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**Effectiveness of a Parenting Skills Seminar
in a Community Based Setting**

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A Culminating Project Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate
School of Lindenwood College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Art

1995

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An enormous thanks to my husband Walter for his love, patience, and support. *Thank you and I Love You!*

I want to thank my family and friends who have supported me in this endeavor. I could not have accomplished this goal without your inspiration, love and faith in me.

A special thanks the many parents who came to my parenting classes. I truly had learned from all of you.

Table of Contents

DEDICATION

Chapter	Page
I. Introduction	1
I dedicate this to my children Tim, Briesha, and Regina. Thank you for allowing me to be a Mom. It is the greatest gift you all can give me. <i>I' ll Love You for Always !!!!!</i>	
II. Literature Review	11
A. Parenting Trends	11
B. Recent Studies	19
C. Parent Education Programs	21
D. Issues in Evaluating for Effectiveness	21
III. Methods	34
A. Subjects	34
B. Concept	34
C. Design	34
D. Procedures	38
IV. Results	41
V. Discussion	41
Appendix	41
References	41
Vita Auctoris	52

Table of Contents

Chapters	Page
I. Introduction	1
II. Literature Review	3
A. Definition of Parent Education	3
B. History	4
C. Theoretical Structures	6
D. Conducting a Group	8
E. Group Members	13
F. Parenting Trends	15
G. Recent Studies	19
H. Parent Education Programs	22
I. Issues in Evaluating for Effectiveness	31
III. Methods	34
A. Subjects	34
B. Content	35
C. Design	38
E. Procedures	38
IV. Results	41
V. Discussion	44
Appendix	47
References	49
Vita Auctoris	52

ABSTRACT

This research evaluated the effectiveness of three parenting skills seminars in a community based setting. Thirty-six Caucasian participants, 9 males and 27 females attended a parenting skills seminar for five consecutive weeks, two and a half hours per session. The researcher conducted three seminars. The participants completed a self-reporting evaluation on three domains: parenting skills, discipline, and stress and worry related to the parenting role. The findings supported the hypothesis that parenting skills seminars are effective. Participants reported improvements in parenting skills and experienced a reduction in some stress and worry about being an effective parent following the parenting skills seminar.

Chapter I

Introduction

The family is the most significant influence on the development of the individual. Values, attitudes, and perceptions of life are influenced by the quality of relationships with parents and children. For many, the style of parenting is learned by the training procedures passed on by their parents (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989a). The influence of the parent on the child is generally acknowledged, but only in recent years has the question been raised: Do parents need training to raise their children?

Beauticians, accountants, electricians, real estate brokers, and therapists are required to be trained and certified, but anyone can be a parent. Anastasiow (1988) claimed an increasing number of children are underachieving, uncooperative, and apparently unhappy. If parenting is left a haphazard process, there may be a continuation of these trends.

The ultimate goal of parent education is to improve the parent-child relationship. Today there is a growing interest among parents to find more effective ways of relating to their children. In cities across the United States, parents have joined organized study groups and are attending parenting seminars to help them better understand their role as a parent (Luethy, 1991). The federal government endorses parent

education workshops in schools, corporations have provided brown bag seminars at the work site, and communities are offering a variety of support groups for parents through either social service agencies, hospitals, or by business groups (Galinsky, 1992).

The basic purpose of parent education is to help the family learn new skills and to feel adequate in using related techniques. Being an effective parent should reduce stress and worry. "Parent education refers minimally to learning what parenting involves and how to parent children" (Martin, 1980, p. 266).

The purpose of this study was to determine if participants attending a parenting skills seminar found the program to be effective. The following components of parent education were explored along with the purpose of the study: definition of parent education, type of group members, trend of parent seminars, theoretical structure, facilitator's role, related research, parenting education models used and the method used to obtain data.

The instrument used to obtain the data for this research project was a comprehensive questionnaire administered to the participants upon completion of the program. (Appendix A) Effectiveness was measured relevant to whether the participants learned and used new parenting skills or continued to implement the same form of discipline used prior to participating in the program, and finally, whether there was a reported reduction in stress and worry following participation in the program.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Definition of Parent Education

Martin (1980) defines parent education as what parents can learn, what is involved in parenting and how to parent children. "It includes learning about children, child development, and hopefully, it includes learning about one's own child" (Martin, 1980, p. 266). Croake and Glover (1977) defined parent education as "the purposive learning activity of parents who are attempting to change their method of interaction with their children for the purpose of encouraging positive behavior in their children" (p.151). Dreikurs and Soltz (1989) believe parenting encompasses an accumulation of facts or knowledge but should go further to include changes within a person on how one feels about themselves and others.

According to Abidin and Carter (1980) parent education should have a basic purpose. "A program of parent education must result in two general, yet major, outcomes: (1) the parent's self-respect should be enhanced and (2) the parents should believe and experience themselves as being more competent in their role as parents as a result of the parent education experience" (p. 109). The parent education experience should have a dual effect of releasing human potential while developing specific skills and attitudes for the parents. The information given to parents should be able to enhance the parent's

ability and increase their sense of competence in their child-rearing role (Abidin & Carter, 1980).

Doherty and Ryder (1980) criticized parent education. They believed that parents should not be encouraged to act as therapist for their children because parenting courses may produce an oversimplistic belief that applying the right technique to an interpersonal situation will always solve the problem. Parents may mistrust their own capabilities and intuitions due to the one-sidedness of the training, which implies that parents are totally responsible for their children's behaviors and parental guilt may increase.

Parent education needs to enable and empower parents by giving them skills and confidence in order to avoid seeking a therapist, counselor or parent educator for all of the answers. Having parent education groups should give parents permission to be able to change their way of thinking and build their self-confidence in their parenting skills (Curran, 1989).

History

Parent education has been in existence prior to the 1800's. Many American mothers received information on child care when mothers immigrated from Europe (Croake & Glover, 1977). In 1888 the Society for the Study of Child Nature was founded. This is known today as the Child Study Association of America. This organization is

the oldest organization in the United States to have a continuous parent education program (Croake & Glover, 1977).

Federal support for parent education predated private organization's efforts to enter parent education activities on a large scale. The first White House Conference on Child Welfare was held in 1909. The Children's Bureau was created in 1912. The Smith-Lever Act was implemented in 1914, and in 1917 "homemaking" was defined as a basic vocation for women and educational provisions were developed (Croake & Glover, 1977).

"Before the 1920's parent education was still primarily informal and unorganized, but as more parents began to ask for help, educators and social workers recognized the need for parent education and gradually began to collect and disseminate organized materials" (Croake & Glover, 1977, p. 152). During the early 1930's parent education continued to expand tremendously. In 1933, Rudolf Dreikurs, MD. held private parent study groups as a method of therapy for his patients to discuss child-rearing issues (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1987).

