

National Extension Parenting Educators' Framework 2002

Karen DeBord
North Carolina State
University

Don Bower
University of Georgia

H. Wallace Goddard
University of Arkansas

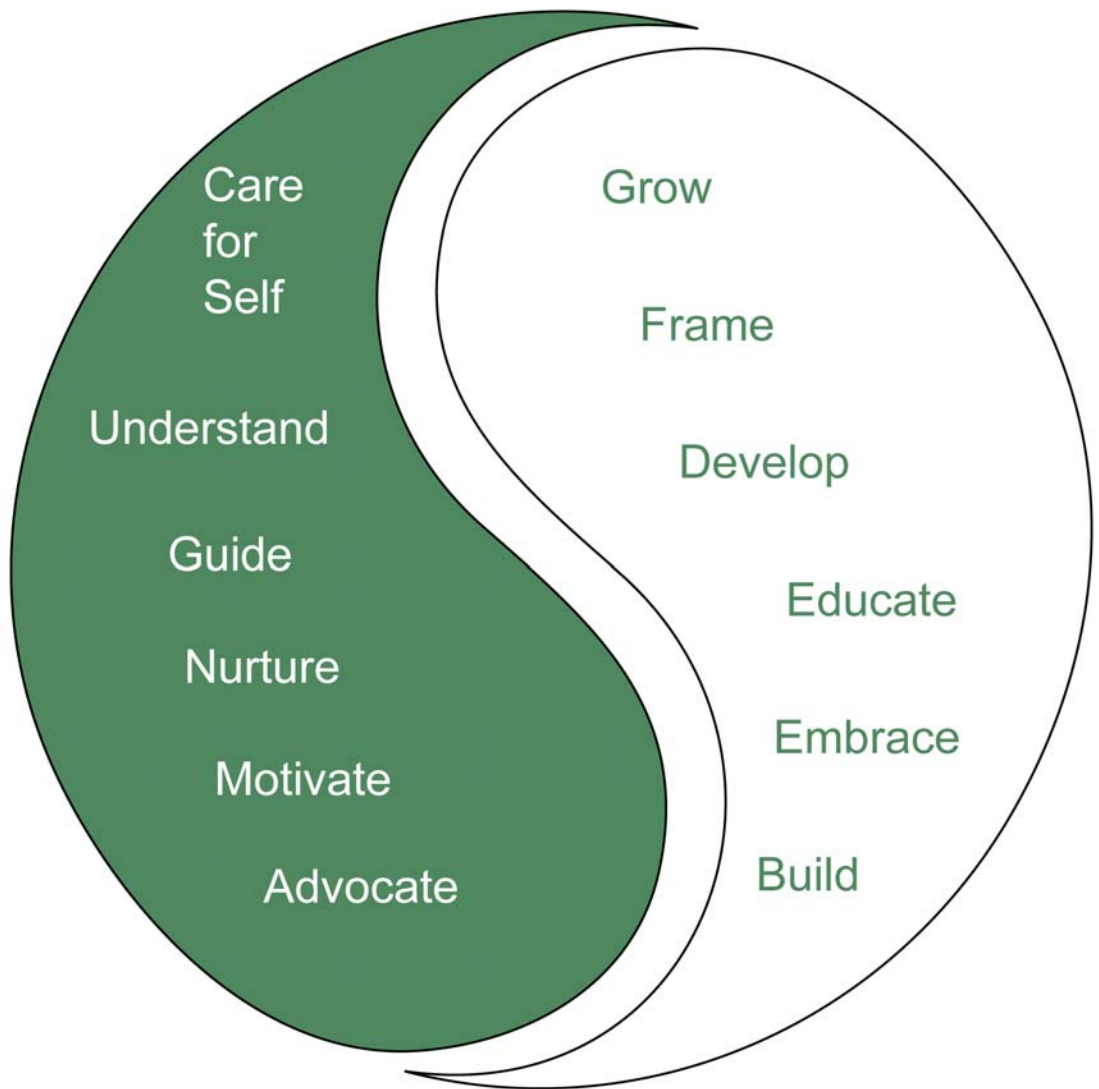
Jacqueline Kirby
Ohio State University

Anna Mae Kobbe
USDA/CSREES

Judith A. Myers-Walls
Purdue University

Maurene Mulroy
University of
Connecticut

Rachel A. Ozretich
Oregon State
University



Parenting education is one strategy within a larger array of comprehensive family support strategies that is designed to decrease the incidence of child abuse, while increasing school achievement, and enhancing family resiliency.

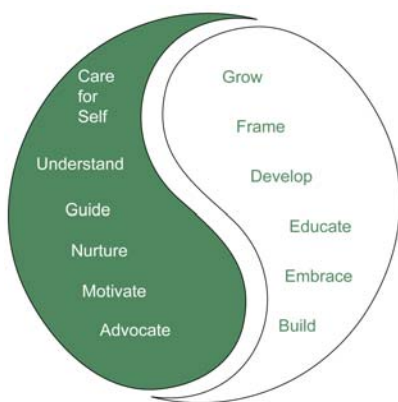
National Extension Parenting Educators' Framework

Parenting education is an emerging professional field in constant flux as it grows to accommodate the diverse needs of families and their children. As the field evolves, a main challenge will be to answer the demand for expansion from academics, government leaders, and parents, all of whom want more parenting education so that children can be successfully guided on their journey to adulthood. These groups and many others have come to recognize that parenting education is one strategy within a larger array of comprehensive family support strategies that is designed to decrease the incidence of child abuse, while increasing school achievement, and enhancing family resiliency.

At present, there are many parent educators who are part of the Cooperative Extension System (CES) of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This group of educators has allowed the CES to become one of the principal providers of parenting education in the United States. Underpinning Extension's programs of parenting education are faculty and staff at this nation's land-grant universities, whose research advances the field and whose academic programs train the vast number of parent education professionals.

The Framework

In 1992, a team of Extension family life and human development specialists, with the national program staff at the USDA led a national effort to develop a model of "what" to teach parents in parent education programs. The model, called the National Extension Parent Education Model (NEPEM) set forth six categories of priority parenting practices to be learned by parents and taught by parenting educators (Smith, Cudaback, Goddard, and Myers-Walls, 1994).



NEPEM's six categories of priority practices for parents – Care for Self, Understand, Guide, Nurture, Motivate, and Advocate – guided Extension specialists, educators, and community partners in the development of parent education programs, educational materials, and evaluation instruments which resulted in significant contributions to the national parenting education resource base. [An overview of the NEPEM can be found online at: <<http://cyfernet.org/parentingpractices/preface.html>>].

In 2000, an Extension team comprised of state family and human development specialists and staff, and the national program leader for family life and human development met for the purpose of outlining the critical skills and practices of parenting educators. After considerable discussion, this team proposed that the NEPEM's "priority practices for parents" be melded with a set of "priority processes for parenting

educators” to form a new structure – the National Extension Parenting Education Framework (NEPEF).

It was the team’s position that when used in tandem, the six “content” practices for parents and the six “process” practices for educators – Grow, Frame, Develop, Embrace, Educate, and Build – would allow parenting educators to work more effectively with parents on behalf of children.

Extension’s Role in Parenting Education

A History of Leadership

CES faculty have hosted national satellite broadcasts on parenting education, developed a curriculum review website, created a framework for planning and evaluating parenting education programs, established an interactive learning web site for parenting educators, and have conducted research to determine how parents want to learn about parenting.

CES has also engaged in multi-state collaborations around significant parenting issues, and have made a significant number of their research reports and programs available to the public through web-based resources such as the Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network <<http://www.cyfernet.org>>.

Those who deliver parenting education on behalf of the CES include county extension educators, extension-trained volunteers, master teachers, and collaborating agency personnel as well as professionals from the fields of education, counseling, medicine, mental health, and the social services. These parenting educators conduct programs in a variety of venues, including military installations, faith-based programs, prisons, housing developments, schools, and other community-based settings.

The CES has also developed innovative parenting education programs focused on responsible fatherhood, mentoring teenage mothers, helping grandparents and other relatives to raise children, co-parenting through divorce, and court-ordered parent training. These programs supplement Extensions vast array of basic, “ages and stages” type programs that address the needs of children and their families from conception through adolescence.

The CES has taken a leading role in utilizing diverse methodologies for disseminating parenting education programs, information and materials to those who need them. In addition to the traditional forum of workshops and classes, Extension staff have utilized vehicles such as home-study courses, age-paced newsletters, mentoring relationships, the internet, as well as mass media standards such as

“The Cooperative Extension System is prepared to build the capacity to remain one of the most highly regarded providers of parenting education in the U.S.”

