

PARENT ASSESSMENT OF PARENT EDUCATION CLASSES

by

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ABSTRACT

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In present time there exists no standard form of measuring or demonstrating the effectiveness of parent education classes. What does exist are parent surveys that allow parents to assess parent education classes. However, even among current surveys, no single style or format exists. The purpose of this research project was to create and administer an effective parent education evaluation survey. The objectives of the survey were to:

1. Identify the level of parents' previous knowledge about the class discussion topics in two parent education classes, Early Ones and Raising Responsible Children.

2. Determine the extent to which the class discussion topics for two parent education classes, Early Ones and Raising Responsible Children, were informative and useful to the parents.
3. Describe parents' attitudes towards the overall parent education class.
4. Determine the parents' attitudes about the instructor's effectiveness in the parent education class.

These objectives were incorporated into the survey questions and design. The content of the instrument was based on portions of the review of literature. The literature review included: the history of Minnesota ECFE program development; parental roles in ECFE; attitudes about parent education, intervention and therapy; program types and guidelines; examples of parent education surveys and questionnaires; ECFE coordinator and parent educator feedback; alternative and recent developments in parent education evaluation methods; and criticisms of parent education.

The human subjects that participated in this research project by completing the parent education surveys were the parents of two parent education classes within the Minneapolis Public School System's Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program. The two classes were an Early Ones parent education class and a Raising Responsible Children parent education class. Both classes were located at Sabathani Community Center in Minneapolis. The surveys were administered in class on the last two scheduled class meeting times. Using the survey, participants rated their previous knowledge, information gained, and usefulness of information regarding specific topics discussed in their class. The participants also assessed the overall program and the parent educator.

Minnesota is currently the only state with a license in Parent Education making this specific research project significant to the state of Minnesota. This research project is also significant to the state of Minnesota because of recent detrimental educational budget cuts. With over 300 Minnesota school districts involved in Early Childhood Family Education programs, which include parent education, now is the time more than ever to measure and demonstrate the success of these programs (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2002). With the development of the parent education survey of this research project it is suggested that it be further researched and also be used by ECFE programs and parent educators.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Parent education is a valuable resource in today's society. Parent education is not a new concept as it roots go back to 1815 (Berger, 2000). One theory of parent education at this time was of a religious, moral emphasis. Topics relative to this theory included proper moral training, discipline, and "breaking a child's will", meaning ridding children of sinfulness. A second theory of the 1800's was the "hardening" of a child. The basis of this theory was to raise strong children to become like men of the past. The third prevalent theory of the 1800's was the belief that nurturing and guidance will "enable children to reach their potential" (Berger, 2000, p. 55).

The progression of parent education through the years has taken on many forms. Parent education can be received via news reports, television programs, parenting books, bulletin boards, and other means. In Minnesota, parent education is being offered via classes made possible by the development of Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) programming in the 1970's (Manalo & Meezan, 2000). The intention of ECFE parent education classes is similar to the third theory of the 1800's mentioned above. It is the focus of these classes to foster, promote, guide, and nurture children by encouraging families to be active in this focus (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2001).

Parent education classes are important for many reasons such as, but not limited to personal and familial growth. Parents are not the only benefactors of these types of programs; children, teachers, and communities also benefit. Parent education classes can be general in that it can be any information regarding parenting and familial processes. It

can also be more specific regarding the type of parent education class offered. Some classes might be eclectic in their objectives while others focus on one primary aspect including child development, special needs, single parenting, abuse and neglect, and many other topics.

With parent education being so multi-faceted, it is a wonder why there seems to exist no specific or universal evaluation tool for its effectiveness and benefits. This is the problem for which this research project is founded. There are several sources regarding what should be included in parent education programs (Manalo & Meezan, 2000; Soriano, Weston & Violet, 2001), types of programs (Dore & Lee, 1999; Manalo & Meezan, 2000), and guidelines for those programs (Humenick, 1999; Manalo & Meezan, 2000), but still no primary form of evaluation other than surveying of the parents who have taken part in the programs (C. Frechette, interview, July 30, 2001). However, most researchers in this area of study do suggest that there needs to be some standard form of evaluation (Fuerst & Fuerst, 1993; Manalo & Meezan, 2000; Reynolds, 1998).

If researchers are suggesting the need for an effective evaluation tool of parent education programs, then why does one not yet exist? One of the primary reasons is that there are too many different types of parent education programs to devise one evaluation tool (Manalo & Meezan, 2000). So why not then devise an evaluation instrument for each type? This too would be difficult for several reasons. Just because a program is specifically designed to meet certain needs of a group does not mean that everyone in the group has those same needs. The diversity of the group is an influential factor on what the program will attempt to facilitate. Another factor is that parents might be taking part in these groups voluntarily or because it is court-ordered leading to different outcomes,

results, and perceptions of the program. This brings us to the second most primary reason why no standard evaluation tool has been created. In adult education, other than university or college degree programs, such as a parent education program, one cannot require the participants to be tested on what they have gained from the program. The notion of testing might discourage parents from taking part or make them feel as if they are inadequate parents (C. Frechette, interview, July 30, 2001).

Mentioned previously was the method of surveying the parents as an evaluation option. While this is useful and often positive, it only produces opinions, not facts or statistics regarding the parent education program with which the parents took part. It is in the opinion of several researchers (Fuerst & Fuerst, 1993; Manalo & Meezan, 2000), that parent education programs are beneficial. The numbers of parent education programs are rising and so is the number of participants (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2000). These statistics alone can lead one to believe that yes, these programs are working, but it is simply not enough. There have been criticisms (Mahoney & Kaiser, 1999), although few, made about parent education partly because of the lack of knowledge pertaining to these types of programs. All of these reasons are direct signals to why there is a strong need for an effective evaluation tool in parent education programs. However, the evaluation tool to be developed or incorporated must be one that can be adapted and changed to meet the specific program needs and its participants (Reynolds, 1998).

As stated, adaptability is key to a parent education evaluation for several reasons. Program type and the parents' reasons for attending, voluntary or mandatory; have previously been addressed as factors affecting the type of evaluation. Parents' input

(Manalo & Meezan, 2000) as to what they expect of a program is essential to the design of the program as well as the evaluation. Age, gender, and race will affect the communication style used in the program as well as learning styles, thus also affecting the evaluation. Education level and economic status play a role in attitudes and learning of the participants, creating another reason for flexibility and adaptability in not only the program but also in the program evaluation.

The lack of a standard parent education assessment is a serious dilemma for the future of parent education. With serious budget cuts in education and parent education becoming a part of the mainstream via public education (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2000) there needs to be a measure of some sort to suggest the benefits of parent education to parents so this too will not be cut from the educational system.

This paper will discuss the research, or lack there of regarding this issue. It will focus on current methods of parent education evaluations used in several Minnesota ECFE programs. It will also describe certain Minnesota ECFE parent educator's opinions and feedback about those current methods. The project based portion of this paper will demonstrate the development and application of a parent education survey used in two Minneapolis ECFE classes.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this research project is to design an evaluation format that is adaptable to various parent education classes and evaluates the same components; previous knowledge, information gained, usefulness, parental attitudes towards parent education classes, and instructor effectiveness. The format will be administered to the

parents of two parent education classes within the Minneapolis Public School System's ECFE programs. The two classes are an Early Ones parent education class and a Raising Responsible Children parent education class. Both classes are located at Sabathani Community Center in Minneapolis. The surveys will be administered on the last two scheduled class meeting times in the fall semester of the year 2002. While the parents of each class will rate their level of previous knowledge, information gained, and usefulness of information regarding specific topics discussed in their classes, those topics will be different for each class. The parents will also be assessing the overall program and the parent education instructors.

