Constructing Daily Routines: A Qualitative Examination of Mothers With Young Children With Disabilities

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This qualitative research study explored the daily routines that mothers construct in response to the emerging self-care skills of their young children with disabilities. Over 2 months, data were collected from naturalistic observations and in-depth interviews of six mothers and their children. Ecocultural theory was used to examine the influence of ecological constraints and cultural values on the construction of routines. The daily occupations of these families were shaped by the simultaneous process of accommodating to ecocultural influences and anticipating future possibilities. A mother’s vision for her child’s future also played a pivotal role in determining whether emerging skills would be reinforced as a part of the home routines.


Every day, mothers and children participate in predictable, familiar routines. Daily routines can encompass mundane occupations, such as dressing and bathing, and more symbolic traditions and rituals, such as bedtime prayers and spiritual worship ceremonies. Through the construction of daily routines, mothers provide their children with hundreds of opportunities to practice and develop skills necessary for their development. The adult arranges tasks and occupations to foster a child’s skill acquisition. The child’s development is directly affected by these mutual roles.

Valsiner (1985) asserted that adults selectively regulate children’s experiences, essentially “canalizing” the child in directions specified by the parent’s goals. Parental goals are in turn shaped by the society’s cultural values. Cross-cultural studies support this notion. For example, children of the Kipsigis tribe are canalized in the direction of early independence within the community setting in order to contribute to activities of the household. Shortly after being weaned, at approximately 2 years of age, young Kipsigi children frequently carry messages to neighbors (Harkness & Super, 1983). In contrast, American middle-class homes tend to restrict children’s community explo-
ration in favor of emphasis on other goals such as school performance (Rogoff et al., 1993). The channeling of a child’s occupations therefore creates systematic variations in the opportunities for development.

Ecological paradigms can provide useful models to examine the child’s development in the context of family ecology (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). One ecological model, ecocultural theory, uses the daily routines of the home as the unit of analysis (Bernheimer, Gallimore, & Weisner, 1990). Ecocultural theory contends that families are “driven by the task of constructing and sustaining a daily routine” (Gallimore, Weisner, Kaufman, & Bernheimer, 1989, p. 219). This model builds on earlier ecological paradigms proposing that families function as socially constructed systems called the “ecocultural niche” (Weisner, 1984). All activities of the niche, including the daily routines, reflect the cultural values that influence family practices (Weisner, Gallimore, & Jordan, 1993). The niche is affected by distal ecological variables, including the social and political climate, as well as by proximal factors, such as the family’s economic status. Ecocultural theory proposes that ecological variables can modify the cultural practices within the niche. For example, a single mother who believes that she should be her child’s primary caregiver may need to resort to full-time day care to support her family. Her cultural practices are modified because of her economic needs.

The impact of ecocultural factors on the families of children with disabilities was explored in a longitudinal series of studies called Project CHILD and Project REACH (Weisner, Matheson, & Bernheimer, 1996). The participants were drawn from 102 families of children with disabilities for whom the diagnosis was initially unknown. Predictable patterns of adjustments in daily routines, called accommodations, were evident across families (Gallimore et al., 1989). The patterns of accommodation identified as domains were the following:

1. Family subsistence and financial base
2. Accessibility of health and education services
3. Home and neighborhood safety and convenience
4. Domestic task and chore workload for family
5. Child care tasks
6. Child play groups and peers
7. Marital role relationships
8. Social support
9. Father’s role
10. Sources of parental information and goals.

The study findings suggested that the families of children with disabilities accommodated to the constraints and opportunities presented in daily life in a manner similar to families from similar cultural backgrounds with children who were typically developing (Gallimore, Weisner, Bernheimer, Guthrie, & Nihira, 1993). However, parenting a child with a disability correlated with increased accommodations in the domains of child care and service. Parents’ perception of the child also influenced the frequency and intensity of family accommodation (Bernheimer, Gallimore, & Kaufman, 1993). In particular, the child with high medical needs or increased behavioral demands required more adjustment of the family’s daily routines. Parents perceived the accommodation of their daily routines as either a constraint (negative) or resource (positive) in accordance with the cultural values of the niche members (Bernheimer et al., 1990). Therefore, the valence, or meaning, attached to various forms of daily routine adjustments appeared idiosyncratic to each household.