According to Croake and Glover (1977) there was a decline in the parent education movement during the late 1930's. The National Council of Parent Education lost its financial support and disbanded in 1938. This left the parent education movement without a national organization to guide and coordinate its professional activities. Efforts

were not made again until the late 1940's when parent education began to expand with both public and private participation from national to local levels. Agriculture, education, and mental health organizations were the primary supporters of continuing parent education endeavors.

Theoretical Structures

Parent education has borrowed from the counseling, psychotherapy, and education arena in order to develop its approach in working with parents (Croake & Glover, 1977). The approach adopted tends to represent the group leader's theoretical beliefs about how children should be raised and developed and how parents can best aid in that development. According to Croake and Glover (1977) "there is no universally agreed upon method of parent education" (p. 152).

Tavormina (1980) provides an explanation of the difference between parent counseling and parent education.

The overall description of parent counseling emphasizes three factors: 1.) direct training to parents 2.) certain procedures that affect parenting and, 3.) procedures that are implemented into their natural environment. This definition easily encompasses the often-confusing discrepancy between parent education and parent counseling, in which the former is preventive and the latter interventive in focus. (p. 130)

Tavormia (1980) continues discussion on the three counseling models, which are: reflective counseling, behavioral counseling, and combination format of the two. "The first two relate to the basic school of thought of psychotherapeutic intervention and the third model is the combination of feelings and behavior" (p.130). In reflective parent counseling the focus is on parental awareness, understanding, and acceptance of the child's feelings, whereas in behavioral counseling the emphasis is on actual behavior instead of cognitive variables. The combination format assumes that parents need to discuss feelings and learn new management tools. This model has gained support due to its focus on attitude and behavior changes (Tavormina, 1980). All three models are similar because they focus on specific childrearing issues and the need for results.

There are many factors that could effect the outcome of a parent seminar: the procedure, the group process, the characteristics of the leader, the attention of participates, and the expectation of the participants regarding the parent education seminar. The emphasis on parent education suggests some underlying role model or definition of what it means to be a "good" parent. Variables like the attitudes of family values and parenting styles, along with the continuously changing child's age, developmental stages, and problems should be considered in how we define a good parent (Tavormina, 1980).

"To justify using parent education seminars as an approach in counseling, the following must be considered: the counseling must interface with child developmental theories and the child development theories must use education to teach a parent about a child's changes over time" (Tavormina, 1980, p.138). The blending of the two perspectives could be used to support the other and may at times cross over the counseling and educational definitions.

Parent education seminars can model the preventive counseling method because the prevention model is concerned with identifying skills that are needed now or that may be needed in the future and providing the means for acquiring them. The intent is to anticipate future problems and to move to prevent them by providing individuals or groups with the skills needed, or by creating change in the environment (Peterson & Nisenholz, 1991). Using the preventive/proactive approach is challenging because parents need to see success in the new technique before wanting to use the technique as their new skill.

Conducting Parenting Groups

In order for the prevention/proactive approach to be effective, the group leader must assess the level of the parent's ability. Interviewing the parent before the session gives a history and indication of potential issues of the parent. In completing an assessment, Tavormina (1980)

stated:

The potential influence of such issues as levels of parental psychosocial functioning; parental motivation for change; demographic characteristics such as age, education, and social class; specific parental attitudes and expectancies for the children; and relative amount of parental realism regarding their assessments of their children must be considered. (p. 151)

Structured groups meet generally for two hours a week for 4 to 15 weeks. At the beginning of the first session the members receive a questionnaire to assess their level of coping as a parent. At the end of the sessions the same questionnaire is completed to evaluate whether they had learned any new skills (Corey & Corey, 1992). The facilitator relies on the parents' honesty and feedback in determining if the sessions were beneficial. Most parents express openly when the techniques or their newly acquired skills have been successful for them. The positive reinforcement is a contributing factor of how the parent accepts the changes they had made in their attitudes about being an effective parenting (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989b).

The group leader must create a sense of belonging and commitment to the group and to the objectives of the group. This can be done through respect, responsibility, responsiveness, and resourcefulness (Soltz, 1972). The group leader must let the

participants know what is expected of them, such as the ground rules for attendance, confidentiality, mutual respect, and skills to be discussed. The leader must model an attitude of respect for differing viewpoints, accenting what members have in common, create and maintain enthusiasm, cooperation, and promote agreement among group members (Litman, 1991). Abidin and Carter (1980) make reference to having knowledge of child development:

The parent group leader needs to bring to the group the fundamental knowledge of child development. The leader's familiarity with the process of growth and change through which each child passes and the implications of these from the parent is essential to ensure adequate communication and understanding. (p. 110)

The parent group leader must have a foundation of counseling theories, especially an understanding in group counseling. Through preventive group counseling people can be taught how to prevent problems from occurring and how to deal with difficulties that may arise. There are several advantages of being in a group. Group members often feel a sense of belonging, are more willing to open up with others that may have a common problem, therefore providing a safety net for the sharing of feelings and concerns (Peterson & Nisenholz, 1991).

The disadvantages of group counseling according to Peterson and

Nisenholz (1991) are the group counselor may have less control of the group because of more people; negative events can happen causing the group to focus on what was happening. "Confidentiality is more difficult to mandate in a group than in individual counseling, and it is almost impossible to enforce" (p. 255). The major concern regarding the parent group leader in conducting the session would be failure to screen members or prepare them properly for participation in the group. They may not be able to handle the group because of their inexperience or lack of knowledge in counseling, causing the group to have problems and hindering those who may need to seek further help.

"Parents often express the idea that the parent group leader must be an experienced parent to be able to adequately handle the responsibilities of the role" (Abidin & Carter, 1980, p. 110). If a group leader can relate to the needs of the group, the trusting relationship will begin to bond between the parent group leader and the members (Stolz, 1972). Some parent group leaders believe their style of parenting is the only correct technique in handling children or family issues. This attitude of the parent group leader limits the group's perspective to only view the leader's approach hindering the effectiveness of the session (Abidin & Carter, 1980). The ethical question raised in relation to ineffectiveness is the facilitator, paraprofessional, or licensed professional counselor doing everything possible in helping the parent, or doing more harm than good? In this situation, it is

inappropriate for the group leader to impose their values on the group.

A facilitator needs to consider some basic ideas about parents and parenting before they conduct a parent group. Abidin and Carter (1980) have listed the following as helpful basic assumptions:

1. Parents want to learn how to do the best they can in their role of parenting.

2. People who find themselves as parent so often don't have the necessary parenting skills in one area or another and must either learn them by trial and error or in some educational format.