Research Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to create an instrument that includes the following four objectives. The instrument objectives are to:

1. Identify the level of parents' previous knowledge about the class discussion topics in two parent education classes, Early Ones and Raising Responsible Children.
2. Determine the extent to which the class discussion topics for two parent education classes, Early Ones and Raising Responsible Children, were informative and useful to the parents.
3. Describe parent attitudes towards the overall parent education class.
4. Determine parent attitudes about the instructor's effectiveness in the parent education class.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this research project and for the understanding of the reader, parent education needs further, but brief discussion and description. As previously

mentioned, parent education can be generalized or more specific based on where and what information is obtained by the parent. However, in this paper the term parent education will be used to refer to a component of an Early Childhood Family Education program, which will be addressed as ECFE throughout this paper. It will also refer to a classroom setting with a licensed instructor in which parents are enrolled either voluntarily or mandated, with which they attended regularly according to the class meeting times and schedule.

Parent education classes in this study serve as a resource for parents covering a variety of parental issues from discipline to time management. Parent education is inclusive of the family, meaning that parent education programs are geared toward the benefit of the family. A parent education program with a child component is a program that not only has a class for the parents, but for the children as well. At the beginning of each class period, parents and children take part in what is called parent-child interaction time where parents and children “play” for a period of time prior to them separating for separate classes for the children and the parents. Some parent education classes, not the majority, are non-separating where children and parents stay in the same room for parent-child interaction time and parent education. For further clarification regarding parent education, the words program and class are used interchangeable.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter the reader will find a review of literature related to this research project. This chapter will include a brief history of the Minnesota ECFE program development in Minnesota and the importance of parents and their role in ECFE. It will address different views of parent education in relation to intervention and therapy. It will examine program topic selection, program guidelines, and program indicators. Example questions from current parent education surveys and questionnaires will be shared as well as ECFE coordinator and parent educator responses about those evaluations. Alternative evaluation methods and recent evaluation developments will also be addressed. The chapter will conclude with a brief look at the limited criticisms of parent education.

Minnesota ECFE Program Development

In 1973 the first ECFE bill was introduced to the Minnesota State senate, however it did not pass. In 1974 six pilot programs were approved and funded. Later that year program size doubled allowing for twelve local grants. In 1977 there were twenty-two sites and forty by 1979. By 1984 twenty-nine school districts were operating ECFE programs with an additional forty-one to adopt the program. One year later approximately seventy school districts were running ECFE programs and one year after that 279. By 1988, 310 school districts were operating ECFE programs. The next four years to follow show smaller increases in districts to adopt ECFE programming; 1989- 326 districts, 1990- 340 districts, 1991- 365 districts, 1992- 380 districts. Thus the vast majority of Minnesota school districts have adopted the ECFE program (Minnesota

Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2000). Based on these statistics it would be an assumption that a demand has been created for ECFE programs and that the demand is being met by the increase in districts offering ECFE. It would also be assumed that these programs must be successful in the continuation of program growth. From 1993 through 1999 there is a decrease in total districts incorporating ECFE programs, however, this is due to smaller schools district combining to create a larger district (J. Wentland, interview, December 8, 2002). In 1999 and 2000 there is another decrease, but not just in the number of districts, in funding as well. A question to be asked and answered is why would funding be decreased if a demand for programming still exists? This question reflects the need for effective program evaluation data to give proof to the need for and success of ECFE programs.

Parental Roles in ECFE

What makes ECFE programs successful? According to Minneapolis area ECFE program coordinators and parent educators contacted, see Appendix A, one key factor prevailed as dominant to any others, the parents. After all, they are the ones involved in the parent education classes. Parents are very crucial to the success of a parent education program. It is important to identify parental needs and wants. Members of family support practices are in agreement that parents are one of society's most valuable resources (Manalo & Meezan, 2000). Parents help build the foundation for parent education programs by providing their input and feedback about how the program should be run and what should be involved in the program. Parents also bring ideas, topics, issues, and concerns to the program participants and to the attention of the instructor that

may not have been addressed or planned for in the program. This enables the instructor to create a more relevant program to address parental wants and needs.

Parents are also valuable resources to each other. Parents serve as role models or examples for other parents. Often parents may feel unsure or somewhat intimidated about taking part in a parent education program. They may feel inadequate or that they are bad parents. Knowing that other parents are involved and share similar issues helps to ease the tension. Several researchers (Soriano et al. 2001) agree that parenting through peer support is a useful and successful component of parent education. More experienced parents can be examples for new parents, rather than an instructor simply referring to a case scenario. Parents can learn from each other's triumphs and failures, exchange ideas, and most importantly, build strong social supports. Parents from one study reported that the social supports they gained through parenting programs helped them to feel more community-oriented (Soriano et al.). This new sense of community empowered the families to take advantage of more community resources. Families themselves become resources to the community (Manalo & Meezan, 2000).

Different Views of Parent Education

Understanding better the role of parents in ECFE programs, a look at certain views about parent education will be the focus of this section. The view of parent education as education versus intervention will be addressed first. Parent education involves a classroom setting, a licensed teacher, and parents. Reasons for attendance vary as do the specific focus of a class. In some circumstances parent education is viewed more as intervention than education. For instance, in the case of child abuse and neglect, a parent might be court ordered to take a parent education class. This would be

seen as an intervention of the parent's current parenting methods (Dore & Lee, 1999).

Another circumstance might include parents of children with special needs. Parents may have to modify their existing parenting practices to meet the special needs of the child.

This too is a form of intervention because under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1990, parents of children with special needs are required to take part in some type of parent education program (Dunst, 1999).

Regardless of why parents are involved in parent education programs, the key word is education. In either example, the intervention is still education and should be viewed so. The parent should gain something from his or her experience with the program. The environment and the attitude of the program must foster the parents' belief that time spent in the program will be useful (Manalo & Meezan, 2000). If the parents' view is otherwise, or as if someone is trying to take control of that person's parental right, that parent will not gain or learn anything. This can have a negative affect in that the parent may continue with the already established means of parenting, and in the case of the abused child, the intervention could possibly make things worse.

The idea of intervention as separate from education is another reason for the need for an evaluation tool in parent education programs. Although Burton and Higgins Hains (1992) do not address the issue of evaluation, the argument for unification of intervention and education is addressed. It is the opinions of both these researchers that in order to improve quality and expand the quantity of services in these two areas, the two fields must unify to reach those goals. In these particular areas, it is not so much the parents' input in creating the evaluation that is crucial to the program's success, it is the parents'

feedback in the evaluation that will help to bridge the gap between intervention and education.

Another aspect of parent education to address is whether it is therapy or education. Doherty (1995) addresses this issue in his article *Boundaries Between Parent and Family Education and Family Therapy: The Levels of Family Involvement Model*. He discusses the importance of a distinction between the two fields. To do this he uses the Levels Family Involvement (LFI) model. Level One: Minimal Emphasis on Family regards programs in which for no other reason than practical or legal, family members are involved. In Level Two: Information and Advice, family members are involved in educational activities regarding family life, parenting, and child development. The third level, Feelings and Support, expands on Level Two by having family members disclose personal feelings and experiences related to the topics of Level Two. Level Four: Brief Focused Intervention involves creating a plan to help change problem behaviors that may arise in the second and third level of family education. Level Four may also include assessment of that plan. The last level, Level Five: Family Therapy falls outside the area of parent education and is usually focused at treating serious family or psychological problems (Doherty, 1995).

The first view expressed in this section, intervention versus education, strives for unification of the two fields. The second view, therapy versus education, addresses the need for clear and distinct boundaries of the two fields. While it is not to say that family therapy and family education are not related or do not overlap, it is the opinion of Doherty (1995) that two areas be considered separate for the purposes and function of the educators, the therapists, and the families.