Anna Mae Kobbe
National Family Life and
Human Development
Leader

newspaper columns, radio and television interviews, and magazine articles.

NEPEF's Contribution to the Field

As previously mentioned, the field of parenting education is in a state of flux. There is a growing national awareness of need for parenting educators. Yet, there is little consensus within the field as to what constitutes parenting education and who can and should provide it.

Colleges and universities are being asked to develop degree programs to prepare students to become parenting educators. Similarly, national professional organizations, like National Council on Family Relations and the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, are being asked to develop or expand their licensure and certification processes to cover parenting educators. However, movement toward professional development programs and professional credentials and licensure continues to be slow.

Many practitioners are asking themselves how the field of parenting education can ensure that quality parenting education programs are taught by competent professionals and are looking to others to provide the answer. Within the national CES, family life and human development specialists have decided to utilize NEPEF as the vehicle for meeting our institutional need for professionally trained parenting educators to work in more than 3,100 counties across the United States.

Because the CES is faced with the daunting responsibility of providing sound programming to approximately one million parents annually, it can not wait for others to articulate essential knowledge and skills for the field. The NEPEF provides CES with a structure for making informed decisions about the hiring, training, and professional development needs of its staff.

The CES is committed to remain a leader in the field of parenting education and because of that commitment the CES will insure that the NEPEF is rigorously tested and reviewed. Extension administrators, specialists, educators and community collaborators will debate its merits. Its strengths and weaknesses will be discussed at professional meetings, presented at conferences, and published in professional journals. If its anticipated value as a guide for developing quality programs and hiring and educating quality professionals is realized, CES will offer NEPEF to other organizations and professionals who are interested in helping move the field of parenting education forward.

The NEPEF should not be considered an "end all, be all" document of essential knowledge or practice. Rather, it should be viewed as an attempt to get those professionals who identify themselves as

parenting educators to explore the body of knowledge and the repertoire of skills that are necessary to be effective in their work. The NEPEF's value will lie in its ability to initiate conversations among practitioners about best programs and best practices. Through these dialogues, standards for licensure or certification may be articulated.

Referenced Web Sites

The National Extension Parenting Education Model
(NEPEM)

http://www.cyfernet.org/parenting_practices/preface.html

The Review of Literature for National Satellite
Teleconference on Parenting Education

<http://ag.udel.edu/extension/fam/recprac/part1.pdf>

Curriculum Review Site

<http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife/nnfr/pfp/>

Framework for planning and evaluating parenting
education programs

www.nnfr.org/eval/pareval/

Research project exploring the way in which parents like
to learn about parenting

<http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/human/resbriefs.html>

The National Extension Parenting Educator's Framework

(NEPEF)

Examining the Framework

The National Extension Parenting Educators' Framework (NEPEF) was created through a cooperative effort of Extension faculty from several universities (The University of Arkansas, The University of Connecticut, The University of Georgia, The North Carolina State University, The Ohio State University, The Oregon State University, and Purdue University).

The NEPEF extends the 1994 National Extension Parenting Education Model (NEPEM) of priority practices to be learned by parents by including priority practices and skills to be learned by parenting educators.

Priority Practices are defined as significant aspects of parenting education that contribute to high quality and effectiveness in programs when implemented.

The NEPEF has two dimensions, each containing six domains of competency. One dimension outlines the *Content* knowledge needed by parenting educators while the other dimension outlines the *Processes* that parenting educators need to work effectively with parents and children. A brief overview of each dimension follows.

The Content Dimension

The Content dimension is comprised of NEPEM's six knowledge domains for parents and the attendant priority practices.

Care for Self: includes knowledge about managing stress, managing family resources, getting support from and giving support to other parents, developing a sense of purpose in parenting, setting child-rearing goals; and developing strategies for cooperating with one's child-rearing partners. Parenting educators are also reminded to recognize and build upon the personal strengths of parents.

Understand: focuses attention on basic knowledge of child development and emphasizes how children can influence as well as be influenced by the people, places, and events that surround them.

Guide: underscores the importance of parenting strategies that engage a child in appropriate and desired behaviors; establish and maintain reasonable limits; provide developmentally appropriate opportunities for learning; convey fundamental values; and, teach problem-solving skills.

Nurture: emphasizes the importance of teaching appropriate expressions of affection and compassion; fostering children's self-respect and hope; teaching kindness; providing for the nutrition, shelter, clothing, health, and safety needs of children; and, helping children feel connected to their family histories and cultural heritages.

Motivate: underscores the importance of stimulating children's curiosity, imagination, and search for knowledge; teaching children about themselves, others, and the world around them; creating beneficial learning conditions, and, helping children to process and manage information.

Advocate: highlights the value to be derived for parents and children by finding and connecting with community-based programs, institutions, and professionals; by representing their children's needs so important linkages with community service providers can be forged; and, by speaking up and taking action when policies and procedures impede their children's growth or interfere with their family functions.

The Process Dimension

The Process dimension of NEPEF focuses on the professional skills and abilities that parenting educators need in order to determine needs of parents. This includes assessing the type of parenting information that parents need and want, the delivery mode best suited

for the parents, and the optimal delivery time so the information can be readily used by the parents.

These unique skills, referred to as *process skills*, include – the capacity to take stock of one’s own professional competence; a well-rounded knowledge of various theories of child, family, and adult development; competency in assessing needs, marketing programs, and evaluating their effectiveness and impact; familiarity with and an appreciation for the diversity of family structures and values; an ability to utilize a variety of teaching and learning strategies; and, expanding one’s understanding of the field by engaging in professional networks and organizations.

The *Process* side, like the *Content* side of NEPEF is comprised of six domains – Grow, Frame, Develop, Embrace, Educate, and Build – and the priority practices have been briefly outlined as follow:

Grow: refers to personal growth as a professional; knowing yourself and understanding how this affects the way you relate to others;

Frame: refers to knowing theoretical frameworks that guide practice in the field of parenting education;

Develop: refers to planning and marketing programs to educate parents, and developing evaluation processes that are part of a total educational effort;

Embrace: refers to recognizing and responding to differences in ethnicity, family type, and belief systems among populations being served;

Educate: refers to being an effective teacher; knowing how to use various delivery methods, helping parents learn, and challenging them to higher parenting goals;

Build: refers to reaching out to build professional networks; being a community advocate; and connecting with organizations to expand the field of parenting education.

A more detailed discussion of the NEPEF’s dimensions, domains, and priority practices follows.

GROW



Descriptors

Professional Development

*Parenting Education
Training*

*Building Knowledge, Skills,
and Connections*

*Self-Examination,
Reflection*

“Probably the most critical issue facing the development of parenting education is that of how practitioners are trained, supervised and supported in their work with parents. In no other area... is the field in need of greater investment.”

Carter & Kahn, 1996, p. 45

GROW is the process by which parenting educators become professionals and associate themselves with colleagues through professional development activities.

GROW involves educators learning to know themselves and their values while building knowledge, skills, and connections as educators.

GROW recognizes that the parenting educator and her/ his personal qualities are a critical part of the educational process.

GROW is used to suggest career-long activities that begin with the earliest preparations for becoming a parenting educator and continue as an ongoing developmental process.

Critical GROW Practices

To GROW, a parenting educator will:

- Identify one’s personal strengths and challenges.
- Confront personal biases that interfere with one’s ability to educate and support particular individuals and specific populations of families.
- Develop personal awareness and skills to interact sensitively with parents in order to nurture their growth and development.
- Set personal and professional goals.
- Attend seminars and conferences designed to build the knowledge and skills of parenting educators.
- Continually reflect on one’s behavior and performance and revise goals for improvement.
- Develop and share personal philosophies of parenting and of education.
- Learn about and apply ethical principles in all aspects of professional life.
- Locate and regularly interact with skilled colleagues, mentors, and supervisors.

“Those working in the field should be able to deal effectively with their own feelings and attitudes... [and] help youth and adults clarify their own concepts and expand their thinking beyond their own value structures.”

*National Commission on
Family Life Education,
1968.*

- Be an active member and develop leadership skills in professional associations and advocacy groups.
- Keep current with the trends and issues in the field by participating in formal and informal opportunities for continuing education and professional development

Examples of Specific Professional Objectives for GROW

The following parenting educator behaviors serve as examples of more specific objectives based on the critical practices for GROW.