The literature examining ecocultural theory indicates that the aggregate of a family’s daily routines can provide insight into family ecology. However, it is unclear whether examining one domain of routines, such as self-care occupations, also would reflect the spectrum of environmental and cultural influences on the family. In addition, the series of studies that form the foundation for ecocultural theory have relied on reports from parents that describe established home routines. It is not known whether such a retrospective analysis can comprehensively identify factors that influence the emergence of one repertoire of routines over another. This issue is particularly important when considering that daily routines provide opportunities for mothers to channel their child’s development. This channeling initially takes place at the point of the child’s emerging skill, and refinement of emerging skill takes place over time. Therefore, examination of daily routines as the child’s skill emerges and develops might provide additional information about the construction of daily routines.

**Intervention Examining Daily Routines**

All children benefit from daily routines that promote development. However, the skill acquisition of some children is more sensitized to home routines. For children with disabilities, the daily reinforcement of occupations provides a practice component that can be crucial for both skill acquisition and maintenance (Kellegrew, 1998; Koegel, Koegel, Kellegrew, & Mullen, 1996). Parental support is particularly salient for occupations that take place primarily in the home, such as self-care routines. Younger children also depend more on parental structure of home routines to reinforce emerging skills.

Intervention that draws on the consistent and functional nature of daily routines has a natural appeal for occupational therapy practitioners. I explored the role of daily opportunities for self-care occupations on the skill performance of young children with disabilities nearing their third birthday (Kellegrew, 1998). Self-care occupations that the mothers valued and that were also goals on the children’s individual family service plans were targeted. Using a multiple baseline across subjects design, mothers were asked to provide daily opportunities for their child’s emerging dressing or eating occupations and to monitor the child’s success. Two mothers adapted their daily routines to provide increased opportunities for their child to...
engage in the self-care occupation. These two children demonstrated rapid self-care independence in the targeted skill, which was maintained after completion of the intervention study.

The third child in this study demonstrated a marked increase in self-feeding when given increased opportunity. However, the child’s caregiver did not continue to provide the child with opportunities to eat independently, and he remained dependent in this area. Despite the mother’s knowledge that independent eating was within the child’s repertoire, this occupation was not spontaneously integrated into the family’s daily routines. The child’s ability to perform an occupation did not appear to guide the construction of the family’s daily routines as is suggested by the literature (Porn, 1993). This leads to the question, “What factors are influential in determining the evolution of daily routines within a family?” Understanding the ways in which families construct routines can provide useful information that contributes to increased efficacy in designing and integrating intervention into the daily life of the family.

This research study examined the process through which mothers construct self-care routines for their young children with disabilities. Qualitative methods were used because this form of inquiry is uniquely suited to explore the ways in which people make meaning and negotiate their lives (Carlson & Clark, 1991). This research specifically sought to understand the mother’s point of view as she designed and orchestrated everyday routines over time. Ecocultural theory was incorporated as a conceptual framework for the study. The study analysis extended past work with this theory by examining specifically the construction of children’s self-care routines as they emerged within the everyday life of the family.

Method

Participants

The participants were recruited from a large early intervention center in a suburban county adjacent to Los Angeles, California. Children whose dressing and eating ability was rated as “emerging” by the occupational therapists and physical therapists at the early intervention program were selected for participation. Six families, including seven children with disabilities and their mothers, were involved in the study. Two of the children were adopted siblings near the same age.

The child participants ranged in age from 28 months to 32 months and had a variety of conditions, including cerebral palsy, developmental delay, severe dyspraxia, and Down syndrome. Four children were girls, and three were boys. The adult participants included six mothers and one maternal grandmother who cared for the child during most of the work day. All families were intact, middle class, and from a Caucasian ethnic background. All fathers worked a traditional work week. Five of the six mothers were full-time homemakers, and one mother worked full time. Two of the seven children were only children, whereas the remaining families had other siblings (see Table 1).