Influences on Program Topic Selection

Having addressed the history of the ECFE program development, parental roles, and certain views about parent education, a brief overview of programs topics need be addressed so that an understanding of what the actual programs are about can be developed. Program topics can range from discipline to potty training. The characteristics of the parents and the age of their children affect the topic selection of a program. Using the two examples above, a class may consist of parents of newborns in which neither of these topics (discipline or potty training) immediately affects. On the other hand, a class may consist of parents of toddlers in which both of these topics are immediate issues. One other possibility is that you may have a group of parents of children ranging from newborns to preschoolers in which you need to find a balance of topics.

Two other major influences on parent education programs are broad external factors and family focused factors (Soriano et al. 2001). External factors might include accessibility to or cost of parent education programs. Family focused factors might include moral and value development. Role strain, role conflict and/or role overload because of work related issues that affect the family is an example of external and family focused factors affecting each other.

Not only are there varying topics in parent education programs, but there are also a lot of factors that go into the selection of topics for a parent education program (Dore & Lee, 1999; Humenick, 1999; Manalo & Meezan, 2000). This too is another reason for the need of an effective parent education evaluation tool. Different program topics require different evaluations and different evaluations yield different results.

Program Guidelines

Just as there are different parent education programs there will be different guidelines. However, there are some general guidelines for all parent education programs. Prior to stating some of the general guidelines general beliefs and principles surrounding parent education programs will be addressed. The following beliefs and principles are adapted from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Family Resource Coalition (Manalo & Meezan, 2000):

- 1) “Primary responsibility for the development and well being of children lies within the family, and all segments of society must support families as they rear children.
- 2) The developmental processes that make up parenthood and the family life create needs that are unique at each stage in the life span.
- 3) Assuring the well being of all families is the cornerstone of a healthy society and requires universal access to support programs and services; families are empowered when they have access to information.
- 4) Child-rearing patterns are influenced by parents’ understanding of child development and of their children’s unique characteristics, personal sense of competence, and cultural and community traditions” (p. 414).

These beliefs have had a direct impact on the elements of parent education programs. These beliefs are made obvious in the following parent education program guidelines taken from the family support practice cited in Manalo & Meezan’s (2000) article, “Toward building typology for the evaluation of services in the family support programs:

- 1) “Services are focused on the family as a whole
- 2) Family strengths are identified, enhanced and respected.
- 3) Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.
- 4) Services are community based, involve community organizations and residents (including parents) in their design and delivery, and contribute to the community building process.
- 5) Services are easily accessible and are delivered in a manner that affirms and strengthens families’ cultural, racial, and linguistic identities.
- 6) Services are flexible and continually responsive to emerging and community issues, and are intensive enough to meet family needs.
- 7) Linkage to a wide variety of supports and services are generally crucial to meeting families’ and children’s’ needs.
- 8) Staff and families work together as partners in identifying and meeting individual and family needs in relationships based on equality and respect.
- 9) Staff mobilizes formal and informal resources and enhances families capacity to support the growth and development of all family members.
- 10) Staff advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.
- 11) Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration” (p. 414).

With general beliefs and guidelines already intact, a long, overdue effective parent education evaluation tool based out of these common principles must arise.

Granted the more specific a program's guideline, the more specific and tailored the evaluation.

ECFE Quality Indicators

Having stated some general program guidelines, the next area to address is program evaluations. In viewing Minnesota's Early Childhood and Family Education Quality Indicators program checklist (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2002), it was surprising that of the nine monitoring and evaluation indicators of the program operations section, only four actually mentioned evaluation. Those four indicators are as follows (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2001):

- 17) "Staff develop and implement plans for monitoring and assessing the program.
- 23) The program gathers and uses participant satisfaction data for program development and improvement.
- 24) The program participates in studies of program outcomes.
- 25) The program conducts periodic self-assessment of program components by using this document" (p. 14).

To compare this number to the rest of the Minnesota Early Childhood and Family Education Quality Indicators program checklist, the five major sections of this checklist will be broken down into number of indicators per section. The program operations or Program Component E section of which the above four indicators were taken from includes twenty-five indicators. Program Component A: Community Outreach, Community Input, and Linkages has a total of thirty-eight indicators. Program

Component B; which deals with environment, resources, and educators' roles, has twenty-nine indicators. The early childhood education and parent-child interaction section, Program Component C, has forty-six indicators. Program component D: Home visiting, the smallest section has twenty-two indicators. So of a total 170 indicators only nine deal with monitoring and evaluation, and of those nine only four actually relate to evaluation (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2002).

Parent Education Evaluation Surveys

After having viewed this checklist it was time to see what actual ECFE programs and parent educators were using to have parents evaluate the program classes. Sample parent education evaluations from four Minneapolis area public school districts including Minneapolis, Chaska, Wayzata, and Rockford were examined. As well as having specific evaluations to review, contact was established with ECFE coordinators and parent educators.

While all the evaluation methods were the same, parent education surveys or questionnaires, these differed in design. These surveys primarily asked the same questions. Below is a compilation of commonly asked questions or fill in statements of parents involved in ECFE classes in the four Minneapolis area public school districts. The following set of questions would usually be asked at the beginning of a quarter, trimester or semester parent education class.

- How did you hear about the program?
- What influenced you to sign up?
- What is your greatest concern as a parent?
- What is your greatest concern for your child?

- What topics would you like to see covered in this class?
- What do you (the parent) hope to get from this class?
- What do you hope your child gets from this class?

This next set of questions would usually be asked mid or end quarter, trimester or semester parent education class.

- What did you like best about the class?
- What didn't you like about the class?
- What would you like to see changed?
- What topics did you like best?
- What topics didn't you like?
- What topics would you like to see in the future?
- Our family enjoyed...
- Our family didn't enjoy...
- Next time we would like to recommend...
- What are the most important things you learned about yourself from this class?
- What are the most important things you learned about your child from this class?
- What are the most important things you learned from the group?
- Are the things your learning in class helpful at home?
- Were your expectations of the class met?
- Were your goals met?
- What ways did this class meet your needs?
- What ways could this class better meet your needs?

- What ways did this class meet your child's needs?
- What ways could this class better meet your child's needs?
- Did you learn new things about your family?
- Suggestions I have...
- I would describe ECFE to a friend as...
- Did registration go smoothly?
- Was the location accessible?
- Was the classroom space comfortable?
- Did you feel welcome?
- Was there a good relationship between you and the staff?
- Was the parent's class supportive?

The above questions and fill-in statements are very general and open ended making possible data collection and analysis difficult.

ECFE Coordinator and Parent Educator Communication

In looking at the evaluation examples, the researcher questioned how the parent surveys were developed. With the help of the four Minneapolis area public school ECFE coordinators and parent educators, see Appendix A, this question was answered. First, all the coordinators and educators stated that they do use parent evaluations, and as stated above, these were all surveys or questionnaires. In terms of who creates the evaluations, the Chaska and Minneapolis districts have teams that create them (N. Dilks, email, December 2, 2002; H. Wells, email, December 9, 2002). At Rockford, the ECFE coordinator creates the evaluations (R. Ouverson, email, November 25, 2002), and in Wayzata the individual parent educator creates them for his/her specific parent class (J.

Carlson, email, December 10, 2002). Another question related to the previous was when were the evaluations created? H. Wells and R. Ouverson, both ECFE coordinators, said that the mid series and final evaluations were created years ago, however they are constantly being revised to meet the needs of the program. When it was asked if all classes do parent course evaluations R. Ouverson stated that all classes do, however, this researcher once worked as a children's teacher for an ECFE class for the Rockford school district and at no time were any evaluations given to the parents involved in that class. When H. Wells was asked that same question she too stated that all classes should take part in mid and final evaluations. She also stated that sometimes, because of non-English speaking classes, evaluations are not always administered to those classes because of the amount of time it takes to read and fill them out.