The parenting educator should be able to:

- List personal strengths and challenges in program development and delivery and relate those strengths and challenges to her/his personal, educational, and professional background.
- Describe personal values and beliefs regarding parenting education.
- Outline a personal development plan that builds upon strengths, addresses his/her challenges, and cultivates a sense of pride in his/her profession.
- Join and participate in a professional organization that has both state and national presence.
- Be familiar with current research literature on parenting, child and family development, and **What We Know About GROW**

Self-development and self-examination are critical processes in preparing for a career in parenting education. Parenting educators should continually reflect on her/his work with families and examine what s/he is observing, doing, and feeling. “Family life educators need to be in touch with their own feelings or biases” (Powell & Cassidy, 2001, p. 30). Such reflection can help reduce the risks of exhaustion, burnout, and isolation from colleagues (Fenichel, 1992; Carter & Kahn, 1996).

Parenting educators should assess their skills and seek training options that fill identified needs (Braun, Coplon, & Sonnenschein, 1984). In order to be effective, parenting educators must develop a philosophical basis for teaching about families and thoroughly consider where personal beliefs have originated (Powell & Cassidy, 2001).

Parenting educators should learn to identify different types of educational approaches and their feelings about each approach.

Czaplewski and Jorgensen (1993) listed three major educational

approaches in family life education. The first is called the *Behavioristic approach*. (Note that this term is not identical to behaviorism as a parenting style.) The Behavioristic approach assumes that the teacher is responsible for providing the student knowledge, skills, and competencies.

Others have called this category the expert approach. The second is the *personalistic approach*, which portrays the teacher as a role model and emphasizes the development of autonomy, self-direction, and psychological maturity. It uses cooperative techniques between teacher and learner. The third is the *inquiry-oriented approach*, which recognizes that all members of society have responsibility to contribute in socially productive ways. Here, the teacher needs to support the development of critical thinking skills. Certain situations might call for the use of a fourth approach—*eclectic*, which uses some elements of the other three approaches. Czaplewski and Jorgensen (1993) state that much of the preparation of family life educators has been done in an eclectic fashion.

Professional development opportunities for parenting educators should take into consideration stages of professional growth.

Studies in a related field—early childhood education—identified four stages of professional development. The first stage is characterized by a need for straightforward training that clearly defines work expectations and provides step-by-step instructions or prepared curricula. The subsequent three stages involve increasing amounts of self-reflection, a decreasing dependence on specific knowledge, and an increasing need for interaction with professional colleagues (Katz, 1977). Although research still must be conducted, similar stages may be evident in the field of parenting education.

Even professionals who have completed a number of recognized stages of advanced professional development still need continuing education. As Powell and Cassidy (2001, p .45) so aptly noted, “(Q)ualified professionals must stay current on research and developments in their field.”

Education and training should involve much more than subject matter. To prepare to teach and guide parenting groups, educators need to develop many complex and difficult skills. Parenting educators should seek to build basic knowledge about children, parents, and families, but they should also develop skills in group process, program development, and problem-solving (Cochran, 1997; Rothenberg, 1992). In addition, theory should be a central component in training so that the educators in training can organize their continually shifting knowledge base (Jones, 1993, xiii).

Educators need to understand the critical components of a program approach in order to maintain program quality. The

“Certain characteristics are critical to the success of a family life educator: general intellectual skills, self-awareness, emotional stability, maturity, awareness of one’s own personal attitudes and cultural values, empathy, effective social skills, self-confidence, flexibility, understanding and appreciation of diversity, verbal and written communication skills, and the ability to relate well with all ages and groups on a one-to-one basis.”

Powell & Cassidy, 2001, p. 31

“Adults, like children, learn both through being told by those who already know and through discussion with peers who are in the process of constructing similar knowledge.”

Jones, 1993, p. xvi.

highest quality programs have been said to be those that are flexible in their delivery and are adapted to the needs and wishes of program participants (Schorr, 1988). Yet, other authors have noted that adjustments to a program increase the risk that its theoretical underpinnings and conceptual framework will be compromised (Carter & Kahn, 1996). Professional development activities combined with continuing education and appropriate supervision can help ensure that a program’s integrity will not be compromised when the program is adapted to changing circumstances and audiences.

A large portion of parenting educator preparation is done on the job, making mentoring and supervision critical. Traditionally, field experiences have played a key role in the preparation for all family-life-education positions (Cochran, 1997). Field experiences that include learning-by-doing, in-service guidance, and supervision have been viewed as critical elements in preparing to lead a parenting group (Kawin, 1963). Because of the emphasis on in-service training and the focus on process skills, in addition to mastering basic content, educators need to connect with mentors and supervisors as critical elements of an educator’s training process.

Beginning parenting educators need to seek out, and become comfortable with, supervision. They should take advantage of opportunities to reflect upon their experiences with a more experienced colleague. Similarly, more experienced parenting educators who work with other educators need support and training for the role of supervisor (Carter & Kahn, 1996).

Professional organizations support knowledge and skills development and reduce isolation. Parenting education has roots in many disciplines. Consequently, it is difficult to identify just one professional organization with which the majority of parenting educators are affiliated. The issue of differing and sometimes competing professional organizations in the field of family life education has a long documented history (Kerckhoff, 1964; Somerville, 1971).

A recent survey found that parenting educators belong to a variety of organizations and that most of these educators felt that their organizations did not fully understand their positions (Carter & Kahn, 1996). Many believe that the development of a professional organization is a necessary first step in “professionalizing” a field. Given current circumstances and history, it will be interesting to watch whether one umbrella organization will emerge for parenting educators or whether several organizations will agree upon an established set of principles and practices.

A parenting educator is respectful of all individuals with whom he/she works and is sensitive to her/his unique role as an educator. This requires maintaining high personal standards. As the profession grows, ethical principles must be developed and accepted in the educator's various roles—parent educator, researcher, and community partner. The current guidelines for Ethical Thinking and Practice for Family and Parent Educators (National Council in Family Relations, 1999) provides a basis for parenting educators to begin their personal growth.

References

- Braun, L. A., Coplon, J. K., & Sonnenschein, P. C. (1984). *Helping parents in groups: A leader's handbook*. Boston: Wheelock Center for Parenting Studies.
- Carter, N., & Kahn, L. (1996). *See how we grow: A report on the status of parenting education in the U.S.* Philadelphia: Pew Charitable Trusts.
- Cochran, M. (1997). Training and education for family support workers: Issues for the future. *Family Resource Coalition Report*, 15, 2 (Guidelines for family support practice: Companion guide), 23-25.
- Czaplewski, M. J., & Jorgensen, S. R. (1993). The professionalization of family life education. In M. E. Arcus, J. D. Schvaneveldt, and J. J. Moss (Eds.), *Handbook on family life education: Foundations of family life education* (pp. 51-75). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Fenichel, E. (Ed.) (1992). *Learning through supervision and mentorship to support the development of infants, toddlers, and their families: A sourcebook*. Arlington, VA: Zero to Three/National Center for Clinical Infant Programs.
- Jones, E. (1993). *Growing teachers*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Katz, L. G. (1977). The nature of professions: Where is early childhood education? *Montessori Life*, 5 (2), 31-35.
- Kawin, E. (1963). *Parenthood in a free nation: Manual for group leaders and participants*. West Lafayette, IN. Purdue University Press.
- Kerckhoff, R. K. (1964). Family life education in America. In H. T. Christiansen (ed.), *Handbook of marriage and the family*, (pp. 881-911). Chicago: Rand McNally.

National Commission on Family Life Education –Task Force of the National Council on Family Relations (1968). Family life education programs: Principles, plans, procedures. *The Family Coordinator*, 17, 211-214.

National Council on Family Relations (1999). *Tools for ethical thinking and practice in family life education*. Minneapolis: National Council on Family Relations.

Powell, L. H., & Cassidy, D. (2001). *Family life education: An introduction*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

Rothenberg, B. A. (1992). *Parentmaking educators training programs: A comprehensive skills development course to train early childhood parent educators*. Menlo Park, CA: Banster Press.

Schorr, L. B. (1988). *Within our reach*. New York: Doubleday.

Somerville, R. M. (1971). Family life and sex education in the turbulent '60s. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 33, 11–35.

FRAME



Descriptors

Theories

Philosophies

Organizing Principles

Paradigms

Assumptions

Conceptual Frameworks

“Parent education can positively affect the satisfaction and functioning of families by communicating knowledge about human development and relationships that increases their understanding, providing alternative models of parenting that widen their choices, teaching new skills, and facilitating access to community resources.”