Data Collection

In keeping with a qualitative framework, all data were collected in natural environments, and observations were designed to capture the fluid, complex interactions of everyday life. One researcher (myself) collected all data. Before the start of the study, a pilot project was conducted to hone the interview format and videotaping procedures.

Data were collected in two phases. The first phase involved all six families. Unstructured audiotaped interviews were conducted individually with each mother. Interview topics explored the family’s daily routines and ecological challenges, such as economic resources and transportation issues. The mother’s values and beliefs regarding child rearing also were explored. Self-care routines were videotaped and gathered for all families during naturalistic observations of mealtimes and child dressing routines. Data, in this phase, were gathered over the course of one to two visits per family.

The second phase of data collection incorporated three of the original six families: the families of Paul, Allison, and Nathan. Nathan’s grandmother, his primary caregiver during the day, also was included. Phase two participants were selected using two criteria: (a) the child’s emerging self-care ability was evident and, (b) consistent routines requiring the child’s self-care independence were not yet an established part of daily life. It was hoped that following these families over time would give insight into the evolution of daily routines that incorporated emerging skills. Each of the three families was observed and videotaped one to four

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child (Age)</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Vocation</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Vocation</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allison (32 months)</td>
<td>Down syndrome</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Constuction</td>
<td>1 younger</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliza (28 months)</td>
<td>Spastic cerebral palsy</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Manicurist</td>
<td>JD</td>
<td>Attorney</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen (30 months)</td>
<td>Mild cerebral palsy</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>Grocer</td>
<td>1 older</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan (32 months)</td>
<td>Down syndrome</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>1 older</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul (28 months)</td>
<td>Down syndrome</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>none</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose (30 months)*</td>
<td>Prenatally exposed to drugs</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Homemaker</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>3 older</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seth (30 months)*</td>
<td>Down syndrome</td>
<td>Same as for Rose</td>
<td>Same as for Rose</td>
<td>Same as for Rose</td>
<td>Same as for Rose</td>
<td>3 older</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Rose and Seth are adopted.
times weekly during mealtime and child dressing routines for approximately 2 months.

Additionally, in-depth interviews of the mothers and Nathan’s grandmother were conducted over the 2-month period. Nathan’s mother and grandmother were interviewed separately during an initial and an interim interview, and they were interviewed together during the last interview. For all participants, questions from the initial interviews were reexamined to determine changes in perspective across time. Additional queries exploring the caregiver’s perception of her child’s skills were conducted during the last interview because this emerged as an area of interest during preliminary data analysis. Both phases of the study yielded 72 videotaped observations and 15 interviews for coding and analysis.

**Data Analysis**

The daily routines of the home were the unit of analysis of interest for this study. However, each home routine can encompass a wide range of elements. In their ecocultural examination of classroom routines, Tharp and Gallimore (1988) contended that the examination of single routines can be best understood by examining activity settings. Activity settings are units of activity that involve the interaction between members of the niche in a goal-directed action. The five components of activity settings include the following:

1. Personnel present
2. Values and goals
3. Tasks being performed
4. Meanings, feelings, and motives
5. Cultural scripts that govern the interaction

Data were aggregated and coded from both phases of the study according to the five components of activity settings. The procedure for coding narrative data and observational data differed. Narrative data included the transcripts of each videotaped routine. Videotaped routines that appeared to most inform the study, as determined by the researcher, were chosen for transcription. The narrative data were grouped according to the basic idea of the communication and then coded into one of the activity setting components by the researcher. Observational data, gathered from the videotapes, were segmented by counter numbers into action units according to the task performed. Activity setting components were coded for each action unit. An experienced graduate student researcher independently cross-checked the accuracy of the coding for 30% of both the narrative data and the observational data.

Coded observational and narrative data from both phases of the study were then examined to determine patterns both within and among families. In particular, the manifestation of routines in response to the child’s changing self-care skills was a focus. Two major patterns, accommodation and anticipation, emerged that described the manner in which mothers constructed daily routines. The findings of the study were reviewed for veracity with a researcher experienced in qualitative inquiry.

