Group parent education: Critical issues regarding PET, behavioral and Adlerian programs

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Group parent education: Critical issues regarding PET, behavioral and Adlerian programs

Abstract
Parent Education has long been a national concern. Frazier and Matthes (1975) stated that efforts to help individuals develop more effective relationships with their children have increased consistently over the past seventy-five (75) years. Over the past twenty-five (25) 1 years parent education has become a complex field with numerous books, movies, and pre-packaged programs being used to guide parents (Cooney, 1981; Sherrets, Authier, & Tramontana, 1980; Rinn & Markle, 1977; Dembo, Sweitzer, & Lauritzen, 1985; Getz & Gunn, 1988).
GROUP PARENT EDUCATION:
CRITICAL ISSUES REGARDING PET, BEHAVIORAL AND ADLERIAN PROGRAMS

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Parent Education has long been a national concern. Frazier and Matthes (1975) stated that efforts to help individuals develop more effective relationships with their children have increased consistently over the past seventy-five (75) years. Over the past twenty-five (25) years parent education has become a complex field with numerous books, movies, and pre-packaged programs being used to guide parents (Cooney, 1981; Sherrets, Authier, & Tramontana, 1980; Rinn & Markle, 1977; Dembo, Sweitzer, & Lauritzen, 1985; Getz & Gunn, 1988).

A variety of changes in family life may explain the increased need for parent education (Luckey, 1967; Judah, 1978; Henry, 1981; Sherrets et al., 1980; Frazier & Matthes, 1975; Roehl, Herr, & Applehaus, 1985; Getz & Gunn, 1988). Following is an enumeration of some of these changes. Family structure no longer includes intergenerational ties and supports from parents (Sherrets et al., 1981; Getz & Gunn, 1988). Young adults who become parents often make a geographical as well as a psychological move from the family of orientation to the family of procreation. They are less able to call on their more experienced parents for parenting advice. In addition there are changes in sex roles and authority patterns. More child care is done outside of the home (Henry, 1981; Dembo et al., 1985).
Changing family structures and distressing societal concerns also indicate the increased need for parent education (Roehl et al., 1985). Divorce and remarriage have created single parent families and blended families (Roehl et al., 1985; Sherrets et al., 1980; Getz & Gunn, 1988). The societal issues of alcohol and drug abuse, premarital sex, and teenage pregnancy also press at parents (Henry, 1981; Roehl et al., 1985; Getz & Gunn, 1988).

Due to these varied family structural and societal changes Roehl et al. (1985) stated that parenting education was needed now more than ever. They reported that parents were decreasing the amount of time spent guiding and nurturing. Henry (1981) agreed and stated that there was a need for more effective parenting in order to have the same impact as in the past. In addition, Dembo et al. (1985) reported Bigner's (1979) argument that the modeling previously learned from adults' own parents is inadequate to deal with the problems of contemporary society.

Not only was the need for increased parent education recognized by professionals, parents, too, have responded to parent education with increased interest. As parents underwent family transitions and struggles, they sought new information, guidance, and support (Luckey, 1967; Cooney, 1981; Strother & Jacobs, 1986).
Parents have turned to a multitude of sources for guidance (Sherrets et al., 1980; Cooney, 1981). Although parent educators were traditionally home economists, social workers, psychologists or nurses, the variety of parent education programs used in the last two decades have justified the use of many types of facilitators. Nonprofessionals, teachers, the clergy, medical personnel, and social scientists have all been involved in parent education leadership (Sherrets et al., 1980; Cooney, 1981; Summerlin & Ward, 1981).

The developmental emphasis of elementary school counselors combined with their preventative intervention rather than remediation, have placed them in an ideal position to become involved in parent education (Dinkmeyer, 1966; Luckey, 1967). Since the mid 1960s school counselors at all levels have worked with parents and families to provide appropriate services including parent education (Luckey, 1967; Judah, 1978; Cooney, 1981; Getz & Gunn, 1988).

Teaching parent education has become a role accepted by many counselors (Cooney, 1981; Getz & Gunn, 1988). The advantage of the training format was that it offered greater efficiency and capacity to meet client needs (Johnson & Katz, 1973; O'Dell, 1974; Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1974; Fears, 1976). Utilizing parent education models, counselors could provide information to increase parenting competencies to a great
number of parents; thus allowing parents to impact their children's development in more supportive and preventative manners (O'Dell, 1974; Henry, 1981).