3. The parenting role includes expectations, attitudes, behaviors, and problem-solving strategies, all of which maintain a balance between the emotional, intellectual, and behavioral components of the learning experience.

4. Parents learn best what they are interested in. This means that the subject matter of the parent education group should be close to their immediate life experiences.

Ideally, the parents have decided to participate in the group knowing the general focus of the program, e.g., developmentally delayed children 0-6. Learning is further facilitated if the parents can be involved in developing the group's agenda.

5. The parent group must provide the parents the

opportunity to integrate their new learnings into their own style. The idea that there is only one right way should both implicitly and explicitly be avoided.

6. Parents can and do learn from each other. The group leader should facilitate and encourage the communication and exchange of ideas and solutions between parents.

(pp.109-110)

A facilitator should be able to provide an opportunity of enhancing the learning experience for the participants of the group.

Group Members

Selecting the group is not always an option for the facilitator. According to Noller and Taylor (1989) " more mothers attend parent education courses than fathers, a small percentage of parents attend as a couple, and sometimes husbands enroll in a course subsequent to their wives' participation" (p. 196). More often parent education programs are proportionately directed to parents of younger children (Croake & Glover, 1977). Like many other forms of educational programs, it is likely that middle to upper socioeconomic level parents participate more frequently than parents from lower socioeconomic levels (Croake & Glover, 1977; Kelley, Power, & Wimbush, 1992; Powell, Zambrana, & Palacios, 1990).

When the characteristics of the parents and their children are not

widely dissimilar the parents will benefit due to more productive group experiences. "If there can be a prior discussion with the prospective group member, the facilitator could weed out participants that would not benefit from the group" (Abidin & Carter, 1980, p. 115). There are advantages to choosing who can attend the group, because the group facilitator could focus on the major concerns of the participants. The process of the learning experience is more beneficial if the group leader and members are wanting the same results.

For the most part a facilitator can not determine what a group member's agenda is until the session has begun. If the parent group is not pre-selected, nor has any common boundaries, this is considered an open-ended group (Abidin & Carter, 1980). The limitations of having an open-ended group result in difficulty of determining the size, unrelated personal agendas of group members, family needing professional counseling, and poor attendance due to lack of interest (Abidin & Carter, 1980). The professional person should consider the group needs and design the sessions on the topics or developmental skills the parent group wishes to learn (Litman, 1991).

Being too general with the approach and content is a common error when forming a parenting education group. A group, by definition, is a collection of people with a common denominator. The task in forming a group lies in establishing that denominator (Curran, 1989). Once that occurs the group will go through stages of

development. The five common stages are forming, norming, storming, performing, and adjourning (Curran, 1989).

Parenting Trends

Parent education study groups have been around for decades. Rudolf Dreikurs M.D., conducted such parent study groups as a method of therapy for his patients who were parents (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1987). Parents would gather to discuss issues and concerns they were experiencing in their role as a parent. The topics of the study group usually included the fundamentals of Alfred Adler's theories, such as: social interest, purpose of behavior, and striving for superiority in parenthood. For parents, the fact of knowing the four goals of misbehavior; attention, power, revenge, and feeling of inadequacy increased their effectiveness as a parent. In addition, the notion of logical and natural consequences provided encouragement and a reassurance of their competency. (Martin, 1980).

The federal government has supported programs on parenting and child development within the public school system. Public schools are required to develop curricula for elementary and secondary children and are mandated to provide the parent education. The purpose of the programs are to prevent child abuse and to assist parents in learning new parenting skills (Anastasiow, 1988).

In 1983 the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary

Education piloted a new parent education program in four school districts. The purpose was to help educate parents on developmental stages of their children between the ages of birth and three years old. The theory proposes that if parents have more knowledge of what to expect during these stages there could be less abuse.

The program was approved in 1985 and mandated by the Missouri legislation to provide free parent education by the public school districts to all Missouri families. The program provides support and information on child development, discipline, and age appropriate activities. Children's health and developmental screenings are also administered. The families are seen by a parent educator once every six to eight weeks during a school calendar year to supply the family with parent information. There is also a parent support group meeting, where parents can share their concerns of parenthood or they can attend a lecture on a specific topic (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 1989).

While some parent education programs are being offered through the school systems, Work/Family Direction, a private for-profit agency is marketing parenting seminars to the corporate world. Work/Family Direction started in 1986 as a child care resource and referral agency and is now known by many national corporations for their innovative ideas of how companies can be "family friendly." One idea is for companies to provide brown bag seminars on parenting issues

(Galinsky, Huges, & Love, 1988).

According to the National Commission on Working Women, in 1984, 60.5% of women with children under the age of eighteen years old worked outside the home. With the social-economic trend that was occurring, the need for two incomes, resulted in mothers going into the workforce. The balancing of work and family life had become a struggle for most households (Luethy, 1991).

Parenting seminars at the work site are viewed as an educational program and not as a counseling service (Galinsky, Huges, & Love, 1987; Mernit, 1990). Employees while at work prefer to keep their personal problems confidential, even while they are participating in a support group. The view of having parent seminars at the work site is considered non-threatening to some employees, while others fear their family problems would be violated, because their co-workers may share the information with others (Mernit, 1990). Litman (1991) summarized that working parents who are struggling with the "balancing act" and attending a support group meeting or parent education seminars at work find emotional support and receive practical parenting advice that helps reduce their stress and frustration.

Parenting seminars held at the work site is one approach for educating and informing parents. Another approach is through different organizations and agencies within a community. In many communities there are resources which link parents to the appropriate

agency that will best serve their needs. Children's schools such as elementary, preschools, and day care centers have been acknowledged in the trend of serving parents as a resource to gain insight and skills in parenting.

Effective Parenting Information for Children (EPIC) is an example of an innovative program designed to help school and family life support one another in guiding children. EPIC, was founded by Robert Wilson, after his wife was killed by a 15 year old boy during a robbery in his home. Searching for reasons to understand the boy's actions, Wilson discovered the boy had been bounced from 11 foster homes and holding centers. Parents, guardians, schools, and social service agencies had all failed. The realization of how a system could fail led Wilson to dedicate his life in resolving such a failure (Montgomery, 1992).

The three most important influences on a child's life are the home, school, and community. EPIC attempts to cover all three areas by having programs designed to meet the needs of the various settings. The home portion of EPIC relies on parent volunteers to conduct a parent workshop for other parents. Workshops are set up for parents to meet weekly over two months and cover 12 major areas, such as teen value systems and communication problems and strategies (Montgomery, 1992). EPIC is also the primary parenting model used in the Family Life Education Division of Dayton's (Ohio) Family

Service Association. It allows parents to explore their own parenting styles and strengths through interaction and discussion (Montgomery, 1992). "EPIC has sponsored parent workshops in many settings, from rich suburbs to housing projects, to a hotel for homeless people" (Montgomery, 1992, p.5).