The parent educators were asked what purpose does the evaluation serve to the parent educator? J. Carlson (email, December 10, 2002) replied with three purposes: program involvement, teaching improvement or affirmation, and parent self-evaluation. Similar responses were given by C. Barinsky's (email, November 18, 2002). She stated the evaluations were a way to get parental feedback about what parents are learning and their satisfaction, and also to gain new ideas for programming. It was then asked of all ECFE coordinators and parent educators in the four Minneapolis area public school districts if they found their current methods of evaluation effective and useful. Both parent educators, C. Barinsky and J. Carlson said "yes". ECFE coordinator R. Ouverson also said yes because it seems to be useful in program planning. Coordinator N. Dilks agreed, however, she wonders if parents always write the truth because the evaluations are filled out in class. On the contrary to popular opinion, H. Wells, ECFE coordinator,

stated that final evaluations are not useful because they do not meet a need. She also mentioned that sometimes the feedback is so general the ECFE staff does not know what to do with the feedback. She did state however, that the mid series evaluations seem very helpful to both staff and program improvement.

Alternative Parent Education Evaluation Methods

Parent surveys and questionnaires are the dominant form of parent education evaluation of classes. A possible reason for the lack of other methods might be due to the conflict between researchers and practitioners. According to Myers-Walls (2000), “the best evaluations studies involve collaborations between evaluation researchers and practitioners, but the two groups represent different cultures” (p. 341). What is meant by “cultures” is “temporal orientation, cognitive resources and values,” (p. 341). Other differences include “definitions of excellence, patterns of communication, daily life styles and use of tools,” (p. 341). For example, a practitioner designs a program course and the researcher wants to know the basis for support of that program. Another example is that while researchers are working to provide answers through research that take time, the practitioners want the answers immediately. In relationship to family education a conflict of objectives in research arises. Practitioners are looking for what families need while researchers are looking for the truth about family interactions.

Having stated this conflict, what about a possible solution? Previously mentioned was the Levels of Family Involvement (LFI) model. It is suggested by Doherty (1995) that the LFI model can be used for research on parent and family education even though it has typically been used with physicians in the past. He suggests that a coding system that was developed for assessing involvement levels of families and family physicians

could be used for assessing interactions between families and family educators with fairly easy adaptations. The assessment could be used to evaluate such things as the fit of program goals for parents versus the actual level achieved; the effectiveness of staff; competency levels; and levels of involvement, outcomes, and satisfaction (Doherty, 1995). Doherty suggests that a balance of informational and affective exchanges be a research focus for Level Three: Feelings & Support of the LFI model.

While Doherty's above suggestion seems like a good route for researchers, Participatory Action Research (PAR) gives researchers another option. What PAR gives individuals is the power to recognize "that they have the ability to identify their own needs and to generate practical long lasting solutions" (Simonson & Bushaw, 1993, p. 27). The applied research method PAR contrasts the professional expert model of research that typically entails a researcher entering a group of some sort, gather data, interpreting results, then suggesting a form of action. In PAR the researcher is a part of the group who happens to be interested in gaining information and making changes. The use of PAR measures the group's perception of a need and it focuses on social planning and action.

There are however some drawbacks to PAR. It is assumed that because people are members of a group that they will want to help make change. This however may not be true. Another draw back is that while PAR may have the word participatory in it, sometimes only one or two individuals are doing all the action planning. In some ways, ECFE programs could be viewed as having adopted some of the PAR attributes in that they use the parents of the program to assess needs and make changes to the program. However, as stated by N. Dilks (email, December 2, 2002), some time participants may

not speak the truth and sometimes, as H. Wells (email, December 9, 2002) stated, what can you make of or do with certain responses?

New Developments in Minnesota ECFE Evaluation

If PAR and the LFI model are possible future options, what else is currently happening in the way of parent education evaluations other than surveys and questionnaire? Minnesota's Department of Children, Families & Learning (2002) has designed outcomes and indicators for ECFE programs. Outcomes are defined as goals or results while indicators are defined as benchmarks or measures of performance. A major push for the design of these outcomes and indicators is limited funding to continue to provide support for ECFE programming. There is now, more than ever a need to prove the success of ECFE programs and to do this, that success must be measured. The outcomes and indicators can serve as progressive benchmarks to guide community members, potential funders and local and state policy makers; the enhancement of existing services and programs through the progression of evaluation methods; and to foster communities with a healthy and child focused agenda. While the outcomes and indicators state what need be evaluate, they do not discuss how.

In 1996 Betty Cooke and Marsha Mueller received the Award for Exemplary Evaluations (AEA) for the "involvement of staff in the evaluation process" (Fitzpatrick, 1998, p. 87). The evaluation was for the Minnesota ECFE program. There were two primary aims of this evaluation, learn the outcomes of lower-income families involved in ECFE and involve staff in evaluation processes to build organizational capacity (Mueller, 1998). The reason for the focus on lower income defined as annual households incomes of less than \$30,00 is because of a common perception that ECFE programs attract and

serve only middle-income families. The funding for this evaluation project came from The McKnight Foundation to Family Education Resources (FERM).

With the focus on lower-income families, a more specific target group had to be defined. The lower-income families had to be new to ECFE and have children ages birth through three years old. Two sample groups were selected, the first consisting of all the lower-income newcomers. The second group was a smaller group taken from the larger group to be involved in more intensive portions of the project. There were three data collection methods: enrollment surveys, parent interviews, and videotaped observations. The fall and spring enrollment surveys differed in content. Fall surveys asked for demographics, social supports, and family stress. Spring surveys asked for parental program perceptions and the results of those perceptions. The parent interviews were also different in fall and in spring. The fall interview consisted of fifteen open-ended questions about child development and parental issues. The spring interview dealt with those same issues but different questions. It also included questions about how participation in ECFE has made a difference in parenting. Three observations were recorded via video camera. The first was parent-child interaction in the home setting. The second recording was done at the program site during parent-child interaction time. The third video observation was a child only observation (Mueller, 1998).

From this project five themes presented themselves (Mueller, 1998):

- 1) “Parents felt that ECFE made a positive difference in their approach to parenting, parent-child relationships and their child’s behaviors.
- 2) Staff assessments of parents’ knowledge, behavior, and role perception from interviews revealed improvements from fall to spring.

- 3) Independent ratings of videotapes by child development specialists at the University of Minnesota showed a decrease in the number of parents receiving lower ratings on measures of parent-child interaction from fall to spring.
- 4) Lower-income families who come to ECFE demonstrate different levels of knowledge about child development and parenting skills, diverse demographic characteristics, different levels of accumulated risk, and different amount of social support.
- 5) ECFE's universal access approach is effective with many different low-income families" (p. 85).

The primary way that this evaluation is currently being used is to hold workshops for ECFE staff with a focus on observation skills as an important aspect of evaluation. Mueller states that there is a distinction between users and audience in this type of evaluation (Fitzpatrick, 1998). ECFE staff are the intended users while the audience consists of legislator and professionals needing information about program, outcomes, and success.

Overall, the evaluation project appears to be a success. However, Fitzpatrick (1998) points out two concerns. The first is that there is no mention of standards, criteria or statistical tests in the evaluation project. Secondly, there was little interaction between Mueller and the site evaluators for the project. The basis for this concern is one of checks and balances. The lack of interaction creates a gap between data collection and the program; and interpretation, reporting and administration. A few other issues not mentioned are time, workload, and funding. Educators are already pressed for time with large workloads to be responsible for such a time and work consuming form of

evaluation. This is not to say that this type of evaluation is not needed. Are there other options for outside help?