Wandersman, 1987,

FRAME includes the philosophies, perspectives, theories, frameworks, paradigms, schools of thought, worldviews, and models to guide parenting professionals in designing programs of education and in making recommendations for children, parents, and families. Many different frameworks are used by parenting educators to understand parent-child relationships. Parenting educators **FRAME** parent-child relationships in many different ways. They also draw on frameworks and assumptions when they advise parents on how to deal with difficulties in their relationships with children.

Critical **FRAME** Practices

To **FRAME**, a parenting educator will:

- Describe many different theories used to organize and understand parent-child interactions.
- Outline major schools of thought in parenting education (e.g., democratic, humanistic, developmental, attachment, genetic, socially conscious, behaviorist, social learning, communication).
- Check assumptions and theories used within various parenting programs; establish their consistency with program recommendations.
- Identify concepts and practices in parents’ words and actions that may indicate their orientation or personal frameworks.
- Assist parents to discover their assumptions and consider other views.
- Help parents find practices consistent with their values and philosophies.
- Describe how different frameworks may be used to address different issues.

Examples of Specific Professional Objectives for **FRAME**

The following parenting educator behaviors serve as examples of more specific objectives based on the critical practices for **FRAME**:

The parenting educator should be able to:

- Describe three major frameworks that are important in helping parents understand and respond to their children’s behavior.
- Explain the general recommendations and appropriate uses of three frameworks.
- Synthesize a number of frameworks into a personal philosophy of parenting education.
- Identify the frameworks that guide the recommendations made by various parenting programs.
- Demonstrate the ability to work with groups of parents on choices that are consistent with their diverse personal philosophies and desired outcomes for their children.

What We Know About *FRAME*

For some parenting educators, the use of a *communications framework* (Gordon, 2000) is crucial to their understanding of parent-child relationships. Thus, their emphasis is on reflective listening skills and the use of “I” messages. Other professionals, however, may approach parenting education from a *humanistic orientation* (Ginott, 1965). This framework views children as having a natural tendency toward positive growth. Consequently, their principal message to parents is to love, support, and teach their children. Parenting educators who subscribe to a *behavioral paradigm* (Canter & Canter, 1992) will view the use of rewards and punishments as key elements in parent-child relationships. A *developmental framework* (Berger, 2001) emphasizes the stages and progress of human development.

These are just a few of the many frameworks used by parenting educators. An awareness of multiple frameworks, allows a parent educator to better understand challenging parenting questions. Most professionals use a combination of frameworks to makes sense of parent-child relationships. Successful parenting educators understand the value of frameworks for developing effective educational programs for parents. Judicious use of frameworks to guide the instructional design is likely to make the program objectives, educational activities, and parenting recommendations more powerful and effective.

Frameworks or theories grow out of efforts to make sense of scientific observations (Thomas, 1992). While the frameworks themselves are rarely tested directly, they are often used to make sense of research findings. As the study of parent-child relationships continues to mature, some frameworks that make the program objectives, educational activities, and parenting recommendations powerful and effective are likely to become increasingly prominent while others may fade. We can also expect new frameworks to be “invented” to help us better understand parent-child relationships.

How it works:

- The ability to **FRAME** experiences of parenting enables us to better understand them.
- Frameworks or theories grow out of efforts to make sense of scientific observations.
- Different frameworks are useful for understanding different areas of behavior.
- Parents and parenting educators are best equipped when they can apply multiple frameworks to guide childrearing.
- One of the factors that distinguishes excellent parenting education from mediocre parenting education is the wise and balanced use of frameworks.

“Choices have consequences. When we choose to see a child—and a parent—in a certain way, we set up a tide of effects. It makes a difference how we choose to make sense of parent and child behavior.”

Goddard, 2001

Different frameworks are useful for understanding different areas of behavior. For example, with parents concerned about toilet learning, a developmental framework is likely to be very useful - “Does the child have adequate muscle control and the desire to be toilet trained?” A parent dealing with sibling rivalry may find a humanistic framework to be of help- “Does each child have an opportunity to receive adequate attention and love in the family?” For those parents wishing to understand children’s temperaments and preferences, a biological framework may prove quite informative – “What are your child’s preferences for activity? Sleep?” The attachment framework can be helpful in explaining an infant’s clingingness-”Has a hectic schedule recently kept one or both parents from providing a safe base for the baby?”

The awareness of multiple frameworks prepares an educator to help parents deal with different situations and circumstances.

Parents and parenting educators are best equipped when they can apply multiple frameworks to guide childrearing. Because different frameworks provide different advantages in dealing with different situations, it is helpful for parents to be familiar with a variety of perspectives. When that breadth of knowledge is combined with good problem-solving skills, parents are more likely to be able to respond helpfully to their children’s struggles (Brock, Oertwein, & Coufal, 1993). When parenting educators are comfortable with multiple frameworks, they are better able to coach parents. A knowledge and appreciation of multiple frameworks allows a parenting educator to equip parents with options.

One of the factors that distinguishes excellent parenting education from mediocre parenting education is the wise and balanced use of frameworks. When programs of excellence use multiple frameworks, they can draw on the best theories and research in giving parents with a variety of research-proven tools. Less respected parenting programs make a hodgepodge of recommendations without tying them to an understanding of how children develop or parents learn. When parenting educators ground their programs in a framework, the program is more likely to be helpful and to be perceived as credible.

References

Brock, G. W., Oertwein, M., & Coufal, J. D. (1993). Parent education: Theory, research, and practice. In M. E. Arcus, J. D. Schvaneveldt, & J. J. Moss (Eds.), *Handbook of family life education: The practice of family life education*, Vol. 2, 87-114. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Canter, L., & Canter, M. (1992). *Assertive discipline*. Santa Monica, CA: Lee Canter & Associates.

Ginott, H. (1965). *Between parent and child*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Goddard, H. W. (October 4, 2001). Great Discoveries about Humans. Arkansas Parenting Education Network Networking Day. Little Rock, AR.

Gordon, T. (2000). *Parent Effectiveness Training: The proven program for raising responsible children*. New York, NY: Crown Publishing Group.

Thomas, R. M. (1992). *Comparing theories of child development*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Wandersman, L.P. (1987). New directions for parent education. In S. L. Kagan, D. R. Powell, B. Weissbourd, & E. F. Zigler (Eds.), *America's family support programs* (pp. 207-227). New Haven, CN: Yale University Press.

DEVELOP



Descriptors

Needs Assessments

Program Planning

Program Promotion

Program Evaluation

Few issues present a greater challenge to parenting education and family support than those surrounding evaluation and accountability.

DEVELOP is the process of creating a parenting education program before and after actual program delivery. The process includes all elements of the program development process for adult education in community-based settings, from need assessments through evaluation. (Specific aspects of developing teaching strategies and delivering parenting education are discussed in the **EDUCATE** section, pages 36-42.)

Critical **DEVELOP** Practices

To **DEVELOP**, a parenting educator will:

- Conduct community needs assessments (e.g., asset mapping) to identify educational needs, audiences, existing community and family strengths, and other available resources.
- Involve representatives from target audiences and collaborating organizations in the development of parenting education programs.
- Determine goals and objectives for the program, along with outcomes that can be measured.
- Select delivery methods based on family needs, strengths, and program resources.
- Evaluate the parenting education processes and impacts using appropriate methods.
- Review parenting evaluation results and share them with colleagues, collaborators, and stakeholders in order to plan future programs.

Examples of Professional Objectives for **DEVELOP**

The following professional behaviors serve as examples of more specific objectives based on the critical practices for **DEVELOP**:

The parenting educator should be able to:

- Conduct and report on an assessment of community strengths and needs for parenting education.
- Specify the goals of a parenting education program and how change will be measured.

“One of the major difficulties with the development of family life education programs is that there has been limited discussion of the methodology of family life education.”

Hughes, 1994

- Match an appropriate, research-based parenting education model to the needs identified by the community .
- Create a marketing plan that will attract a targeted audience of parents.
- Identify factors that might contribute to participant attrition and address them.
- Review, select, create, or tailor teaching resources that support the goals of the parenting education program.
- Develop the processes and tools that will be used to measure the success of the parenting education experience.
- Report programming impacts in ways that are both understandable and meaningful to stakeholders and collaborators.
- Document how a program’s results may be replicated and expanded to additional groups.

What We Know About *DEVELOP*

Information about the skills needed to design, develop, implement, and evaluate successful programs of parenting education comes from research literature on community-based adult education, facilitation of support groups, program development and evaluation, and parent empowerment.