Recent Studies

There has been recent research on the effectiveness of parent education programs. Powell, Zambrana, Palacios (1990) studied the preferences of 121 urban low-income Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American mothers of young children regarding the methods and content of an educational program focused on child development and parenting topics. The research was guided by issues the authors felt needed to be addressed before designing programs that are responsive to the needs and characteristics of low-income parents of Hispanic origin (Powell, et al., 1990).

The method used to collect data was through interviewing participants by a trained interviewer of Latino ethnicity who was matched by gender to study the participants. Most interviews conducted were at health program sites, with only some interviews occurring in the respondent's home. The interview lasted an average of 40 minutes and each participant received a \$5 stipend (Powell, et al., 1990).

The conclusion of the study revealed the importance of assessing the needs of culturally diverse groups before implementing programs that involve child development and parenting topics. "In brief, the findings indicate that Mexican and Mexican-American mothers were similar in program preferences for : delivery mode, use of individuals with special training or experienced parents as program staff, involvement of extended family members in a program, preprogram familiarity with staff, and child-focused content" (Powell, et al., 1990, p. 302). The study also provided information that Mexican mothers reported more concerns about the group mode and greater interest in home visiting, extended family member participation, and content related to self/family/environment than Mexican-American mothers (1990).

Another interesting study was conducted by Devlin, Brown, Beebe, and Parulls (1992) with divorced or separated fathers. The purpose of this research was to evaluate the success of a parent educational program designed to improve the parental satisfaction of divorced or separated fathers. "The program was designed to help fathers stay in contact with their children; to maintain and improve the fathers' perceptions of themselves as fathers and their relationships with their children after the divorce, and to maintain child support payments" (Devlin, et al., 1992, p. 291). According to the researchers, the program for this study was closely related to the Adjusting Family

Model, which is applicable to divorced custodial and noncustodial and widowed fathers. The focus of the Adjusting Family Model is to have single-parent fathers become aware of their effective states and to develop their communication skills.

The composition consisted of 30 separated or divorced fathers, 15 who volunteered for the free educational series Parenting for Divorced Fathers and 15 who served as a control group (Devlin, et al., 1992). The parenting workshops consisted of six consecutive sessions, 90 minutes in length. The sessions were facilitated by two male co-leaders, and one female facilitator for the session on coparenting and the final session. There was no cost to the participants attending the workshops. "The six sessions covered the following topics: 1.) The experience of divorce - fatherhood; 2.) Enhancing the parent-child communication-listening; 3.) Enhancing the parent-child communication-talking; 4.) Coparenting; 5.) What do you do with your kids?; 6.) Where do we go from here?" (Devlin, et al., 1992, p. 291).

The results of the study provided strong support for parent education for divorced or separated fathers. The divorced or separated fathers improved their perception as effective parents and increased their communication skills with their children, compared to the control group of fathers who did not take the six week parenting education series (Devlin, et al., 1992). The researchers had the participants rate their overall views regarding the parenting workshop series. The

participants stated, 100% would recommend the program to other divorce or separated fathers, 89% would like to have informal get-togethers with the group members, 89% said they would attend a follow-up meeting, and 100% claimed they would participate in a follow-up series (1992).

The studies mentioned had attracted the researcher to explore the types of parenting curricula, programs, or approaches being used in parenting groups. The method and content of a curriculum may influence the effectiveness of a parenting skills seminar.

Parent Education Programs

There may be many different types of parenting education programs being used however, the researcher will be addressing two well known programs; P.E.T. (Parent Effectiveness Training) and S.T.E. P (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting). "Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.) is probably the most widely known and influential parent education program (Doherty & Ryder, 1980, p. 409). With over 400,000 graduates and a best-selling book to the program's credit, the founder Thomas Gordon has justifiably accepted the media characterization of P.E.T. as a national movement (Gordon, 1976).

Parent Effectiveness Training involves both a theory of interpersonal relationships and a set of skills. According to the P.E.T. theory, interpersonal exchanges should be congruent and non-coercive.

Congruence refers to the accurate communication of feelings. An example of this would be when a congruent parent gets upset with their child's behavior they would not criticize the child or give orders, but rather tell the child what he or she (the parent) is feeling, what specifically is bothersome, and why it is bothersome (Doherty & Ryder, 1980).

According to the researchers, Doherty and Ryder (1980) the principle of non-coercion is the heart of the P.E.T. theory. Gordon (1976) believes that conflicts in families are usually resolved by one person winning and the other person losing. In these terms most families are either authoritarian (parents win) or permissive (children win). "Since losing inevitably breeds resentment and anger, parents and children become alienated from each other" (Gordon, 1976, p. 175). "Eschewing the use of power in interpersonal relationships, P.E.T. promotes "no-lose" conflict resolution, in which everyone's needs are taken into account and everyone participates in the final decision" (Doherty & Ryder, 1980, p. 410). Following is Gordon's description of this "no-lose" method:

When a conflict between parent and child occurs, the parent asks the child to participate in a joint search for some solution acceptable to both. Either may suggest possible solutions, which are then carried out and evaluated. A decision is eventually made on the best

solution. They then decide how it is to be carried out. No coercion is required, hence no power is used (Gordon, 1976, p. 176).

To foster these ideals of congruent communication and non-coercive problem-solving, P.E.T. teaches three sets of skills: counseling skills, confrontation skills, and problem-solving skills. The primary counseling skill, active listening, is to be used when the child is experiencing a problem which may not be directly bothersome to the parent, that is, when no parent-child conflict is occurring. Active listening is the Rogerian counseling technique of feeding back to the speaker the message heard by the receiver, with an emphasis on the feeling tone of the message. The purpose of the of this technique is to help the child reach his/her own solution to the problem, with the parent playing a non-intrusive, helping role (Doherty & Ryder, 1980).

If active listening is appropriate when the child is experiencing a problem, the I-message is the skill of choice when the parent finds the child's behavior unacceptable (Doherty & Ryder, 1980). According to Gordon (1976) an I-message has three parts: 1) a statement of a feeling, 2) a non-judgmental description of the child's behavior, and 3) a description of the tangible effect of the child's behavior on the parent. An I-message invites, but does not compel the child to modify the offensive behavior. "The parent is behaving congruently, that is, acknowledging that he or she has the problem, while not blaming the

child. The child, then, is free to make a choice about cooperating" (Doherty & Ryder, 1980, p. 410). Gordon (1976) claims that parents typically employ you-messages, which are put downs, commands, or threats when confronting their children. "These you-messages are apt to evoke resentment, defensiveness, and feelings of inadequacy in children" (Gordon, 1976, p. 114).