Criticisms

What other criticisms exist regarding parent education evaluations? There were the few relevant criticisms on parent education, but not parent education evaluation. Of the critiques made on parent education, most are invalid due to lack of competency. For example, Mahoney and Kaiser's (1999) critique on parent education in relation to early intervention. While their statement regarding needing a renewed focus on parent education is agreed with, it is not agreed with in the context of which they discussed it. Mahoney and Kaiser state that parent education in early intervention is not well defined or practiced in the United States. Looking at the previous statistics of the development of the Minnesota ECFE program one would have to disagree. One might also agree that Mahoney and Kaiser are the ones who need a new outlook on parent education and intervention, one of unification (Burton & Higgins Hains, 1992; Dore & Lee, 1999; Dunst, 1999; Manalo & Meezan, 2000). Mahoney and Kaiser only discussed parent education in terms of its need in special needs cases. They later contradict themselves in their critique by including other parent education practices as examples.

Several other criticisms throughout history and within Mahoney and Kaiser critique include: "the burden that home programming imposes on parents, the relationship between parent and professional, the implicit blaming of parents, the role conflict of parents, and the potential bias of parent education" (Mahoney & Kaiser, 1999, p. 131). Dunst (1999) argued against these criticisms. As one can see from the literature reviewed in this study, these claims are the complete opposite of what the types of parent education

programs and guidelines were developed. The contradiction of information between these two arguments is another support for a need to create some form of effective parent education program evaluation, and in relation to the type of program.

Summary

The Minnesota ECFE program has proven very popular since it's development in 1973 with only six pilot programs compared to present day where almost all public school districts include ECFE (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2000). However, the lack of proof producing evaluation data puts the program at risk of losing funding.

The Minnesota ECFE program would not exist without the parents. Their role in the program is crucial to survival of the program. Another role for the parents as participants of ECFE is that of evaluators of the program. Parental feedback needs to be obtained via some standard form of assessment that can help prove the effectiveness and the successfulness of the program.

In addition to parents' roles in ECFE, views about parent education are just as important. While some view parent education as separate from early intervention, some see it as closely related (Burton & Higgins Hains, 1992; Dore & Lee, 1999; Dunst, 1999; Manalo & Meezan, 2000). The issue of clarification of fields is similar for family therapy versus parent education. While the two fields are relative in some aspects, they should be viewed as separate in others (Doherty, 1995).

The views mentioned above will affect program topic selection as well as other factors. Parental characteristics and the characteristics of their children will influence topic selection as well as the needs and wants of the participants (Soriano, Weston &

Violet, 2001). Some programs will be defined by their participants and others will define the participants. As is with the case of special needs parents who are required take specific parent education classes with a specific “children with special needs” focus (Dore & Lee, 1999; Dunst, 1999).

In order to select useful, effective, and appropriate topics, certain program guidelines must be established. Without guidelines there would be no checks and balances for cohesion of the program, it’s educators and the participants. In order to create guidelines a program must have established beliefs and principles (Manalo & Meezan, 2000).

In the efforts to “prove” ECFE parent education success, specific quality indicators have been developed. Although the total number of monitoring and evaluation indicators is small in comparison to the total number of ECFE quality indicators, nine of 170 (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2002), it is still recognized as an effort in the way of parent education evaluation.

Another parent education assessment effort recognized in this literature review was parent education evaluation surveys and questionnaires. Without parental feedback, a parent educator would not be able to develop an informative and useful class agenda that meets the needs and wants of it participants. However, the survey or questionnaire used needs to be designed to obtain useful feedback.

Development and usefulness of parent education evaluation methods are relative to the function and purpose of a program and also to the ECFE program coordinators and parent educators. The feedback of the ECFE coordinators and parent educators about the parent education evaluations is also important to the program. Because of different

parental needs and wants, evaluative surveys and questionnaires must be changes to obtain needed information that will help in the effort to “prove” ECFE parent education success.

Parent education assessment is primarily done by use of survey or questionnaire. The lack of other parent education assessments is in part due to the conflict between researchers and practitioners (Myers-Walls, 2000). However, other methods do exist, but those other methods, Levels of Family Involvement (LFI) model (Doherty, 1995) and Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Simonson & Bushaw, 1993), require more time and effort.

Newer developments in the area of parent education assessment can be accredited to Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning. Not only have they designed and imposed outcomes and indicators for the ECFE program (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2002), but certain staff have received an award for their evaluation process (Fitzpatrick, 1998). The evaluation process designed and used by certain Minnesota ECFE parent education classes included enrollment surveys, parent interviews, and videotaped observations. While this evaluation process was more extensive than surveys alone, it was also more time consuming.

The lack of criticisms towards parent education is a reflection of “good” program design, implementation, and involvement. However, it is still not enough to keep funds from being cut. Yet this provides another reason for the need of an effective parent education evaluation method.

CHAPTER THREE:

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter includes a description of the human subjects, the survey instrument designed and used to conduct this research project, and data collection. Statistics utilized and limitations will also be presented.

Subject Selection and Description

The human subject samples were parents from two Minneapolis public school ECFE parent education classes. Minneapolis was selected for this research project because of the state's history with ECFE making the geographical area significant to this research project. Minnesota is also currently the only state that certifies parent educators and has a required parent educator license. The Minneapolis area was chosen for population size and diversity.

The two classes in which the instrument was administered were titled Early Ones and Raising Responsible Children. The Early One's class was a non-separating (children and parents stay in the same room at all times) ECFE class that includes children under one year of age and the parents or caregivers of those children. The class met once a week for an hour and a half for twelve weeks. The Raising Responsible Children class was a separating (parents go to a separate room for the parent education component) multi age ECFE class including children ages birth through five and the parents or caregivers of those children. This class also met once a week for twelve weeks, but for two hours a meeting.

Instrumentation

Of the research examined, it was found that parent surveys were primarily used as a method of parent education evaluation. Of those surveys collected from ECFE coordinators and parent educators in four Minneapolis area public school districts, similar questions were asked. The most frequently asked questions were about likes and dislikes of the class, what could be changed, were expectations/goals met, what the parent learned about him/herself, and what the parent learned about the child. Very few of the questionnaires asked for instructor or program feedback. Instructor feedback questions asked for opinions rather than ratings and the program questions were geared towards registration procedures. Overall the questions were very general, and barely any of them were topic specific other than asking what you learned or liked the most about a topic and the opposite. Based on the surveys reviewed, similar questions were asked but no consistent format for asking the questions presented itself. Therefore, a survey was designed by this researcher to be administered to the two Minneapolis parent education classes that could be given to any specific parent education class assuming that topics would differ. See Appendix B.

The first section of the survey asks for general demographic information. It can be altered to gain specific information about the participants based on the needs of the class or program. The second section asks for parent perceptions about specific topics. This section includes rating previous knowledge of a topic, information gained about that topic and usefulness of the information gained about the topic. This section will allow the instructor to determine what topic areas need to stay, go, or be revised. This section can be adapted to the specific topics of a specific parent education class. The third

section also uses rating scales to evaluate the overall parent education class. This area of the survey is created determine the participants experience in the class versus the specific topic information gained. The fourth and final section asks parents to evaluate the instructor. In talking with ECFE coordinators and parent educators it was found that instructor evaluations are typically done by other staff members. Being in the position of a parent educator or ECFE coordinator, it would be extremely beneficial to know the parents' attitudes about the instructor to determine if there is a goodness of fit with the class and instructor. Although this evaluation survey can not be deemed valid or reliable because it is not a standardized instrument, it is however a reflection of the current parent education evaluation surveys with more questions specific to topics and the parent educator.

Data Collection

The surveys were administered in class on the last two scheduled class meeting times in the fall semester in November, 2002. The surveys were administered on the last two class meetings to ensure more participation. Prior to the administration of the survey, the participants were asked to read a consent form. See Appendix B. The consent form required no signature therefore ensuring the participants were not identifiable. Those who agreed to fill out the survey were given a survey, clipboard and a pen. When the participants had finished the survey they turned them back into the instructor.

Data Analysis

The survey used in this study was designed for the purpose of determining parental attitudes towards parent education classes of parents enrolled in two specific parent education classes.