The theoretical and research base of any parenting education program must be specified and consistently applied in order for the design, implementation, and evaluation of the intervention to be effective. Too many parenting education efforts rely on the organizer’s common sense, good intentions, and available resources (Hughes, 1994). At the same time, few packaged curricula provide all of the resources necessary for addressing the specific needs and interests of a particular group without the facilitator supplementing that curriculum with other teaching tools (Brown, 1998). Done well, this customization is one mark of a professional parenting educator. Done poorly, such blending of resources and philosophies can confuse the participants and complicate the evaluation process (Medway, 1989). Effective parenting education programs are those which (a) include flexible structures and sensitive staff members; (b) respond to participant needs; and (c) use a coherent, research-based training design (Cataldo, 1987).

Effective parenting education follows a sequential program development process, including planning, design,

implementation, evaluation, and accountability. The development process, especially as it pertains to community-based adult education, has been thoroughly conceived and tested (Boone, 1985; Jacobs, 1988; Rockwell & Bennett, 2000).

This body of literature emphasizes the interaction of needs assessments, targeted outcomes, program design and implementation, progress-tracking, and evaluation designed to serve specific needs.

Traditional approaches to needs assessment may be complemented by contemporary approaches that consider the assets as well as the challenges of target audiences (O’Looney, 1996; Nieto, Schaffner, & Henderson, 1997).

When used conscientiously, the program development process as applied to parenting education can result in positive outcomes for families and positive accountability data for planners.

Many scholars recommend a comprehensive process that includes specifying target-audience needs and assets, considering facilitator resources, conducting interventions, considering delivery formats, and designing appropriate evaluation and reporting methods (Pines, 1991; DeBord, 1998; Brown, 1998; Matthews & Hudson, 2001). Not only is actual program delivery important, but increasingly, providers of community-based education are being held accountable for expected program outcomes.

Marketing parenting education, recruiting participants, and encouraging their continued involvement have been shown to be effective. Many parenting education efforts have limited success because the importance of targeted program promotions and inducements to continue involvement was not considered. While some parenting education efforts, such as those aimed at abusive/neglectful parents, mandate parent participation under threat of legal consequence, most programs rely on voluntary participation. Curran (1989) discusses the advantages of promoting parenting education to target groups using strength-based messages that appeal to common interests and practical needs, rather than highlighting family dysfunction. Cataldo (1987), Smith and Wells (1997), and others discuss specific techniques of parent recruitment, such as personal contact, newsletters, posted announcements, and the use of existing groups. The related problems of attrition in multi-session programs may be minimized by including incentives, child care and transportation; by sending meeting reminders; and by establishing personal relationships with participants (Hughes, 1994).

Parenting education is best evaluated by using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques, applied to improve both the process and outcome of the effort. Medway (1989) and others reinforce the fact that the design of program evaluation is integral to

“Enrollment and participation incentives are more important for fathers than for mothers because many fathers appear to be less motivated . . . to participate in parent education.”

Brown, 1998

“A one-time end-of-project reflection is no longer acceptable. Programs must find ways to build in continuous feedback to practitioners, designers, and other stakeholders.”

Carter & Kahn, 1996

the entire planning process, not a step added at the conclusion. The evaluation plan must be consistent with the scope, delivery methods, content, and intensity of the program. Variations in these conditions, or the failure to specify them, has made it difficult to compare the efficacy and efficiency of many parenting education programs.

Perhaps the most comprehensive and user-friendly discussion of the process of evaluation in community-based parenting education was provided by the Cooperative Extension System's former National Network for Family Resiliency (DeBord, Stivers, Fetsch, Goddard, & Ray, 1997). This report leads the reader through the important considerations and steps of the evaluation process, at whatever level of depth and specificity may be required. The study emphasizes the importance of designing the evaluation plan based on the proposed use of the evaluation, for example, to inform stakeholders, improve program delivery, and assess participant change, or a combination of these.

References

Boone, E. (1985). *Developing programs in adult education*. Englewood, Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Brown, J.L. & Kiernan, N.E. (1998). A model for integrating program development and evaluation. *Journal of Extension*, 36. Retrieved from <http://www.joe.org/joe/1998june/rb5.html>

Brown, M. (1998). *Recommended practices: Parent education and support*. Retrieved from <http://ag.udel.edu/extension/fam/recprac/part1.pdf>

Carter, N. & Kahn, L. (1996). *See how we grow: A report on the status of parenting education in the U.S.* Philadelphia: Pew Charitable Trusts.

Cataldo, C. Z. (1987). *Parent education for early childhood: Child-rearing concepts and program content for the student and practicing professional*. New York: Teachers College Press

Curran, D. (1989). *Working with parents*. Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance Service.

DeBord, K. (1998). *Planning, conducting, and evaluating parenting education programs*. Retrieved from [http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/smp9/parent education/planning and conducting.htm](http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/smp9/parent%20education/planning%20and%20conducting.htm)

DeBord, K., Stivers, W., Fetsch, R., Goddard, W., and Ray, M. (1997). *Evaluation of parenting education programs: A parenting evaluation decision framework*. Retrieved from: <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/fcs/human/pareval.html>

Hughes, R. (1994). A framework for developing family life education programs. *Family Relations*, 43, 74-80.

Jacobs, F.H. (1988). A five-tiered approach to evaluation: Context and implementation. In H.B. Weiss & F.H. Jacobs (eds.), *Evaluating family programs* (pp. 37-68). New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Matthews, J. & Hudson, A. (2001). Guidelines for evaluating parent training programs. *Family Relations*, 50, 77-86.

Medway, F.J. (1989). Measuring the effectiveness of parent education. In M.J. Fine (Ed.), *The second handbook on parent education: Contemporary perspectives* (pp. 237-255). New York: Academic Press.

Nieto, R.D., Schaffner, D., & Henderson, J. L. (1997). Examining community needs through a capacity assessment. *Journal of Extension*, 35.

<http://www.joe.org/joe/1997june/a1.html>

O'Looney, J. (1996). *Redesigning the work of human services*. Westport, CT: Quorum.

Pines, D. (1991). Implementing a parenting program in your community. In *Parent training is prevention: Preventing alcohol and other drug problems among youth in the family* (DHHD Publication No. (ADM) 91-1715, pp. 135-142). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Rockwell, K., & Bennett, C. (2000). *Targeting outcomes of programs (TOPS)*. Retrieved from <http://deal.unl.edu/TOP/english/index.html>

Smith, L. M., & Wells, W. M. (1997). *Urban parent education: Dilemmas and resolutions*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

EMBRACE



Descriptors

Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

Diverse Family Forms

Multiple Environmental Contexts

Populations Differing in Preferred Communication and Learning Approaches

EMBRACE means recognizing, respecting, and responding to ethnic and cultural diversity, different family forms, and multiple environmental contexts of families raising children. EMBRACE also means reaching out to parents and caregivers who differ in preferred communication and learning approaches, sexual orientation, English language proficiency, access to basic resources, and levels of literacy.

Critical **EMBRACE** Practices

To EMBRACE, a parenting educator will:

Locate, customize, or create curricula, instructional approaches, participation costs, and program delivery methods to fit family strengths, needs, and preferences.

Support diversity by recruiting parent leadership for programs and consulting with parents on curriculum and instructional processes on a continuing basis.

Consider the relationship between the parent educator's identity and that of participants, minimizing power differences, cultivating connections and relationships within and across cultural, ethnic, and other group characteristics.

Include discussions and celebrations that honor the pertinent cultural or family history, spiritual and secular values, communication styles, and current challenges of all participating groups.

Facilitate access to family support and social services that are culturally appropriate for families who need and want them.

Make parenting education accessible to different groups by adapting schedules, forms, or locations for different groups.

Examples of Specific Professional Objectives for **EMBRACE**

The following parenting educator behaviors serve as examples of specific objectives based on the critical practices for **EMBRACE**.

The parenting educator should be able to:

- Describe the unique characteristics, circumstances, strengths, and challenges of targeted parent groups before the educational program begins.

“One cultural generalization is the Latino value of family unity, loyalty to the family, and emphasis on cooperation rather than competition among family members and friends. This cultural generalization is somewhat true for most of Latino families, however, to assume that all Latinos fit this generalization is to stereotype.”

DeBord & Ferrer, 2001 (p.1)

- Demonstrate sensitivity and confidence in interactions with parents from a variety of backgrounds.
- Demonstrate the ability to discuss parenting in clear language, using nonjudgmental terms with parents from a variety of backgrounds.
- Describe the procedures for locating and using family support services in the targeted community and for parents to identify their personal support networks.
- Describe a variety of approaches for delivering parenting education to various family types.