When a parent and child are locked in conflict, in P.E.T. terms the relationship owns the problem. This situation calls for the problem-solving skills, which are: 1) identifying and defining the problem, 2) generating possible alternative solutions, 3) evaluating the alternative solutions, 4) deciding on the best acceptable solution, 5) implementing the solution, and 6) evaluating the outcome (Gordon, 1976). The goal, as discussed earlier, is to involve parents and children in finding a solution which is fair results in a commitment from everyone. "Problem-solving is the cornerstone of the P.E.T. approach, presupposing the generous use of both active listening and I-message skills by the parents, as well as their commitment to open communication and democratic conflict resolution" (Doherty & Ryder, 1980, p. 410-411).

The basic program consists of eight weekly three-hour classes, typically enrolling from 10 to 25 parents. The instructor can be a lay person or a professional who has completed a 5 1/2- day training program and a signed contract. The P.E.T. teaching methodology combines lectures with discussion and role-playing and has a strong

emphasis on skill-building. The instructors follow a detailed curriculum but have some freedom to experiment with new teaching techniques (Doherty & Ryder, 1980).

P.E.T. courses may be sponsored in a variety of ways: by individual instructors, churches, schools, or family service agencies. Fees are determined by the instructor or sponsoring agency; however, a materials and supplies fee for each participant must be sent to Effectiveness Training, Inc., a private corporation which operates P.E.T. and related programs.

Another parent education program that has become very popular throughout the world today is Dinkmeyer and McKay's Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) program (Nystul, 1982). The STEP program is a lecture and discussion systematic training that stresses the theory of Alfred Adler and more specifically the techniques of Rudolf Dreikurs (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989a). "The program is based on the theory that behavior is purposeful and goal directed, with the primary goal for the child being to achieve a sense of belonging" (Williams, Omizo, & Abrams, 1984, p. 127). Dinkmeyer and McKay (1989a) designed the STEP program for parents who want to raise responsible children and to feel more adequate and satisfied as parents.

One of the major concepts in the STEP program is that the parent-child relationship is based on a democratic approach. This approach, in contrast to autocratic child-rearing methods in which the

parents make and enforce rules and the children submit, democratic child-rearing methods which are based on mutual respect and equality (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989a). Each person in the household is entitled to equal respect. The parents need to provide the child with the opportunity to make decisions, within limits, and allow them to be responsible for their decisions. "This type of guidance is called natural and logical consequences. Democratic parents learn to communicate with their children and to encourage them. Communication and encouragement imply valuing each child as an individual who deserves love and respect" (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989a, p7.).

The sessions focus on understanding the purposive nature of the child's behavior (and misbehavior) and its social consequences (Esters & Levant, 1983). More specifically, STEP helps parents learn effective ways to relate to their children. By clarifying the purposes of children's behavior, STEP helps parents learn how not to reinforce the child's unacceptable behaviors and how to encourage cooperative behavior (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989a; Esters & Levant, 1983; Jackson & Brown, 1986;) Parents learn to develop responsibility in their child by applying natural and logical consequences in lieu of punishment and by using encouragement instead of praise (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1987).

Rudolf Dreikurs classified the misbehaviors of children into four broad categories. Dreikurs called these categories goals in the sense

that the misbehaviors achieved something for the child (1987).

Through the STEP program, any parent could learn how to discover the purpose of a child's misbehavior by two simple techniques. Dinkmeyer and McKay described the following procedure for the techniques:

Keeping in mind that misbehavior serves a purpose, it was best understood by observing its consequences, thus:

1.) Observe your own reaction to the child's misbehavior.

Your feelings point to the child's goals.

2.) Observe the child's response to your attempts at correction. The child's response to your behavior will also let you know what the child is after (p.10).

A parents need to look at the results of misbehavior rather than just the misbehavior. The results of the misbehavior reveals the purpose (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989b). Misbehavior reveals the purpose and the purpose reveals the goal. Dreikur identified four misbehaviors in order for parents to understand the purpose of a child's behaviors. The goals are: attention, power, revenge, and the display of inadequacy (Dreikur & Soltz, 1987).

When a child is displaying the goal of attention he is seeking to engage the parent into the desired behavior. "Children who hold the conviction that they can belong only if they are receiving attention prefer negative attention to being ignored" (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989b, p. 10.) Parents feel annoyed by the child's behavior. When this occurs

parents need to ignore the misbehavior. "The appropriate way to give attention is to give it when it is not expected" (p. 10).

The goal of power-seeking children is that they feel they are only significant when they are the boss. "When a child is defiant, parents feel angry and provoked" (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989b, p.10).

Attempts to correct the child are seldom successful. Parents must refrain from getting angry and must disengage themselves from the power struggle (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989b).

If the struggle for power continues and the children feel as though they can not win, they may alter the desire of power and pursue the third goal, revenge. In a revenge cycle the child's goal is to hurt.

"Children who pursue revenge are convinced that they are not lovable; that they are significant only when they are able to hurt others as they believe they have been hurt. They find a place by being cruel and disliked" (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989b, p.10). Parents of the revengeful child feel deeply hurt and want to retaliate. To begin to help the revengeful child the parent must be on guard not to retaliate. They need to improve or reestablish the relationship by remaining calm and show good will (1989b).

The last goal of misbehavior is a display of inadequacy. Children who attempt this goal are extremely discouraged. By giving up hope of succeeding they attempt to keep others from expecting anything from them. Parents will know when a child is pursuing this goal because

they too will feel despair and want to give up. "To help a child who feel inadequate, parents must eliminate all criticism, and focus instead on the child's assets and strengths. The parents must encourage any effort to improve, no matter how small it seems" (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989b, p.11).

Many families fall into two categories of parenting either excessive order and control or no order at all and no control (Esters & Levant, 1983; Noller & Taylor, 1989; Dreikurs & Soltz, 1987; Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989b). In the STEP program parents come to understand the importance of establishing a democratic atmosphere in which they can be kind but firm and in which all family members are treated equally (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989a).

"Many parents are ineffective because they lack self-confidence and a feeling of worth as parents" (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989a, p.20). The STEP program is a attempts to instill in parents a sense of greater self-confidence as parents (Esters & Levant, 1983; Jackson & Brown, 1986). Dinkmeyer and McKay (1989a) believe that the STEP parent education program can be effective if it helps parents understand the purpose of behavior, the encouragement process, effective communication, the application of logical and natural consequences, and the benefit of the family meeting.