Section I of the survey, General Information, asked for gender, age, relation to child, marital status, and number of children. Rather than having participants write in the answers for the questions, choices were listed for all questions except number of children, and participants checked the ones that applied to them. Number of children required participants to actual write the number of children in the blank. The questions asking for relation to child and marital status included “other” as a option with a space to write if their status on either question did not present itself as a listed choice.

In the following three sections of the survey, Likert Scales were used to obtain participants’ responses. Section II: Perceptions about Parent/Family Education Class Discussion Topics, included three sub sections that rated previous knowledge, information gained, and usefulness of information gained of six class topics. Each sub section had it’s own rating scale. Section III included seven statement regarding attitudes about the overall parent education class. Section IV also included seven statements, but regarding attitudes about the parent education instructors. Both sections used the same rating scales to determine the level of agreement or disagreement towards the attitude statements.

The researcher and research advisor analyzed survey responses. Demographic responses for each of the two parent education classes were examined in terms of frequencies and percentages. Frequency counts were used to determine the number of

participant responses and the mean of those responses for each of the two parent education classes in sections II, III, and IV.

Limitations

A major limitation of this research project was the sample size. It was very small in comparison to the actual population size in that this was a pilot survey concerned more with instrument design than with the actual results of the survey. Another major limitation was that the results reflected only female responses. Although there were some men enrolled in the Early Ones class, none of them were present on the days of survey administration. A third limitation was that the ethnic diversity of the sample size was lacking. A limitation of the instrument and with voluntary adult education was that participants could not be tested or graded on information gained from the parent education class.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will present the results of the parent surveys. Demographic information will be presented first followed by objective related attitude statement data. Tables will be used to illustrate frequencies and percentages for all demographic information responses. Number of participants (n) and means (x) will be used to illustrate attitude statement responses. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of the results related to the literature reviewed.

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic information in Section I from both parent education classes, Early Ones and Raising Responsible children, is presented in tables 1 through 5. The following demographic areas are presented: gender, age, relation to child, marital status, and number of children.

Table 1: Gender

| Gender | Early Ones Frequency | Early Ones Percent | Raising Responsible Children Frequency | Raising Responsible Children Percent |
|---------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Male | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Female | 9 | 100 | 4 | 100 |
| Total | 9 | 100 | 4 | 100 |

Of the two classes, there were no male participants, making the female population 100% for both classes. Refer to Table 1.

Table 2: Age

| Age | Early Ones Frequency | Early Ones Percent | Raising Responsible Children Frequency | Raising Responsible Children Percent |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Under 20 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 20-29 | 2 | 22.2 | 2 | 50.0 |
| 30-39 | 5 | 55.6 | 0 | 0 |
| 40-45 | 1 | 11.1 | 1 | 25.0 |
| 50+ | 1 | 11.1 | 1 | 25.0 |
| Total | 9 | 100.0 | 4 | 100.0 |

The age portion of the survey was divided into five age categories: under 20, 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, and 50+. In the Early Ones class, a little over half (n=5, 55.5%) of the participants were thirty to thirty-nine years of age. In that same class about one fifth (n=2, 22.2%) of the participants were twenty to twenty-nine years of age. There was one participant (11.1%) who was forty to forty-nine years of age, one participant (11.1%) who was fifty plus years of age, and no participants (0%) twenty years of age or younger. Refer to Table 2.

The Raising Responsible Children class consisted of a majority (n=2, 50%) of participants twenty to twenty nine years of age. One participant (25%) was forty to forty-nine years of age and one participant (25%) was fifty year or older. There were no participant (0%) twenty-nine years of age or younger. Refer to Table 2.

Table 3: Relation to Child

| Relation to Child | Early Ones Frequency | Early Ones Percent | Raising Responsible Children Frequency | Raising Responsible Children Percent |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|
| Parent | 7 | 77.8 | 3 | 75.0 |
| Grandparent | 1 | 11.1 | 1 | 25.0 |
| Nanny | 1 | 11.1 | 0 | 0 |
| Other | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 9 | 100.0 | 4 | 100.0 |

In both classes, the majority (Early Ones: n=7, 77.7%; Raising Responsible Children: n=3, 75%) of participant were parents. Both classes had one grandparent (Early Ones: 11.1%; Raising Responsible Children: 25%). There was one nanny (11.1%) in the Early ones class but none in the Raising Responsible Children class. Refer to Table 3.

Table 4: Marital Status

| Marital Status | Early Ones Frequency | Early Ones Percent | Raising Responsible Children Frequency | Raising Responsible Children Percent |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|
| Single | 0 | 0 | 1 | 25.0 |
| Married | 8 | 88.9 | 2 | 50.0 |
| Separated | 0 | 0 | 1 | 25.0 |
| Divorced | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Widowed | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Other (Engaged) | 1 | 11.1 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 9 | 100.0 | 4 | 100.0 |

The majority of participants (Early Ones: n=8, 88.8%; Raising Responsible Children: n=2, 50%) in both classes were married. In the Early Ones class there were no (0%) single, separated, divorced or widowed participants. However, there was one (11.1%) engaged participant. In the Raising responsible Children class one participant

(25%) was single and another participant (25%) was separated. No participants (0%) in this class were divorced or widowed. Refer to Table 4.

Table 5: Number of Children

| Number of Children | Early Ones Frequency | Early Ones Percent | Raising Responsible Children Frequency | Raising Responsible Children Percent |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---|---|
| One | 7 | 77.8 | 4 | 100.0 |
| Two | 2 | 22.2 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 9 | 100.0 | 4 | 100.0 |

The majority of participants (n=7, 77.7%) in the Early Ones class had only one child, while two participants (22.2%) had two children. All Raising Responsible children class participants (100%) had only one child. Refer to Table 5.

Perception and Attitude Statements

Tables 6 through 11 will illustrate participant perceptions regarding previous knowledge of a topic, information gained about a topic, and usefulness of information gained about a topic. The rating scale for previous knowledge of a topic included the following response choices 1- no previous knowledge, 2- little knowledge, 3- moderate knowledge, and 4- very knowledgeable. The rating scale for information gained also included four choices; 1- no information gained, 2- slightly informative, 3- moderately informative, and 4- very informative. Usefulness of information gained included four choices as well; 1- not useful, 2- slightly useful, 3- moderately useful, and 4- very useful.

Tables 6 through 8 will illustrate the perceptions of the Early Ones class participants regarding previous knowledge, information gained, and usefulness of information gained about six class topics. Tables 9 through 11 will illustrate the Raising Responsible Children class participants perceptions regarding previous knowledge,

information gained, and usefulness of information gained about three of the same class topics as Early Ones and three different class topics.

Table 6: Early Ones' Previous Knowledge of Class Topics

| Topic | n | x |
|---|----------|----------|
| Sleep | 9 | 3.1 |
| Personal Time | 9 | 3.2 |
| Nutrition & Weaning | 9 | 3.1 |
| Age/Stage Play Development | 9 | 3.1 |
| Toy-Making | 8 | 2.0 |
| Discipline/Setting Limits/Positive Reinforcement | 8 | 3.1 |

Participants had moderate knowledge of class topics sleep, personal time, nutrition and weaning, age/stage appropriate play development, and discipline/ setting limits/positive reinforcement. According to the mean, little knowledge was known about toy-making. Refer to Table 6

Table 7: Early Ones' Information Gained about Class Topics

| Topic | N | x |
|---|----------|----------|
| Sleep | 9 | 2.8 |
| Personal Time | 8 | 2.3 |
| Nutrition & Weaning | 9 | 2.2 |
| Age/Stage Play Development | 9 | 3.1 |
| Toy-Making | 8 | 3.4 |
| Discipline/Setting Limits/Positive Reinforcement | 8 | 3.1 |

According to the means in Table 7, the topics of age/stage appropriate play development, toy-making, and discipline/ setting limits/positive reinforcement were moderately informative. All other topics were slightly informative. Refer to Table 7.