What We Know About *EMBRACE*

Great diversity exists in families in terms of personalities, values, learning preferences, and ethnic, experiential, and cultural backgrounds. In addition, children in families contribute their own unique challenges. Along with individual and group diversity, families are affected by the ecological contexts and social realities in which they live (Myers-Walls, 2000).

Parenting educators must be sensitive to diversity in order to provide quality programs to a variety of individuals as well as to specific populations that are comprised predominantly of a single ethnicity, culture, or family form (Arcus, 1992).

Individual families or groups of families vary in their access to basic resources and in the characteristics of their neighborhoods. Some ethnic or cultural groups may experience discrimination in employment, housing, and other areas. Family forms vary greatly according to such characteristics as marital status, numbers and ages of children and parenting adults, structural relationships between adults and children, gender dynamics, and sexual orientation.

Individual family members have unique family histories, life circumstances, beliefs and values, learning preferences, and education and literacy levels. For example, the challenges and resources of teen mothers are different from those of adult single fathers or those of blended families. Some families and parenting education groups represent one or more intersecting categories, and parenting educators may be called upon to structure programs that will be sensitive to very different life stories (Myers-Walls, 2000).

Parenting education programs and processes should be adapted to meet the needs of specific participants and groups. A “one-size fits all” approach is not as effective as customized approaches (Arcus, 1992, 1995; Cross, 1996; Myers-Walls, 2000; Weissbourd & Kagan,

“Within the realm of parent education programs that can be described as culturally sensitive, three main types of programs have been identified: translated, culturally adapted, and culturally specific.”

**Cheng Gorman
& Balter, 1997**

All parenting educators need to be knowledgeable about, and sensitive to, the specific populations with which they are working.

1989). On the other hand, completely customized materials are not always feasible or advisable given the complexity and dynamic nature of diverse families (Wiley & Ebata, under review). Because family circumstances have changed markedly in recent years, parenting educators have been challenged to find effective strategies to provide appropriate educational experiences (Arcus, 1995).

A series of evening classes does not fit the needs of all parents. Home visits, school- and community-based family activities, newsletters, online learning, and work-site seminars are examples of alternate strategies for offering parenting education to greater numbers of people in the place, at the time, and in the form that will be most effective and accessible.

A variety of teaching strategies are more likely to accommodate individual learning styles than a single approach (see the EDUCATE section, pages 36-42). Attention must be paid to native language, format, and literacy level in printed material, while attention to building trust and emotional safety is critical in group settings.

Three main types of culturally sensitive programs have been identified: translated, culturally adapted, and culturally specific (Cheng Gorman & Balter, 1997).

A traditional program that has been rendered into a target population's language is a translated program.

A traditional program that has been designed to include some of the values and traditions of the target population is a culturally adapted program.

A program created for a specific population from the beginning is a culturally specific program.

Parenting educators are most effective when they are sensitive to cultural traditions, expectations, and child-rearing patterns. For groups of specific ethnic or cultural populations, geographic regions, or specific family forms, qualified parenting educators who are members of those groups are often able to make contacts and interact more effectively than similarly qualified educators who are not. However, it is often not possible to match a specific group with a *qualified* parenting educator representative of that group. In any case, all parenting educators need to be knowledgeable about, and sensitive to, the specific populations with which they are working (Cross, 1996; Myers-Walls, 2000; Ortega & Nunez, 1997; Weissbourd & Kagan, 1989). Parenting education also benefits from the wisdom of participants. The group itself benefits from listening to individual parents' perceptions, whether they are based on unique cultural history or keen personal sensitivity.

Involving parents in the design, governance, and delivery of parenting education programs is likely to improve program effectiveness, responsiveness, and cultural sensitivity, resulting in greater family trust and empowerment, greater family enrollment and retention, and positive outcomes for children and families.

Building trust and demonstrating respect is particularly important when a parenting educator is not a member of a targeted ethnic or cultural group. Honoring specific aspects of cultural history and values helps in the trust-building process, especially when the history and values are related to parenting practices.

Parenting educators' values related to parenting are affected by their own cultural experiences in addition to the knowledge they have gained about parenting and children's development. Self-reflection on this process (see the GROW section, pages 9-15) can help parenting educators more sensitively assist other parents through the process of reconciling knowledge about parenting practices that nurture positive child development and possibly conflicting customary practices from the same or a different cultural heritage.

For example, when corporal punishment is a common practice in a culture, an effective strategy includes acknowledging how difficult it can be to confront this issue, and then challenging parents to use new, more effective, and more nurturing ways to discipline children (Asian Pacific Family Resource Center, 1997; Cross, 1996).

Many groups are struggling with issues related to preserving their ethnic or cultural heritage and the acculturation of their children into the predominant or popular peer culture. Parent-child relationships may be strengthened by participation in culturally specific activities with children that improve communication and build cultural pride and self-esteem (Asian Pacific Family Resource Center, 1997; Cross, 1996).

The process of acculturation is complex and involves deeply held values and unique life experiences. Parenting educators will find in any group of parents many unique ways of adapting to the predominant culture (Garcia, 1994). It is important to treat each individual's own experiences with this process respectfully. It can be helpful to remember that personality differences between individuals within an ethnic or cultural group may be as great as the differences between ethnic and cultural groups.

An effective way to ensure sensitivity to diverse family forms and populations is to involve parents in advisory committees and program planning and to call on them as sources of regular feedback. In programs where families are seen as partners with program staff in an atmosphere of mutual respect, the expertise of families is brought into the educational process, and program effectiveness is increased (Doherty, 2000; Weissbourd & Kagan, 1989).

Involving parents in the design, governance, and delivery of parenting education programs is likely to improve program effectiveness, responsiveness, and cultural sensitivity, resulting in greater family trust

and empowerment, greater family enrollment and retention, and positive outcomes for children and families (Ahsan, 1999; Foster 1999).

The relationship between the parenting educator and the participants is also important (see the EDUCATE section, pages 36-42).

A collaboration between the educator and parents, each of whom brings strengths and resources to the educational experience, is likely to be more effective among diverse populations of families than the traditional “expert” approach, which is usually built into packaged curricula, where the parenting educator presents predetermined information, and parents have little chance to affect the content or learning process (Myers-Walls, 2000).

Access to family support services is critical in order for parenting education to be effective. When basic needs are not met, or a family is experiencing a crisis, the care of children is likely to be compromised, not to mention the parent’s ability to focus on learning new parenting strategies. Families experiencing extreme economic stress, unemployment, substance-abuse, or marital conflict are at greatest risk of child neglect and maltreatment (Baumrind, 1994; Dunst & Leet, 1994). Early and continuing support strengthens the family and works to prevent family dysfunction (Weissbourd, 1987). Parenting programs should incorporate into their structure information on how to access culturally appropriate family support services. The levels of attention and funding directed toward teaching people how to access family support services usually decline when the circumstances of the populations involved improve. Yet, all parents benefit from culturally appropriate family support and educational services.

References

- Ahsan, N. (1999). Forging equal partnerships. Special focus: Parents are leaders. *America’s Family Support Magazine*, 18(1), 19-20.
- Arcus, M. E. (1992). Family life education: Toward the 21st Century. *Family Relations*, 41, 390-393.
- Arcus, M. E. (1995). Advances in family life education: Past, present, and future. *Family Relations*, 44, 336-344.
- Asian Pacific Family Resource Center (1997). Culture is key to building trust with families. *Family Resource Coalition of America Report*, 16, 9.