With the wide diversity of parent education programs proliferating across our nation, a strong "belief" has developed in the efficacy of parent education (Tramontana et al., 1980). The question as to whether adults do benefit from programs designed to teach them how to parent has become a subject for debate and a great amount of research (Henry, 1981; Dembo et al., 1985).

The purpose of this study is to review three prominent group parent education approaches to ascertain critical issues for consideration in implementation of group parent education. Each of the three approaches: Parent Effectiveness Training (PET), the behavioral approach to parent education, and the Adlerian parent study group will be examined in the areas of program components, goals, methods of instruction, leadership, and research outcomes. The main emphasis will be on research outcomes.

A variety of labels have been applied to group programs established to educate parents. Labels utilized include parent education (Luckey, 1967; Frazier & Matthes, 1975; Getz & Gunn, 1988); Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) (Gordon, 1970); parent classes (Larson, 1972); parent study groups
(Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1974); family education (McDonough, 1976); and parent training programs (Henry, 1981; Gerler & Merrell, 1985).

These terms are often used interchangeably in parent education literature. In this review the term parent education will be used as a general term in reference to programs which attempt to improve parent child relations. Parent education then refers to the process of helping parents achieve some of the following goals: develop greater self-awareness, use effective discipline methods, improve parent-child communication, make family life more enjoyable, and provide useful information on child development (Dembo et al., 1985).

Parent Effectiveness Training

Program Description

Parent Effectiveness Training is a program in which a variety of techniques are used to improve parent-child relations. It was developed by Thomas Gordon (1970) and is based on the work of Carl Rogers. The training emphasis is on learning human relations strategies. These strategies include the use of active listening, sending "I messages," and a "no lose" method of conflict resolution (Rinn & Markle, 1977; Henry, 1981, & Dembo et al., 1985). These skills are taught through lectures, readings, roleplaying, and homework exercises.
Active listening is defined as the ability to listen to another's problems in an accepting manner without judgment. Parents are trained to identify twelve roadblocks to communication such as ordering, threatening, lecturing, criticizing, and praising. "I-messages" are taught to parents to help change children's behavior without damaging self esteem. Three methods for conflict resolution are presented with Method III being deemed most effective. Method I is authoritarian; Method II is permissive; and Method III is democratic (Rinn & Markle, 1977).

Goals for the program stress "improved relations." As parents acquire PET skills, both parents and children learn to search for mutually acceptable solutions to problems (Larson, 1972; Rinn & Markle, 1977).

PET groups meet in weekly three hour sessions. These sessions are led by persons who have been trained and certified by Effectiveness Training Associates (EFTA) (Dembo et al., 1985). Henry (1981) stated that these leaders are the only instructors given official sanction to lead PET groups. Programs are then executed on a franchise basis with a portion of parent fees returning to EFTA.

Review of PET Research

Rinn and Markle (1977) critically evaluated fifteen studies on PET made available since 1970. Of these studies
only one was published. Rinn and Markle found overall research on PET to be limited in scope and inadequate in design. None of the studies they reviewed possessed the methodological rigor necessary for informed judgments regarding the effectiveness of PET as a parent education strategy. Rinn and Markle noted a lack of random assignments of subjects to treatment conditions; a strong reliance on self-report data; inappropriate statistical procedures; inadequate control groups; and an absence of long-term follow ups. They found that the data available on PET did not support the assumption that Parent Effectiveness Training is effective. The authors noted the need for a comprehensive evaluation of PET that would assess both process and outcome variables. Thorough process evaluation would include an examination of the degree to which critical aspects of PET had been presented, learned, and performed. Outcome evaluations for PET were also recommended to find out if parents' and children's attitudes, feelings, and behaviors toward each other do change.

Henry (1981) stated that very little research had been published which addressed the efficacy of the PET program. His findings were congruent with those of Markle and Rinn (1977).