Table 8: Early Ones' Usefulness of Information Gained about Class Topics

| Topic | n | X |
|---|----------|----------|
| Sleep | 9 | 2.4 |
| Personal Time | 8 | 2.1 |
| Nutrition & Weaning | 9 | 2.2 |
| Age/Stage Play Development | 9 | 3.1 |
| Toy-Making | 8 | 3.4 |
| Discipline/Setting Limits/Positive Reinforcement | 8 | 3.0 |

Information gained about topics age/stage play development, toy-making, and discipline/setting limits/positive reinforcement were moderately useful to participants while the topics of sleep, personal time, and nutrition and weaning were slightly useful. Refer to Table 8.

Table 9: Raising Responsible Children's Previous Knowledge of Class Topics

| Topic | N | X |
|---|----------|----------|
| Child Development Overview | 4 | 2.3 |
| Erickson's Stages of Development | 4 | 2.0 |
| Language Development | 4 | 2.0 |
| Toy-Making | 4 | 2.0 |
| Discipline/Setting Limits/Positive Reinforcement | 4 | 2.5 |
| Sleep | 4 | 2.8 |

According to the means in Table 9, all participants were moderately knowledgeable about all the class topics. Refer to Table 9.

Table 10: Raising Responsible Children's Information Gained about Class Topics

| Topic | n | X |
|---|----------|----------|
| Child Development Overview | 4 | 2.8 |
| Erickson's Stages of Development | 4 | 2.5 |
| Language Development | 3 | 3.3 |
| Toy-Making | 4 | 3.8 |
| Discipline/Setting Limits/Positive Reinforcement | 4 | 3.3 |
| Sleep | 3 | 3.3 |

The class topics language development, toy-making, discipline/setting limits/positive reinforcement, and sleep were found to be moderately informative by the class participants while the topics child development overview and Erickson's stages of development were found to be only slightly informative. Refer to Table 10.

**Table 11: Raising Responsible Children's
Usefulness of Information Gained about Class Topics**

| Topic | n | x |
|---|----------|----------|
| Child Development Overview | 4 | 3.0 |
| Erickson's Stages of Development | 3 | 3.0 |
| Language Development | 4 | 3.8 |
| Toy-Making | 4 | 3.3 |
| Discipline/Setting Limits/Positive Reinforcement | 4 | 3.8 |
| Sleep | 2 | 4.0 |

According to the means in Table 11, information gained about sleep was found to be very useful. All other topic information was found to be moderately useful. Refer to Table 11.

Tables 12 and 13 illustrate the attitudes of both classes regarding seven statements about the overall parent education class and seven statements about parent education instructors. Both sections used the same rating scale; 1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3- agree, and 4- strongly disagree.

Table 12: Attitudes about the Overall Parent Education Class

| Statement | Early Ones | | Raising Responsible Children | |
|--|-------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|----------|
| | n | x | n | x |
| 1. Overall, I knew a lot about the different discussion topics before taking this class. | 9 | 3.1 | 4 | 2.5 |
| 2. I had the opportunity to determine some of the class topics. | 9 | 3.8 | 4 | 3.5 |
| 3. The overall class experience was informative. | 9 | 3.3 | 4 | 3.8 |
| 4. The overall information I gained in this class is or will be useful to me. | 9 | 3.1 | 4 | 3.8 |
| 5. Taking this class was worth my time. | 9 | 3.4 | 4 | 3.8 |
| 6. I would take another parent education class. | 9 | 3.8 | 4 | 3.8 |
| 7. I would recommend this class to another parent or caregiver. | 9 | 3.6 | 4 | 3.5 |

Both the Early Ones class and the Raising Responsible Children class agreed with statements 2 through 7. Respondents in both classes agreed that they had the opportunity to determine some of the class topics, the overall class experience was informative, the overall information gained was useful to them, taking the class was worth their time, they would take another parent education class, and that they would recommend this class to another parent or caregiver. The Early Ones class also agreed with the statement “Overall, I knew a lot about the different discussion topics before to taking this class,”

however, the Raising Responsible Children class disagreed with this statement. Refer to Table 12.

Table 13: Attitudes about the Parent Education Instructors

| Statement | Early Ones | | Raising Responsible Children | |
|---|-------------------|----------|-------------------------------------|----------|
| | n | x | n | x |
| 1. The instructors are knowledgeable about the discussion topics. | 9 | 3.6 | 4 | 4.0 |
| 2. The instructors developed good relationships with the parents. | 9 | 3.6 | 4 | 3.8 |
| 3. The instructors involved parents in the selection of topics that were important to them. | 8 | 3.9 | 4 | 4.0 |
| 4. The instructors involved the parents in the topic discussions. | 9 | 3.6 | 4 | 4.0 |
| 5. The instructors were available to answer my questions. | 9 | 3.8 | 4 | 4.0 |
| 6. I would take another class with this same instructors. | 9 | 3.7 | 4 | 3.8 |
| 7. I would recommend these instructors to another parent or caregiver. | 9 | 3.7 | 4 | 3.8 |

All participants of the Early Ones class strongly agreed to all the statements in Table 13 regarding the parent educators. Participants of the Raising responsible Children class strongly agreed with the statements “The instructors are knowledgeable about the

discussion topics,” “The instructors involved parents in the selection of topics that were important to them,” “The instructors involved parents involved parents in the topic discussions,” and “The instructors were available to answer my questions.” The statements “The instructors developed good relationships with the parents,” “I would take another class with the same instructors,” and “I would recommend these instructors to another parent or caregiver,” are agreed with. Refer to Table 13.

Discussion

In looking at the results of data collected, it is hard to compare them to the literature reviewed. The reason for this difficulty is that of the research reviewed, the majority of it pertained to giving the reader an overview of the topic of parent education. From this literature a need for parent assessment of parent education classes presented itself. Thus, the parent education survey was created.

In regards to Minnesota’s Early Childhood and Family Education Quality Indicators Program Component E: Program Operations- Monitoring and Evaluation (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2002), this parent education survey can be used as a way of monitoring and assessing the program as suggested by indicator 17, “Staff develop and implement plans for monitoring and assessing the program,” (p. 14), of the above section. The data collected could then be used to further develop and improve the program as suggested in indicator 23, “The program gathers and uses participant satisfaction data for program development and improvement,” (p. 14), of the above section.

The parent education survey was designed reflecting current parent education surveys being used by the four Minneapolis area public school districts. However, the

lack of topic specific questions and parent educator assessment was the impetus for including such questions in the research instrument. Adding these two components to the survey should help with further development and improvements of the program. The suggested alternative parent education evaluation method PAR (Simonson & Bushaw, 1993) also served as contributor to the creation of the research instrument in that the focus of the created instrument was on parent education participant feedback.

While the emphasis of this research project was with creating a parent assessment of parent education classes, it was not so much focused on the actual data collected. However, in looking at the results of this data, the history of Minnesota ECFE programs (Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning, 2000), and Cooke and Mueller's research (Mueller, 1998), one can see that a positive outcome or experience is associated with taking parent education classes.

CHAPTER FIVE:

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will include a summary of the overall research project and will state conclusions based on the research objectives. It will conclude with implications for future educational practices and further research.

Summary

Overall, the literature reviewed proved useful to this research project in the way of gaining an understanding of the history and importance of parent education to the state of Minnesota. Attitudes regarding definitions of parent education were addressed as well as actual class topics and program guidelines. Information about current parent education evaluation surveys and feedback about those surveys was obtained from four Minneapolis area public schools district ECFE coordinators and parent educators. Alternative evaluation methods and new developments in the area of parent education were helpful in making the point that an effective parent education evaluation method is needed. All of the literature components of this research project aided in the design of the research instrument.