**Results**

**Personnel Present**

The work schedules of the adults had an impact on the number of personnel present during self-care occupations. Five of the six fathers were not present during any of the families’ weekday meals. One mother worked full time. She was not available for her child’s breakfast or lunch, but dined with her child each evening. The caregivers who were present during the children’s meals usually ate at a different time than the children. Only one mother regularly ate breakfast or lunch with her child. The mothers reported that children and adults usually dressed separately. In addition, two of the four families with multiple siblings reported that their child did not dress in the company of a sibling.

**Tasks and Activities**

Across participants, a similar cooking routine and menu, use of household space, and time use during mealtime occupations were noted. For example, the children’s breakfast foods typically consisted of juice, cereal, yogurt, toast, waffles, or eggs. All children were fed at a table, in or near the kitchen. There was slightly less consistency noted in the families’ dressing routines. In particular, the gender of the child influenced the clothing choices. Daytime clothing for boys consisted of pull-on pants, T-shirts, socks, and tennis shoes. The girls were occasionally dressed in clothing that was more difficult to put on independently, such as leggings or jumpsuits.

Dressing took place on the floor for four of seven children, and three children were dressed on a high platform such as a changing table or high bed. Children dressed on the floor tended to be more active in the dressing process. For example, they might hand their mother a shoe or retrieve an item of clothing out of a drawer. Children dressed on changing tables or platforms tended to be more passive, as these children did not participate in the dressing process unless prompted by the mother.

All children were more independent in mealtime occupations than dressing occupations, despite the similarity in developmental difficulty for these two self-care domains (Furuno et al., 1994). Most mothers noted that eating occupations were more readily observed by those outside of the immediate family. In contrast, dressing occupations were viewed as private. Paul’s mother commented, “Dressing is not a subject that you talk to other moms about. It’s a privacy issue, I guess. Even in just talking to my family…No one says, ‘Is he dressing?’” The higher value most mothers placed on independent eating skills appeared partially driven by the possibility of public scrutiny. This is
illustrated by a conversation between Nathan’s mother and grandmother.

**Grandma**: I can remember the time when I met Connie’s friend with her little girl at the restaurant, and she ordered spaghetti for her little girl. **Connie**: And you were horrified, I remember. **Grandma**: She let her eat it with her hands! **Connie**: I remember. In a public place!

**Goals and Values**

The values mothers placed on self-care routines appeared tied to their goals for their child’s future. In essence, these mothers attempted to anticipate the skills their child would need in the near future. For example, Allison’s mother was concerned that her daughter was not toilet trained, a prerequisite for admission to a regular preschool that she was considering. As a consequence, this mother identified Allison’s self-dressing as a goal, stating, “Maybe if she can dress herself and take her pants off, it would help potty train her.”

The interaction between mothers’ goals and their perception of future expectations was noted during the construction of daily routines for tasks other than self-care. One mother sought playmates who were typically developing for her adopted daughter who had been prenatally exposed to drugs. She reported, “Rose will be normal. She’s exposed to drugs. She reported, “Rose will be normal. She’s going to go to college. We are already saving money.” However, she envisioned that her son would require special placement his entire life and subsequently did not view playmates who were typically developing as important for the child, stating, “Seth just tags along.”

The expressed goals and values of these mothers were modified by the ecological variable of time. “Depending on the time…,” “If I have time…,” and “When I have time…” were phrases frequently used by all mothers that illustrated the interplay among goals, values, and ecological reality. When the morning routine was more hectic, most mothers increased their assistance, either by feeding a child who was usually independent in eating or by quickly dressing a child without eliciting cooperation.

In addition, the variable of time tended to have a more profound impact on the child whose skills were less independent or slow than it did on the child whose skills were fully independent. For example, Eliza was relatively independent in manipulating feeding utensils but tended to be slow. On days when she had early physical therapy appointments, she was fed. On days without time pressure, she was encouraged to feed herself. In contrast, Karen was independent in self-feeding and would do so in a timely manner. When confronted with time pressure, Karen’s mother adapted their daily routine in a way that retained the element of self-feeding independence. Karen ate her sandwich in the car 4 days a week while her mother traveled to pick up an older sibling from preschool.