In another comprehensive review of group parent education Dembo et al., (1985) included eighteen PET studies, three of
which were published. The authors reported that PET research generally involved mothers or couples in a standard eight-week program using Gordon's (1975) PET book and were led by a certified PET instructor. The program's effectiveness was assessed by focusing primarily on changes in parents' child-rearing attitudes. The results were mixed. Little independent observer or parent recorded data of children's behavior was found in the evaluations. Dembo et al. (1985) also noted many methodological problems including lack of randomization, reliance on self report data and single outcome measures, absence of control groups, use of inappropriate statistical procedures, possible experimenter bias, and lack of long-term follow up.

The Dembo et al. (1985) research recommended that PET would benefit from some well-designed research and evaluation investigations. The author found it "difficult to determine whether the inconclusive findings in the studies reviewed were due to inadequate or faulty research methodology and/or inappropriate assessment techniques, or to ineffective educational procedures" (p. 178).

The Behavioral Approach to Group Parent Education

Program Description

Behavioral parent education utilizes many different kinds of programs, materials, and formats (Cooney, 1981;
Henry, 1981; Dembo et al., 1985). Behavioral components usually include teaching knowledge of behavior modification on a verbal level and teaching actual behavioral skills on the part of the parent. The approach emphasized behavioral skills by the shaping of specific parent behaviors to modify their reactions to their children's behaviors (O'Dell, 1974). Instruction was given on social and non-social reinforcers, observation and recording procedures, and techniques to strengthen or weaken behaviors according to desirability. Group discussion, didactic instruction modeling, behavioral rehearsal, homework assignments, contracts with parents, films, and feedback were all used to train parents (O'Dell, 1974; Dembo et al., 1985).

The purpose of the behavioral approach was to train parents in behavioral methods of child management in the interest of prevention and solution of problems. O'Dell (1974) stated, "There does not appear to be any class of overt child behaviors that parents can not be trained to modify" (p. 421). The literature represented diverse applications including modification of children's aggressiveness, toilet training, sibling fighting, withdrawal, tantrums, noncompliance, mealtime behavior, and school phobia to name a few (O'Dell, 1974).
Format in relation to number of sessions, session length, and leadership qualifications varied greatly. The parent group was comprised of four to twelve parents and focused on elementary and middle school children (O'Dell, 1974). There were no clear guidelines given for trainer qualifications.

Review of the Behavioral Approach Research

On the basis of Henry's (1981) study of the current dimensions of parent training he stated that the behavioral approach to parent training was well supported in terms of empirical research, but was limited because such programs typically focus only on observable behaviors of children. This focus routinely ignored parent attitudes and feelings and parent-child communications. He also reported that this approach worked best for parents of young or handicapped children due to the inability of parents to manage all the contingencies of the adolescent's total environment. The program's neglect of parent-child communications also limited its effect with adolescents.

Henry (1981) cited studies by Johnson and Katz (1973) and O'Dell (1974) as examples of excellent literature reviews supporting the efficacy of behavioral parent training. Henry qualified that statement by reporting that treatment effects obtained through parent training, however, have proven difficult to generalize across behaviors, settings, and time.
Dembo et al. (1985) included the study of fifteen behavioral training investigations in their review. The authors found that the typical behavioral research studies included middle-class mothers trained by a PhD or a master's level psychologist for a period of eighteen to twenty hours to deal with their male acting out children ranging in age from three to ten years. More favorable outcomes were found for parents with middle class socio-economic status than for lower class parents where less favorable outcomes were evident.

Dembo et al. (1985) noted that investigators found it difficult to match subjects on all relevant variables. Yet, multiple assessment procedures, including independent observer, parent recorded, and parent attitude data used by investigators were lauded. Positive results were rarely noted across all types of measures. Usually the outcomes yielded mixed results that varied according to the type of assessment used. Parent recorded and independent observer data yielded the most favorable results. Parent attitude/questionnaire measures yielded less favorable results. Investigations that provided follow-up data maintained successful outcomes in approximately three-fourths of the studies.
The Adlerian Parent Study Group

Program Description

The program stems from the work of Alfred Adler. As stated by Fears (1976) Adler's theories are utilized in the works of Dreikurs, Dinkmeyer, and others to formulate the purpose and content of the parent study groups.