A STEP parent education group can be lead by a person trained in the helping professions such as psychology, social work, counseling,

the ministry, pediatrics, education, nursing, or psychiatry. It can also be taught by a lay person who is willing to study the manual intensively and has the ability to lead a group. There are nine sessions which are about 1 1/2 to 2 hours in length, held on a weekly basis and has an average of 10 to 12 group members. Participants engage in various activities to reinforce the lesson. The activities are lecture, open-discussion, video vignettes, role-playing, listen to recordings, homework assignments, and a variety of class participation.

Issues in Evaluating for Effectiveness

"There has been relatively few studies evaluating outcome of parent education, and the range of programs subjected to empirical scrutiny hardly approximates the diversity which currently exists in the field" (Tramontana, Sherrets, & Authier, 1980, p.40). Tramontana, et.al., continued to state "moreover, the literature on parent education has not given sufficient attention to the quantity or quality of research efforts in this area" (p.40).

There are several issues that must be addressed before attempting to evaluate any parent education program. First of all, there is the question of *whom* is to be assessed, parents or perhaps both the parent and child? According to Tramontana, et. al., (1980)" parent education is to provide through improving the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of the parent leads to improved parent-child interactions, and ultimately

to a healthier adjustment of the child" (p.40). Evaluation should also entail an assessment of the impact the program had on the child.

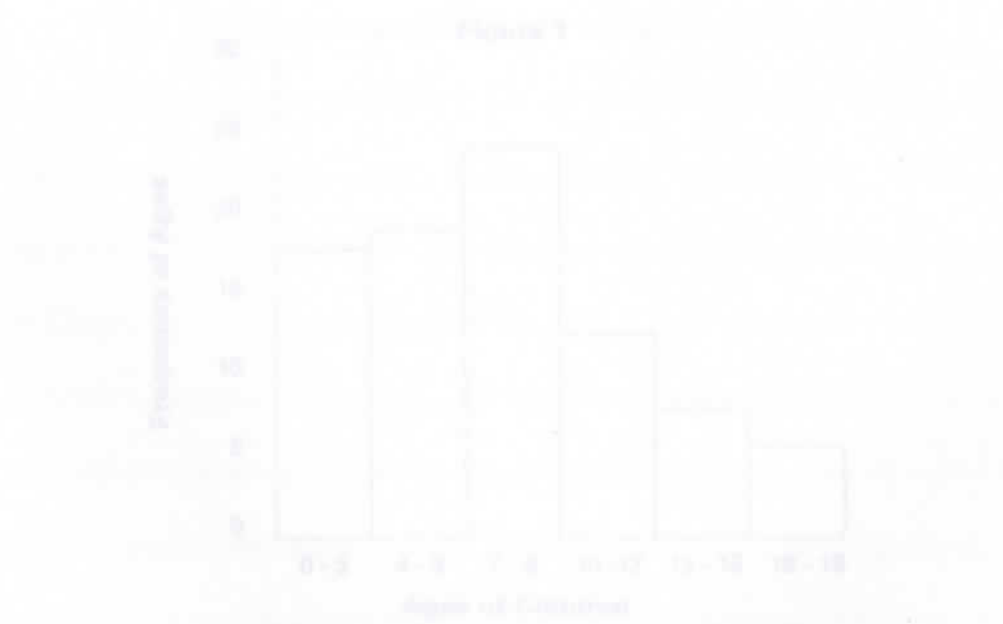
In determining an outcome for the effectiveness of parents the areas to address would be a change in the parents attitude, knowledge, and their behavior. The second issues is related to *what* is to be assessed followed by *when* should there be an assessment. The difficult issue to consider according to Tramontana et. al., (1980) will be *where* is change to be assessed. This issues pertains to if observed changes in the parents actually extend to their interactions with their children at home, and whether or not changes in the children extend to natural settings other than the home.

There is the possibility that a parent education program may influence its recipients in ways which are not necessarily positive (Tramontana, et. al., 1980). "In general, many more mothers attend parent education courses than fathers, a small percentage of parents attend as a couple, and sometimes husbands enroll in a course subsequent to their wives' participation (Noller & Taylor, 1989, p. 196). Marital conflict is likely if one parent participates and tries to get the nonparticipant to accept the new skill. There is a possibility that the relationship of the nonparticipant parent and the child/ren will deteriorate (1989).

Tramontana, et. al., (1980) reported on a study that had involved two groups of mothers one group recieved parent education using a

curriculum and the other group had an open- discussion. The result of the study showed that the mothers receiving parent education was not significantly higher than the mothers who did not. Even though there was not a significant difference between the groups, the study did suggest that parent education *per se* may not be the critical factor. Perhaps offering parents a program of any kind in which special attention is received, and in which they simply are promoted to think about their children and their parenting roles would be more effective.

Some parents and the remaining number of 18 female participants were married, although their husbands' names were not included in the sessions. There was a range of 1 to 10 children per participant with a mean of 3.3 number of children per household. The range of ages of the participant's children were 7 months old through 19 years old. A histogram shows the frequency distribution of ages. (See Figure 1.)

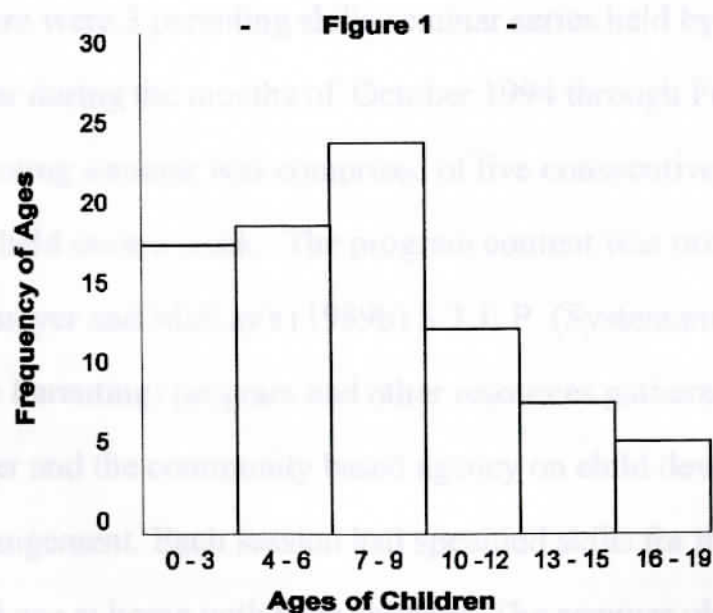


Chapter III

METHOD

Subjects

There were 36 middle-class Caucasian participants in this study. The group consisted of 32.4% (9) males and 67.6% (27) females ranging in ages of 20 through 48 years old giving a mean of 34 years old. Of the 36 participants, there were 9 couples. Five of the 9 couples were in a blended family situation. There were 8 single female parents and the remaining number of 10 female participants were married, although their husbands did not attend any of the sessions. There was a range of 1 to 10 children per household with a mean of 2.3 number of children per household. The range of ages of the participant's children were 2 months old through 19 years old. A histogram shows the frequency distribution of ages. (See Figure 1)



The local sampling was obtained by participants choosing to attend a parenting skills seminar series. The participants were acquired by 1) sending a notice through their child's elementary school or from the suggestion made by the school counselor; 2) reading an advertisement in the local community newspaper; 3) being referred from a social service agency or 4) by word of mouth from a friend, neighbor, or relative who may have attended a previous seminar. Once the participants decided to attend they contacted the community base agency sponsoring the parenting program and registered for the seminar. There was no initial interview or discussion by the facilitator with the prospective participants prior to the parenting seminars, creating an open-ended group.