The objectives of the research project were incorporated into the research instrument, the parent education evaluation survey, for the purposes of meeting the objectives. The objectives were developed based on the reviewed literature, parent education survey examples and communication with ECFE coordinators and parent educators from the four Minneapolis area public school districts including Minneapolis, Chaska, Wayzata and Rockford. The human subjects who participated in the this

research project by completing the parent education survey made it possible to further examine the objectives in regards to their responses.

While the actual results of the survey were not the primary focus of this research project, the design was. Using the information from above, an instrument was created to assess the parent education class topic, the overall class, and the instructor. Adaptability was a key element in the design and creation of the topic specific portions of the instrument. The goal was to ask the same question but about different topics. Rating scales were used for the majority of the survey for the ease of the participant and for quickness of completion of the survey.

The results of the data showed that all participants (100%) from both classes were women and that the highest percent of participants for both classes (n=13) were between the ages of thirty and thirty-nine. The majority of all participants from both classes (n=13) were parents of the child involved in the program and were married. Of both classes, the majority of participants (n=13) had only one child.

In looking at the Likert rating scales in Section II: Perceptions about Parent/Family Education Class Discussion Topics of the survey, the category that received the lowest rating ($\bar{x}=2.3$) among this section was the previous knowledge of topics by the Raising Responsible Children class. The category under Section II that received the highest rating ($\bar{x}=3.5$) was the usefulness of information gained by the Raising Responsible Children class.

Of the attitudes about the overall parent education class, both class participants agreed with all statements except one. The Raising Responsible Children class disagreed with the statement “Overall, I knew a lot about the different discussion topics before

taking this class.” The disagreement of this class with this statement is consistent with the low ratings regarding previous knowledge of topics. In examining responses from both classes regarding attitudes about the parent education instructors, statements were either agreed or strongly agreed with.

In studying both the literature review and the results of this research project, it can be said that parent education is viewed as important, informational, and useful to parents. It can also be said that parent education survey responses are viewed as important, informational, and useful to parent educators as well as the program itself.

Conclusions

The objectives of this research project were met in that the four instrument objectives were incorporated in the design of the parent education evaluation survey. The instrument objectives were to

1. Identify the level of parents’ previous knowledge about the class discussion topics in two parent education classes, Early Ones and Raising Responsible Children.
2. Determine the extent to which the class discussion topics for two parent education classes, Early Ones and Raising Responsible Children, were informative and useful to the parents.
3. Describe parent attitudes towards the overall parent education class.
4. Determine parent attitudes about the instructor’s effectiveness in the parent education class.

The survey asked participants to identify their previous knowledge about the class discussion topics and to determine if class discussion topics were informative and useful. Participants responded to the questions about topic discussions that they had attended. In

another section of the survey, participants were asked to rate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements about the overall parent education class. In the final section of the survey, participants were asked to agree or disagree with statements about the parent education instructors. The designed instrument addressed every one of its objectives, eliciting responses from the participants to each of the questions.

In addition to meeting the objectives, the instrument also met a need for the two Minneapolis parent education classes in that a format was needed for parent assessment of the parent education classes. Not only did the content of the survey address differences in class topics, the design of the instrument was also easily adaptable for both classes with little change to the overall format.

Research Recommendations

For the purposes of creating and using parent assessment of parent education classes, it is suggested that parent and family educational programs look to using the Levels of Family Involvement (LFI) model and coding system (Doherty, 1995) as well as the Participatory Action Research method (Simonson & Bushaw, 1993) suggested in Chapter Two. Both examples seem to extend beyond the typical method of parent evaluation, parent surveys and questionnaires.

Cooke and Mueller's (1998) evaluation of Minnesota's ECFE program appears to be a success, and is also suggested as a means of parent assessment of parent education classes. However, it is suggested that more research be done in terms of looking at resources needed to conduct this type of evaluation.

In addition to exploring already existing and proposed methods of parent education evaluation, it is suggested that the instrument format used in this research

projected be further tested to determine it's practicality in the quest for an effective parent education evaluation method. The format of the instrument was such that it could be used in differing parent education classes for the purposes of eliciting similar information by simply changing, alternating or substituting different topics or subjects.

Educational Implications

The need to explore other parent education evaluation methods still exists. Not yet has one single method proved to be the best. However, parent education surveys have proved to be the method of choice. Therefore, the education implication is for ECFE staff to continue to research, modify, adapt, and implement various methods until one or several prove effective and beneficial to all involved in parent education.

Another educational implication is that that the survey format of this research project be used in parent education classes and other ECFE classes for several reasons. The content was derived from already existing surveys as well as information gained from the four Minneapolis area public school ECFE coordinators and parent educators. Using this information, questions that were pertinent to the class, program, educator, and/or coordinator were addressed. However, how the questions were asked differed from the reviewed survey examples in that the questions were more specific yet allowed for a range of ratings. By using rating scales the instrument could be completed more easily and in a more timely matter compared to fill-in-the-blank or finish the sentence style questions. In addition, it allowed participants more response choices than simple yes/no questions. The content and the format of the instrument also allowed for consistency in the desired information to be gathered. The format's adaptability was such that one topic could easily be substituted for another so that the survey could be

used in various parent education settings. The format also allowed the surveyor to easily read and tally responses so that reflection and change can take place.

In addressing the above reasons for future use this research project instrument, it would be hard to justify why not to try and test the survey format.

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APPENDIX A:
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&
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APPENDIX B:
Consent Form
&
Instruments

Consent Form

Research Project Title: Parent Assessment of Parent Education Classes

I understand that my participation in this research project is strictly voluntary and I may choose not to complete the Parent Education Evaluation Survey at anytime.

I understand that the purpose of this project is investigate parents' previous knowledge, level of information gained and usefulness regarding parent education discussion topics, and also to examine parents' attitudes about the overall class and the parent education instructors.

I further understand that my responses will only be used in-group data and in no way will I or my responses be identifiable in the research project.

By completing the survey I am giving my informed consent to participate in the study.

Note: Questions or Concerns about the research project should be addressed to Alicia Wentland, the researcher, (phone # 612-209-1967, email: aawentland@hotmail.com), or Karen Zimmerman, Research Advisor, (phone # 715-232 2530, email: zimmermank@uwstout.edu). Questions about the rights of research subjects can be addressed to Sue Foxwell, Human Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 Harvey Hall, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone # (715) 322-1126

SECTION IV. Attitudes about the Parent Education Instructors

Directions: Using the rating scale, please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement. Please write the number that corresponds with your response on the line to the left of each statement.

1-----2-----3-----4
 Strongly Disagree Agree Strongly
 Disagree Agree

- _____ 1. The instructors are knowledgeable about the discussion topics.
 _____ 2. The instructors developed good relationships with the parents.
 _____ 3. The instructors involved parents in the selection of topics that were important to them
 _____ 4. The instructors involved the parents in the topic discussions.
 _____ 5. The instructors were available to answer my questions.
 _____ 6. I would take another class with this same instructors.
 _____ 7. I would recommend these instructors to another parent or caregiver.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND INPUT!

(The spacing of the above instrument was modified to fit in the margins of this paper.)

SECTION IV. Attitudes about the Parent Education Instructors

Directions: Using the rating scale, please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement. Please write the number that corresponds with your response on the line to the left of each statement.

1-----2-----3-----4
 Strongly Disagree Agree Strongly
 Disagree Agree

- _____ 1. The instructors are knowledgeable about the discussion topics.
 _____ 2. The instructors developed good relationships with the parents.
 _____ 3. The instructors involved parents in the selection of topics that were important to them
 _____ 4. The instructors involved the parents in the topic discussions.
 _____ 5. The instructors were available to answer my questions.
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THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND INPUT!

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