- Cheng Gorman, J., & Balter, L. (1997). Culturally sensitive parent education: A critical review of quantitative research. *Review of Educational Research*, 67(3), 339-369.
- Cross, T. (1996). Developing a knowledge base to support cultural competence. *Prevention Report*, 1, 2-5.
- DeBord, K. & Ferrer, M. (2001). Working with Latino parents/families. National Children, Youth, and Families Educational Network. Retrieved from <http://www.cyfernet.org/parent/latinofam.html>
- Doherty, W. J. (2000). Family science and family citizenship: Toward a model of community partnership with families. *Family Relations*, 49, 319-325.
- Dunst, C. J., & Leet, H. E. (1994). Measuring the adequacy of resources in households with young children. In C. J. Dunst, C. M. Trivette, & A. G. Deal (Eds.), *Supporting and strengthening families: Methods, strategies, and practices* (pp. 105-114). Cambridge, MA: Brookline Books.
- Foster, R. (1999). Who best represents the voice of parents? Special focus: Parents are leaders. *America's Family Support Magazine*, 18(1), 19-20.
- Garcia, E. (1994). Addressing the challenges of diversity. In S. Kagan & B. Weissbourd (Eds.), *Putting families first: America's family support movement and the challenge of change* (pp. 243-275). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Myers-Walls, J. A. (2000). Family diversity and family life education. In D. H. Demo, K. R. Allen, & M. A. Fine (Eds.), *Handbook of family diversity* (pp. 359-379). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Ortega, R. M., & Nunez, E. V. (1997). Latino families and child welfare. *Family Resource Coalition of America Report*, 16, 8.
- Weissbourd, B. (1987). A brief history of family support programs. In S. L. Kagan, D. R. Powell, B. Weissbourd, & E. F. Zigler (Eds.), *America's family support programs*, (pp. 207-227). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Weissbourd, B., & Kagan, S. L. (1989). Family support programs: Catalysts for change. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 59(1), 20-31.
- Wiley, A & Ebata, A. (under review). Reaching "The American Family": Making diversity real in family life education. *Family Relations*.

EDUCATE



Descriptors

Multiple Methods of Teaching

Diverse Learning Styles

Adapting Methods and Materials to Meet Needs

Individualizing Programs to Meet Audience Strengths and Needs

There are a multitude of teaching methods and a great many styles of learning. The trick for parent educators is to know what to teach, where to teach it, and how to really reach, both physically and intellectually, each diverse audience and individual learner.

Kirby

EDUCATE is the process of building relationships with participants to help them more effectively solve problems, resolve conflicts, set goals, and gain knowledge and skills to guide and nurture their child(ren). **EDUCATE** involves knowing and using a variety of effective teaching strategies, skills, techniques, and methods. It includes adapting these teaching tools to meet specific learner needs.

Critical **EDUCATE** Practices

To **EDUCATE**, a parenting educator will:

- Learn and then use effective teaching strategies, techniques, and methods with parents.
- Understand learning styles and incorporate appropriate educational approaches into programs.
- Know and use a variety of educational methods (e.g., lecture, discussion, role-playing, videotaping, and interactive skill-building activities) to meet the diverse learning styles of program participants.
- Build relationships with participants to understand their individual, familial, and educational strengths, needs, and preferences.
- Use a variety of instructional experiences to challenge parents to learn and maintain newly acquired knowledge and skills.
- Expect and prepare to meet differing levels of knowledge, skills, expectations, and parenting goals with each new audience.

Examples of Specific Professional Objectives for **EDUCATE**

The following parenting educator behaviors serve as examples of more specific objectives based on the critical practices for **EDUCATE**:

The parenting educator should be able to:

- Study different theories and models of adult education and apply the principles to educational programs for parents.
- Match teaching techniques, class activities, and teaching aids to the learning styles and preferences of parent participants.

“Just as people even in the same family have different personalities and preferences, so persons, old or young, have different learning styles.”

**Powell & Cassidy,
2001, pg.64.**

- Use formal and informal assessments of adult learning styles and preferences to plan for a parenting education program.
- Develop a repertoire of proven adult teaching techniques, continually adding new techniques to classes and in-service training programs.
- Observe and then model the relationship-building activities that experienced parenting educators use to better understand the educational strengths and challenges of the target audiences.
- Use alternate delivery strategies as appropriate.
- Learn how to use a variety of instructional activities and teaching aids to reinforce critical parenting concepts and skills.
- Learn to recognize learner needs and build the educational program using available curricula and other resources, while individualizing content and teaching.

What We Know About *EDUCATE*

The individual participants within each audience may bring different knowledge, skills, expectations and goals to the program. Participants do not exist in a vacuum; they bring with them a variety of psychosocial experiences that influence their perceptions of learning as well as their abilities to understand and utilize the content and skills taught (Hilgard, 1967).

One should expect a great deal of variability within a given audience because of the multiple dimensions of adult *personality* (Hilgard, 1967). These dimensions include temperament, intellectual ability, interests and values, social attitudes, motivations, expressive and stylistic traits, and mental health.

When one considers the experiential characteristics of adults, there is an assumption that individuals with more and/or richer life experiences will be better able to reflect on their learning activities. It is believed that different life events, transitions, roles, and crises that are experienced by adults motivate them to reappraise their lives and thus open them to the value of exploring new ideas and actions (Long, 1991). However, this openness to new ideas and activities is greatly influenced by the degree of conflict the adult experiences in his/her roles as spouse, parent, or employee.

Parenting educators must take many factors of individual learning into consideration when planning, implementing, evaluating, and reflecting upon any parenting education experience. The diversity of a parent group's background, skills, and knowledge requires the parenting

“Participants do not exist in a vacuum. They bring with them a variety of psychosocial experiences that influence their perception of learning as well as their ability to understand and utilize the content and skills taught.”

Hilgard, 1967

educator to spend significant amounts of time and energy developing a teaching plan that will ensure an optimal learning experience for most participants.

Individuals have specific learning styles that may differ from those of their peers. It is important to understand these learning styles and be able to incorporate specific strategies into programs to meet these specific needs. Learning styles are the ways that individuals prefer to engage and process information in learning activities (Galbraith, 1991). Parenting educators must consider the various learning preferences of parents and choose strategies and techniques that will allow the best learning experiences for all learners.

Parenting skills and knowledge are best learned through a variety of educational methods. Utilizing a range of educational methods, such as lecture, role-playing, group discussions, games, video, and skill -building activities, enhances the likelihood that information will be processed more successfully.

When only one educational method is used, there is less opportunity for multiple cognitive processes to occur. In other words, when fewer methods are employed, participants have fewer mechanisms for processing the content and are less likely to be able to translate their knowledge into action and behavior change.

When determining the specific teaching method to be used, it is critical that the parenting educator keep in mind the goals and objectives of both the educator and the learner.

For example, if *knowledge* is the goal, then the best teaching methods are lecture and oral presentations, panel discussions, symposia, talks by subject-matter experts, and visuals such as films and slides.

If *understanding* is the objective, the best teaching are group discussion, demonstration, case studies, and problem-solving.

If *skill attainment* is the goal, the best teaching methods are demonstrations, simulations, computer-assisted instruction, role-playing, practica, and similar exercises.

Although group instruction is a popular and effective method for providing information to parents, it is not the only way. Today's parents require alternative methods for receiving parenting information. Newsletters, radio programs, web sites, and home visits are additional methods for meeting the educational needs of some hard-to-reach audiences. Many parents have obstacles to attending traditional parent education classes (e.g., inflexible schedules, lack of transportation or child care, classes held at inconvenient locations or

“Parents learn best when they can utilize a variety of educational methods to ensure that information is processed in a way that makes sense for them personally.”

Kirby

“Go where the parents are, as opposed to making them come to you.”

DeBord

times). For this reason, it is important to take the information to them, reaching them where they are, rather than making them come to you.

Instructors will be more likely to provide appropriate content and learning experiences if they have developed a relationship with participants, can identify their strengths and challenges, and can modify the program to fit the specific needs of the audience. Two factors are critical in establishing a positive climate for adult learning and behavioral change: (1) the teacher and students have an opportunity to spend sustained periods of time together in order to forge a sense of community and mutual trust; and, (2) the teacher is trained to build rapport with the group and to demonstrate the skills taught (Mace, 1981). Other variables that contribute to success are the relationship among the learners, rapport and communication, opportunities for participation, value and belief systems that hold meaning for the learners, and clearly stated expectations and goals (Galbraith, 1991).

Perhaps the most specific recommendations for engaging adult learners have been outlined by Powell and Cassidy (2001) in their text on family life education. They suggest that a successful educational program will:

- Be sustained and comprehensive (over time, and over life experiences). Build in levels of learning that encourage personal transformation and behavioral and attitudinal changes.
- Include at least 15-18 hours of learning experiences, followed by options for long-term reinforcement.
- Incorporate activities for all learning styles.
- Engage the learner in praxis (action with reflection).
- Apply information to personal life experience and demonstrate immediate usefulness.
- Respect learners' experiences, cultures, and value orientations.
- Show learning skills that invite discussion and commentary.
- Use small group discussion formats.
- Involve short “lectures” followed by prepared learning activities and discussion.
- Be based on the assessed needs of the group of learners or individual learners.

References

Barbe, W. B. (1985). *Growing up learning*. Washington, DC: Acropolis Books.