Lack of time also led to a modification of parenting values. For example, Nathan’s mother worked full time and as a consequence had to rely on her mother, the child’s daytime caregiver, to make decisions regarding Nathan’s activities. She realized that the grandmother’s choices differed from her own. Nathan’s mother commented:

She [the grandmother] doesn’t expect him to do anything. She doesn’t think he can do certain things, mostly self-help skills. I don’t know that I agree with it. But, I can’t be there really to teach him lessons. I’ve come to the realization that certain things are not worth fighting over. Certain things I am particular about. Those are the things I will fight for.

**Motives, Meanings, and Feelings**

The motives, meanings, and feelings associated with the enactment of daily routines appeared tied to two components: (a) the mother’s perception of the child’s skill performance and (b) the mother’s child-rearing perspective. Across all families, mothers consistently gauged their child’s skill performance to determine the types of routines that might be most appropriate. For example, Nathan’s grandmother commented, “He doesn’t really play, so he’s too young to have a playmate.” Her perception of Nathan’s play skills led to daily activities that did not include social partners for Nathan.

The skill performance of most young children will vary from day to day, and the children in this study were no different. All of the mothers adjusted the structure of their child’s self-care occupations on the basis of variations in their child’s cooperation and skill. In essence, these mothers appeared to fine-tune their daily routines and expectations in accordance with their perceptions of their child’s abilities at that moment. A comment made by Paul’s mother illustrated this point: “Does he feed himself? Yes, he does. But sometimes he does, and sometimes he doesn’t. I feel I want to be realistic about the things he does. It’s not just black and white.”

The mother’s child-rearing style and perspective also appeared to contribute to the meaning and motive assigned to everyday events and the subsequent construction of daily routines. For example, Allison’s mother displayed a child-rearing style that appeared child centered. This mother explained her strategy for introducing new routines: “When she wants to do something, she tries. She just tries, and that’s how I know she’s ready. I let her tell me.” This child-rearing approach influenced the meaning the mother attributed to the child’s behavior and introduction of more demanding expectations for her daughter. In this case, Allison had an expressive language delay that clouded the communication between mother and child. The mother frequently described her daughter’s cues as unclear, which had a major impact on the construction of daily routines. Allison’s mother commented:

Like for breakfast, I would make her six things because I didn’t think she had a major impact on the construction of daily routines. Allison’s mother commented:

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This process was repeated five to six times per meal. In contrast to Allison's mother, Karen's mother displayed a child-rearing style that required her children to fit a template of acceptable child behavior, whether the child was actually capable of the task at the moment. This child-rearing style also influenced the meaning, motive, and feeling surrounding the construction of daily self-care routines. Karen's mother stated:

I just expect things and whether or not she can do them or not, I at least expect her to try. Like I ask her to make the bed, and if Karen at least tries to tug on it, I know she's comprehending that I want her to do something with the bed.

In keeping with this mother's template of acceptable child behavior, child-initiated activities that did not fit within the template were discouraged. In one illustration, Karen's mother stated, "Karen will take the straw and pull it [the paper wrapper] down, and knock the cup over, so I won't give her a straw. I just took it away." Independently using a straw was not important to this mother, therefore, she did not tolerate a "mess" when the child initiated the activity. However, she did tolerate "messes" when Karen tried to perform other, more valued occupations, such as brushing her teeth.

**Cultural Scripts**

Cultural scripts describe the shared interactions that occur between niche members as they go about their daily routines (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The observation tapes revealed that most scripts between caregiver and child had a sense of continuity and familiarity. Each participant appeared to know the expectations and abilities of the other. For example, when Seth announced that he was finished with breakfast, his mother quickly ran to his chair. He then stood up and jumped into her arms. The mother reported that this was Seth's daily routine and, if she was not fast enough, Seth would jump from the high chair directly to the floor.