Content

There were 3 parenting skills seminar series held by the researcher during the months of October 1994 through February 1995. The parenting seminar was comprised of five consecutive, 2 1/2 hour sessions held once a week. The program content was primarily based on Dinkmeyer and McKay's (1989b) S.T.E.P. (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting) program and other resources gathered by the researcher and the community based agency on child development and stress management. Each session had specified skills for the parents to learn and use at home with their children. The seminar objectives were

devised by Moeller & Brauks (1994) which included:

1. Familiarize the parents with the past and present methods of parenting styles and how this effects their present parenting.
2. Develop or improve their ability to use positive communication skills and acquire a knowledge base of child development.
3. Learn how to encourage children, build their self-esteem, and teach them appropriate ways to problem-solve.
4. Develop an awareness of strategic-techniques and acquire new skills to enhance the quality parenting.
5. Empower parents to feel adequate in their role as a parent and to help reduce stress and worry about how to be an effective parent (p. 2).

The seminar attempted to accomplish these goals by helping parents pinpoint certain areas in which they were experiencing difficulty in the skills needed to be an effective parent. Through open-discussion, video vignettes, mini-lectures, role-playing, and material handouts parents were able to acquire and practice new parenting skills.

Each parenting session was divided into six basic sections. At the

beginning of each session the facilitator reviewed the previous week's materials and opened up for any questions regarding the prior week's session. The next section involved the homework assignment given to the participants the prior week. During this time the participants engaged in a peer group discussion to evaluate their successes and/or failures using the specific skills learned the week before. Along with the group discussion, the facilitator provided feedback to the participants. The facilitator gave a brief justification for using the positive skill and why the old method or the negative skill does not accomplish the parent's goal for effectiveness.

After wrapping up the group discussion the facilitator introduced the new skills for this session. By providing a mini-lecture, material handouts, some role-playing, and a brief video vignette the facilitator was able to present the new skills to the participants. The fourth part of the session was another open discussion regarding the new skills presented. The final section of the seminar was a wrap-up that included assigning a homework task for the participants to try the new skill at home with their children. After each session the resources used for the session were displayed for viewing.

Throughout the parenting series, materials in the form of handouts were given to the participants, which became their personal parenting manual. Participants were encouraged to review their parenting skills manual at their own convenience. The handouts

included: information about the new skills, examples of how the skills are applied, information and/or articles regarding common misbehaviors in children, and information on how to use the new skills effectively. A completed resource list of materials and books was handed out in the last session.

Design

The statistical technique used to analyze the data was based on descriptive statistics. "The purpose of descriptive research is to describe things the way they are, rather than to investigate a cause-and-effect relationship (Huck, Cormier, Bounds, 1974, p. 18).

Procedure

All three parenting series for this study, were held in a predominantly white middle-class community school setting. There was no limit to the number of participants, however, the average number participants in a seminar was 12. In the first session participants were informed of the sequences of the sessions, the importance of attending all five sessions, and were instructed about the evaluation process.

The instrument used for the study was a self-reporting evaluation form that the participants completed at the end of the five week parenting skill series (see appendix A). There were three domains

addressed to evaluate the effectiveness of the parenting skills seminar: 1) whether the participants learned new parenting skills and is using them with their children; 2) whether they are still using the same form of discipline they used prior to taking the series and 3) whether they felt the program had helped reduce some stress and worry about how to be an effective parent. The participants had to check the statement that was true for them. If the participant did not check the statement as true then the statement was measured as not true. (Appendix A)

The self-reporting evaluation form consisted of three sections. The first part consisted of two questions pertaining to the overall assessment of the program and the instructor's ability to communicate the content of the material. The participants circled an answer from one of the following choices: poor, fair, good, or excellent. The next four questions were open-ended and required a brief statement from the participants. These questions were used to gain insight on what the participants had learned from the program, how they might parent their child differently, and what features they found most and/or least valuable.

The last section addressed the three domains used in measuring the effectiveness of the program, (statements a, b, and c). The participants were instructed to check the statements they found to be true for them. If they did not check the box to represent true for them, then the statement(s) were assumed to be not true. The following

statements were used:

- a.) I have learned new parenting skills and am using them with my children.
- b.) I am still using the same form of discipline that I used before I took the class.
- c.) This program has helped reduce some stress and worry about how to be an effective parent.
- d.) The handouts/materials will be useful.
- e.) I appreciate the opportunity to communicate with other parents.
- f.) If additional seminars were offered, I would attend.
- g.) I would recommend this program to others.

The final component of the evaluation was for the participants to make any additional comments, suggestions, or topic ideas for future seminars. The average time to complete the evaluation form was five minutes. The instrument appeared to be user friendly, because there were no questions asked regarding clarification. There was no follow-up contact with the participants once they had finished the five part series.

Chapter IV

Results

Data on Participants

The researcher of this study explored the self-reported effectiveness of a parenting skills seminar, in an attempt to determine if parents reported learning new skills and a reduction in stress and worry.