Galbraith, M. W. (1991). Adult learning methods and techniques. In M. W. Galbraith (ed.). *Facilitating adult learning: A transactional process*, (pp. 103-134). Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company.

Hilgard, E. (1967). *A basic reference shelf on learning theory*. Hilgard, E. (1967). A basic reference shelf on learning theory. Stanford, CA: Clearinghouse on Educational Media and Technology.

Long, H. B. (1991). Understanding adult learners. In M. W. Galbraith (Ed.). *Adult learning methods: A guide for effective instruction*, (pp. 23-38). Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company.

Mace, D. (1981). The long, long trail from information-giving to behavioral change. *Family Relations*, 30, 599-606.

Powell, L. H. & Cassidy, D. (2001). *Family life education: An introduction*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.

BUILD



Descriptors

Professional Relationships and Associations

Support Service Networks

Community Partnerships and Affiliations

Parent and Family Advocacy

“The involvement of parenting educators in building the field is most effective if they understand how political, educational, legal, and medical systems work.”

**Small and Eastman,
1991**

To **BUILD** relationships with other professionals working with children and families may be one of the most effective ways to increase parenting options and resources. Building networks and partnerships that support children, parents, and families at local and state levels and sometimes at regional, national, or international levels will ultimately **BUILD** the field of parenting education. While many of these affiliations are informal in nature, membership in professional associations or organizations will provide critical linkages with others working toward similar goals.

Critical **BUILD** Practices

To **BUILD**, a parenting educator will:

- Connect and partner with other family-supporting professionals to share resources, support community initiatives, and facilitate referrals between agencies and organizations.
- Design, develop, and participate in support services and support networks for children, parents, and families.
- Monitor local, state, national, and international initiatives that affect parenting or impact children and families.
- Be an advocate for the unmet needs of children, parents, and families.
- Join and participate in professional groups, associations, and societies dedicated to the enhancement of parent-child relationships, the well-being of families, and the growth of the field of parenting education.
- Participate in the formation and shaping of child-, parent-, and family-friendly policies for colleague review and dialogue before distribution to appropriate decision-makers in the community and state.

Examples of Specific Professional Objectives for **BUILD**

The following parenting educator behaviors serve as examples of more specific objectives based on the critical practices for **BUILD**.

The parenting educator should be able to:

Goals to BUILD

- Parenting educators must gain skills for making a difference in the larger system.
- Parenting educators must take an active role in developing the professional status of the field.
- Parenting educators must understand how to operate within multiple social and cultural systems to better serve the needs of children, parents, and families.

- Analyze key contemporary policies for their implications for parents and the field of parenting education.
- Write a one-page policy briefing.
- Form partnerships with major community organizations and public and private agencies that serve children, parents, and families in the state.
- Convene meetings of parenting educators in the community or state for the purpose of establishing and funding strong networks of support for children, parents, and families.
- Establish referral procedures and create an electronic parent education communication system.
- Engage in critical discussions and professional activities that build the field of parenting education and enhance the image of parenting educators at the local, state, national, and international levels.

What We Know About BUILD

The field of parenting education should make an organized, programmatic effort to change or enhance the child-rearing knowledge and skills of families and the child care system (Arcus & Thomas, 1993). It is the development of these organized and systematic efforts to which *BUILD* pertains.

Parenting is a complex process that is highly influenced by the social context in which it occurs.

To be truly effective, parenting educators must acknowledge the interaction and interdependence among the various contexts affecting children and families.

When educators understand the total system of services and educational programs, they can better appreciate that communities and institutions to share with parents the responsibility for the healthy development of children and youth. This appreciation then will direct parenting educators to BUILD networks and coalitions that foster a caring environment with communities that make effective schools, adequate housing, good job opportunities, and wide recreational facilities high priorities (Brown & Rhodes, 1991; Brown, 1998).

Understanding the “big picture” will help parenting educators design programs that are tailored to the specific needs of specialized populations. Special populations may include single, divorced, or non-custodial parents; gay/lesbian/bisexual parents; or grandparents raising grandchildren (see **EMBRACE**). Educational

“The task of building parenting education is one of building the ship while it is being sailed.”

**Carter & Kahn, 1996,
pp. 45**

programs should be guided by an understanding of the contexts in which children are parented, as well as by an appreciation of the interrelationships among the parent, community, and family support systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Furstenberg, 1976 Halpern; 1990; Powell, 1989; Stevens, *et al.*, 1993).

Parenting educators can help educate legislators and other policymakers so that they can make more informed decisions affecting children and families. Parenting educators who advocate for a specific policy as a means of becoming active in helping other family life professionals must understand policy alternatives education. Family policy analysis is a technical exercise that requires considerable expertise and knowledge of family research and programs (Ooms, 1995). Research-based information that policymakers receive is valued and may be the only information they see from unbiased resources.

When parenting educators understand how political, educational, legal, and medical systems operate, they can be more effective in selecting information to present to policymakers and others (Small & Eastman, 1991).

The field of parenting education has been, and continues to be, shaped by diverse disciplines and institutions. The field of parenting education has a 100-year history in this country (Palm, 1999), a history marked by ever-changing issues, audiences, disciplines, and institutions. Palm describes these as:

- Issues- child rearing, mother-child relationships, infant mortality, psychological development, parent education, child abuse.
- Audiences- middle- and upper-class mothers, immigrant mothers, fathers, two-parent families, single parents, parents of color, working parents, grandparents raising grandchildren.
- Disciplines- public health, social work, psychology, education, medicine.
- Institutions- local, state, and federal government agencies; universities; public and private social service agencies; educational organizations such as Parent Teacher Organizations and professional organizations such as the American Association for Families and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS), the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR), and the National Parenting Education Network (NPEN).

As a field of study, parenting education has been described as being large, complex, rapidly growing, and having little or no infrastructure to help it move forward (Carter & Kahn, 1996). No one knows exactly how parenting education will develop in the 21st century, but that it is

safe to say the field will remain complex and challenging for its practitioners (Palm, 1999).

Given these circumstances, parenting educators must connect, discuss, brainstorm, plan, and act in concert with others to effect change on behalf of the families they serve. The professional success of the field will depend upon all concerned, that is, knowledgeable stakeholders, coming together to share resources, to work collectively to overcome obstacles, and to meet challenges to build a public agenda that strengthens families (Shor, 1987; Weiss, 1990).

References

- Arcus, M.E. , & Thomas, J. (1993). The nature and practice of family life education. In M.E. Arcus, J.D. Schvaneveldt, & J.J. Moss, (Eds.) *Handbook of family life education: The practice of family life education*. (2). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, M.B. (1998). Recommended practices:A review of the literatures on parent education and support. University of Delaware. [<http://ag.udel.edu/extension/fam/best/crp-part100.html>] Retrieved 11-26-02.
- Brown, W. K. & Rhodes, W. A. (1991). Factors that promote invulnerability and resiliency in at risk children. In W. A. Rhodes & W. K. Brown (Eds.), *Why some children succeed despite the odds* (pp. 171-177). New York: Praeger.
- Carter, N. , & Kahn, L. (1996). *See how we grow: A report on the status of parenting education in the United States*. Philadelphia: Pew Charitable Trusts.
- Furstenberg, F. F., Jr. (1976). *Unplanned parenthood*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.
- Halpern, R. (1990). Poverty and early childhood parenting: Toward a framework for intervention. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 60(1), 6-18.
- Ooms, T. (1995). Taking families seriously: Family impact analysis as an essential policy tool. Paper presented in Leveun, Belgium. Retrieved online November 26, 2002. www.uwex.edu/ces/familyimpact/reports/pins2.pdf

Palm, G. (1999, March). 100 Years of parenting education. *National Council on Family Relations Report*. 44(1), 3-6

Powell, L. & Cassidy, D. (2000). *Family life education: An introduction*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Powell, D. (1989). *Families and Early Childhood Programs*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Shor, I., (ed.) (1987). *Freer for the classroom: A sourcebook for liberatory teaching*. Portsmouth, NC: Boynton/Cook.

Small, S. A. & Eastman, G. (1991). Rearing adolescents in contemporary society: A conceptual framework for understanding the responsibilities and needs of parents. *Family Relations*, 40, 455-462.

Stevens, J. H., Jr., Hough, R. A., & Nurss, J. R. (1993). The influence of parents in children's development and education. In B. Spodek (Ed.), *Handbook of research on education of young children*, (pp.337-351). New York: McMillan Publishing.

Weiss, H. B. (1990). Beyond parens patriae: Building policies and programs to care for our own and others' children. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 12, (pp. 269-284).