Some cultural scripts were quite specific, including exact phrases and behavior. For example, Eliza said, "I have troubles" when experiencing difficulties poking her waffle with a fork. If her mother perceived that Eliza was truly unable to perform the task, she would assist her. If she thought that Eliza might be capable of handling the problem independently, she would reply, "You can do it." Eliza would then proceed to eat her meal independently. When Eliza changed the script to say, "Help, Mommy," her mother responded, "You have troubles?" Eliza then began again, this time with the "correct" response, "I have troubles." This process was repeated five to six times per meal.

Cultural scripts between mother and child could destabilize as expectations during the daily routines evolved. This was clearly demonstrated when reviewing Paul's self-dressing progress during the 2-month observation period. Initially, Paul preferred to play with his mother during the dressing occupation. Later, Paul's mother became much more insistent that Paul cooperate during dressing, thus changing the focus or goal of the dressing time. During the first few days, Paul cooperated but then rebelled and repeatedly tried to reinstate the play-like script. When his mother persisted, Paul's behavior aligned to the new expectation for independent dressing with a new cultural script between mother and child.

**Synthesis of Activity Settings**

A synthesis of the activity setting analysis identified two processes through which mothers designed and orchestrated daily routines: accommodation and anticipation. The process of accommodation describes the ways in which mothers modified and adjusted routines to adapt to daily challenges. The process of accommodation is set in present time and implies that mothers adjust and adapt to everyday challenges. Accommodations were most often required in response to the child's changing skill ability. For example, most mothers adjusted the level of independence they would require of their child in response to their perception of the child's ability. Eliza's mother evaluated Eliza's request for assistance with her waffle to determine whether she really needed physical assistance or just verbal support. Allison's mother looked to her child for cues about her readiness before initiating more challenging routines. Nathan's grandmother did not request the child to feed himself because she was concerned that he "couldn't really do it." The mother's analysis of the child's present-time skill performance directly contributed to the construction of home routines.

Participants also used a companion process to that of accommodation, best described as anticipation. The process of anticipation is rooted in future time. Mothers anticipated their child's future needs and orchestrated daily routines that would reinforce or develop those skills perceived as beneficial to the child's future success. Because all of these children were turning 3 years of age, transition from early intervention services to a preschool setting was a consideration for each family. Those mothers considering a regular preschool placement seemed to be more focused on normalization goals, such as appropriate social skills or independent self-care skills. Mothers who had decided on a special education setting expressed more interest in their child's academic daily activities. One mother commented that she did not have to "work on self-care skills" because special education teachers are trained to provide this service.

**Discussion**

This study examined mothers' construction of self-care routines for their young children with disabilities. For these participants, the creation of routines was a complex enterprise, influenced simultaneously by broad ecocultural variables and a reciprocal relationship unique to each
caregiver–child dyad. Ecocultural theory, used as a conceptual framework, examined larger forces that had an impact on the construction of these mothers’ routines. Ecocultural theory proposes that families accommodate or adjust their daily occupations in response to environmental variables and cultural influences. Past research using ecocultural theory has primarily focused on broad patterns of accommodation across the aggregate of a family’s routines at a fixed point in time. The current study extended the research on ecocultural theory by examining the construction of just one domain of routines, children’s self-care occupations, as they emerged across a 2-month time frame. The findings indicate that ecocultural components of daily routines are recognizable, even when examining a single routine.

In support for the basic premise behind ecocultural theory, both cultural values and ecological variables were prime forces in the formation of self-care routines. The cultural component of the routines in particular created similar patterns across families. Cultural practices, embedded in every aspect of these families’ lives, reflected a Western orientation (Frank, 1994). Of special note was the solitary nature of the daily mealtimes and dressing routines and the distinction between private and public behavior observed in these families. Weisner (1984) commented:

Western children live in a remarkably private culture... [W]e encourage such privacy early in children's lives by giving them their own rooms and spaces, their own toys and other possessions....American children learn how to make behavior and possessions private or at least capable of being kept private as a matter of their choice. (p. 355)