Thirty-five (97.2) participants of the study group had checked that they had learned new parenting skills and were using them with their children, leaving one (2.8%) who had not checked the statement to be true. Five (13.8%) of the thirty six participants also checked the statement that they are still using the same form of discipline they had used before the class, but wrote on the form "sometimes". Leaving thirty one (86.2%) participants claiming they are not using the same form of discipline they had used prior to class. (see Table 1)

The study also explored whether the program reduced stress and worry about being an effective parent. Thirty-three (97.1%) participants had checked the statement to represent true, whereas the remaining two (2.9%) participants did not check the statement, causing the researcher to assume the program did not reduce stress or worry to those 2 participants. (see Table 1)

- **Table 1** -

Domains		Total Participants = 36	
		True	False
Learning and usage of new parenting skills	No.	35	1
	%	97.2	2.8
Same form of discipline as used before taking class.	No.	5	31
	%	13.8	86.2
Reported a reduction in stress and worry following completion of program	No.	33	3
	%	91.7	8.3

There were 9 (100%) male participants that checked true for learning new parenting skills and using them with their children. One (2.8%) male participant also had checked using the same form of discipline that was used prior to the class, leaving 8 (97.2%) male participants not using the same form of discipline as before. All 9 (100%) male participants agreed the program had helped to reduce

- **Table 2** -

Domains		Male Participants = 9	
		True	False
Learning and usage of new parenting skills	No.	9	0
	%	100	0
Same form of discipline as used before taking class.	No.	1	8
	%	2.8	97.2
Reported a reduction in stress and worry following completion of program	No.	9	0
	%	100	0

some stress and worry about being an effective parent. (see Table 2)

The results of the females were 26 (97.3%) participants claimed they had learned new parenting skills and was using them with their children, whereas one (2.7%) did not. There were 23 females, 85.2% of sample, that claimed usage of the same form of discipline prior to the series had discontinued. Leaving 4 (14.8%) of the participants continuing to use the same form of the discipline prior to the parenting skills seminar. Finally, 24 (88.9%) participants reported a reduction in stress and worry regarding their parenting role. The remaining 3 (11.1%) female participants failed to report a reduction in stress and worry. (see Table 3)

- **Table 3** -

Domains		Female Participants = 27	
		True	False
Learning and usage of new parenting skills	No.	26	1
	%	96.3	3.7
Same form of discipline as used before taking class.	No.	4	23
	%	14.8	85.2
Reported a reduction in stress and worry following completion of program	No.	24	3
	%	88.9	11.1

Chapter V

Discussion

The results of the findings revealed that parenting skills seminars are effective in providing new skills for parents to learn and use with their children. Participants reported experiencing less stress and worry about their parenting role after completion of the program.

There appeared to be some resemblance of this group to Croake and Glover's (1977) reference of the type of participants that usually attend parent education programs. They claimed that middle to upper socioeconomic level of parents participate more frequently than parents from lower socioeconomic levels. Approximately 25 % of the group participants were males, congruent with the assumption that mothers compared to fathers are by far the largest proportion of parents reached. The parenting skills program conducted for the study also reflects the conception that parent education programs are proportionately more often directed to parents of younger children.

The parenting skills program shared the basic premise stated by Abidin and Carter (1980) that a parent education program must result in two major outcomes in order to be effective. The parents need to believe and experience themselves as being more competent in their role as parents and self-respect should be enhanced. In the study conducted, the participants experienced a self-perceived reduction in

stress and worry. According to Abidin and Carter (1980) this enhances self-respect and enhances confidence in the parenting role.

One interesting finding was that 100 percent of males agreed that the program had helped reduce some stress and worry about being an effective parent. This means that prior to the program these men could have been overwhelmed, feeling inadequate in their role, and worrying about how to be effective. Men in society usually do not allow others to know their inabilities and whether they are overwhelmed or stressed. The fact that these men attended the parenting skills seminar and completed the program may reflect a new trend for men. Even though men are less likely to attend these types of parenting seminars in comparison to women, these men expressed their desire to learn more on how to be a better parent.

The limitations to this project are obvious. A pretest/posttest is a more reliable method to use in measuring effectiveness of the parenting skills seminar. Giving a pretest prior to the start of the session would have provided a reliable base for measurement. The measurement used for the research was a self-reporting evaluation form that was not field tested for reliability.

The demographic information gathered was incomplete. The agency sponsoring the program did not require the researcher to obtain any additional data. Another limitation was the facilitator was also the researcher. There is a possibility that the results are biased to reflect

the position of the researcher and there was no measurable way of determining if this had any effect on the outcome of the study. A final limitation was the lack of information on the style of parenting and the forms of discipline participants used prior to the seminar.

The content of the parenting skills program was similar to the S.T.E.P. program (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989) and the results were in keeping with the model that parents new learn skills and use them with their children (Nystul, 1982). The additional pieces of developmental stages of children (Tavormina, 1980) and the topic on stress offered a modest support that the parenting skill seminar had provided and positively influenced the parent-child relationship.

The results did support the position that a parenting skill seminar is effective in providing parents with new skills to learn and use with their children. By attending the parenting skills program parents reported a reduction in stress and worry about being effective in their role of parenting.

The project provided an awareness to the researcher on the limitation of studies conducted on parenting effectiveness. There needs to be further research to compare the style of parenting among men and women and the forms of discipline parents use.

Appendix A

Name: _____ Date: _____
 District: _____ Telephone: _____
 Service Area: _____ Location: _____
 Household: _____
 Agency: _____

We would like to thank you for taking a few minutes to help us understand how we can better serve you. Your input is important to us. We will use your feedback to improve our services.

1. How do you rate the overall quality of the program?
 1 (Poor) 2 (Fair) 3 (Good) 4 (Excellent)

APPENDIX A: Evaluation Form

2. What is the most important thing you have learned from the program?
 1 (Poor) 2 (Fair) 3 (Good) 4 (Excellent)

3. What is the most important thing you have learned from the program?

4. How would you describe your child's behavior as a result of the program?

5. What kind of help do you need most?

6. What kind of help do you need most?

7. Check the program's strengths and weaknesses.

- I have learned new parenting skills and am using them with my children.
- I am able to use the same level of discipline that I used before I was in the program.
- This program has helped reduce stress and tension in my home.
- The program has helped me to be a better parent.
- I appreciate the opportunity to communicate with other parents.
- If additional programs were offered, I would attend.
- I would recommend this program to others.

8. Please address any additional comments or suggestions.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation.

Appendix A

Name: _____ Date: _____
 Child(ren): _____ Facilitator's Name: _____
 Names/Ages: _____ Location: _____
 Names/Ages: _____
 Names/Ages: _____

We would appreciate your taking a few minutes to fill out this evaluation form. Any comments or suggestions you have will be valuable in helping us assess the impact of the program as well as in helping us plan future programs.

1. What is your overall assessment of this program?

<u>Poor</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Excellent</u>
1	2	3	4

2. What is your assessment of the instructor's ability to communicate the content of the material?

<u>Poor</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Excellent</u>
1	2	3	4

3. What is the most important thing you have learned from this program?

4. How might you parent your child differently as a result of what you have learned?

5. What features of the program did you find most valuable?

6. What features of the program did you like least?

7. Check the statements that are true for you:

- I have learned new parenting skills and am using them with my children.
- I am still using the same form of discipline that I used before I took this class.
- This program has helped reduce some stress and worry about how to be an effective parent.
- The handouts/materials will be useful.
- I appreciate the opportunity to communicate with other parents.
- If additional seminars were offered, I would attend.
- I would recommend this program to others.

8. Other comments/ suggestions/ topic ideas, please list on back.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation.

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