Ecological variables also influenced the overall structure of self-care routines. For these families, middle-class socioeconomic status contributed to similar types of resources, including access to early intervention services, adequate transportation, and home ownership. As predicted by ecocultural theory, environmental forces modified the cultural goals and practices of families. On a day-to-day basis, participants most often noted lack of time was a pervasive ecological constraint. This was in keeping with other research that noted time constraints as a major consideration for most families (Brotherson & Goldstein, 1992). In the current study, the time demands of self-care routines were a pivotal factor in the types and consistency of children’s self-care occupations. Children who were less competent in self-care skills were less likely to be given opportunities for self-care independence when time was limited. This can be a factor in the self-care development of some children with disabilities who may require more daily practice to achieve skill proficiency.

One finding unique to this study suggests that on a daily basis, mothers make small adjustments in the home routines that shape the types of opportunities for skill development offered to their child. This orchestration of daily routines appeared to be a blended process between accommodation to everyday events and anticipation of future needs. Just as mothers have been noted to fine-tune their speech in response to their child’s communication, the mothers of this study fine-tuned or accommodated their expectations for skill development in response to their child’s skill performance on any given day. Through this process, they formed an evaluation of their child’s ability, taking into account daily fluctuations in skill level. Concurrently, mothers anticipated the skills their child would need in the future. The daily routines that mothers created were those that met two criteria: (a) must be within the child’s potential ability and (b) was required to meet a future demand. The joint process of accommodation and anticipation appeared to have tremendous power to frame the everyday lives of the child with disabilities. Through mothers’ construction of routines, the young child’s emerging skills either were reinforced and strengthened or were ignored.

The findings of this study have implications for occupational therapy intervention. Clark (1993), described occupational storytelling and storytelling as used to elicit therapeutic changes in an adult woman who had survived a stroke. The findings of the current study support the value of adapting occupational storytelling and storytelling for use with the mothers of children with disabilities. Occupational storytelling seeks to elicit a picture of the individual person as an occupational being. In many ways, the mothers in this study described their child’s skill ability in terms of occupations such as bedmaking, choosing breakfast foods, or playing with peers. Reflected in the storytelling were mothers’ perceptions of their child’s occupational ability. Storymaking thus can be used to assist the mother in recognizing and interpreting the child’s abilities, which in turn can have an impact on the types of daily opportunities for occupation presented.

Additionally, storytelling involves the therapist and client creating stories to be enacted in the future (Mattingly, 1991). In this study, a mother’s vision of her child’s future played a pivotal role in the types of daily routines constructed. Some mothers had great difficulty envisioning the possibilities available for their child. For some mothers, preschool placement a few months away appeared to be farthest point in the future for which they could picture their child. Other mothers already had conceptualized a view of their child as an adult and had organized daily routines to support this future vision. Intervention that incorporates storytelling can be a promising avenue for mothers and therapists to explore possible futures available to a child. This exploration can alter the types of daily opportunities for skill development presented to the child with disabilities.

There are limitations in the generalizations of these findings. For these families, the upcoming transition from early intervention services to school-based services appeared to make school placement concerns particularly salient. One avenue for future research is to examine whether age-related developmental events, such as the increasing independence associated with adolescence, rep-
resent predictable opportunities for parents to shape their child's routines in response to future needs. Future research also might explore whether parents' expectations for future events are significantly influenced by their child's personal characteristics. For example, does the mother of a child with behavior problems appear more astute to the social demands of future settings because she is more aware of her child's limitations? In this study, the children were of similar developmental capacity. Additional inquiry might examine the extent to which a mother's perception of her child's abilities alter her vision of future possibilities.

In keeping with the strong national trend toward family-centered care, the findings of this study support an ecocultural view of the family. Furthermore, these results suggest that intervention for children with disabilities need not be at the level of child skill training (Marfo, Browne, Gallant, Smyth, & Corbett, 1991; Weisner et al., 1996; Young, Davis, Schoen, & Parker, 1998). Indeed, occupational therapy services that strive to promote a clearer maternal understanding of the child's present and future occupational potential can result in the creation of home routines that promote development. ▲

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