In the Adlerian approach the behavior of children was seen as purposeful and goal-oriented; misbehavior was likewise goal-oriented (Henry, 1981). Behavior was viewed as a means to gain attention, display power, obtain revenge, or display inadequacy. Misbehavior is considered a misguided attempt to achieve a sense of belonging in the family unit.

Dembo et al. (1985) stated that the goal of this approach was to help parents understand the behavior of their children and the motives for their actions. Henry (1981) added that parents in the Adlerian groups were taught to incorporate cooperative rather than competitive family structure based on democratic principles of child-rearing.

Adlerian parent study groups met weekly for eight to ten weeks. Sessions were 1 to 1 1/2 hours in length. Ten to twelve parents were considered to be adequate for a parent study group (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1974). Each week parents were assigned appropriate parent literature (often by Dreikurs). At weekly meetings the readings and experiences
each group member faced during the week were discussed with a trained facilitator (Dembo et al., 1985).

Dinkmeyer and McKay (1974) stressed the importance of effective facilitation by the group leaders. Group leaders were encouraged to consider structure and organization and provide proper feedback, linking, redirection, questioning, and encouragement.

**Review of the Adlerian Parent Study Group Research**

Henry (1981) found very little evaluative research published on Adlerian parent training. Available research including Freeman (1975), and McDonough (1976), and Moore and Dean-Zubritsky (1979) found success in changing parent attitudes, child rearing practices, and child behavior as measured by parent completed check lists. Henry (1981) reported a study by McBrien (1979) suggesting the need to assess parents' ability to read Dreikursian parenting literature due to its average tenth grade reading level.

Overall, Henry (1981) reported the Adlerian approach to be well received by parents and appropriate for use with children of all ages. Henry reviewed four studies (Berrett, 1975; Freeman, 1975; McDonough, 1976; and Moore & Dean-Zubritsky, 1979) noting positive changes in parent attitudes, childrearing practices, and child behavior as measured by parent-completed check lists. The content was
considered well-balanced in terms of communications and disciplinary techniques.

Dembo's et al. (1985) evaluation of Adlerian Parent Education reviewed seven studies using parent study groups as the primary instructional method and three studies that used Systematic Training for Effective Parenting, a modification of Adlerian procedures. The major instruments used to assess change in the study groups were the Attitude Toward Freedom of Children (ATFC II) (Shaw & Wright, 1967), Child Rearing Practices Scale (CRPS) (Freeman, 1975), and Children's Behavior Checklist (CBC) (Freeman, 1975). Parent attitude measures generally indicated that childrearing attitudes were positively influenced by Adlerian parent education programs, but there was little indication that children's behavior changed due to parents' education (Dembo et al., 1985).

Little information was reported on parent and child characteristics in the Adlerian parent study groups. Once again methodological and measurement problems were noted by Dembo et al. (1985). The lack of random assignment, improper use of control groups, minimal follow-up data, and limited specificity in describing procedures for collecting and reporting independent observer data all limited the significance of results.
An important finding in the Freeman (1975) study related to the use of a placebo control group. In this treatment mothers simply presented their concerns each week with no set curriculum used. The parent education group was not found superior to the discussion group although it was found superior to no treatment group. This finding suggests that perhaps what parents need is a program of any kind that prompts them to think about and discuss their roles as parents (Tramontana et al., 1980).

Fears (1976) noted that following participation in the Adlerian parent study some parents reported less agreement with their spouses about child-raising techniques. In most cases only one parent from a family attended making the decrease in agreement worth noting. Fears encouraged simultaneous participation of both parents.

Comparison Studies Research

Tramontana (1980) identified two studies which directly compared theoretical approaches. In reviewing the comparison study of PET and Adlerian parent study groups by Anchor and Thomason (1977), Tramontana (1980) reported no significant findings of effectiveness for either approach on highly educated parents. In the second study, Tramontana (1980) reported that Frazier and Matthes (1975) found the Adlerian approach to be superior to the behavioral approach in some
outcome areas. Tramontana, however, stated that the nature of the assessments made seemed to be biased in favor of the Adlerian approach.

Dembo et al. (1985) identified five comparison studies: four published and one unpublished. The studies included the Frazier and Matthes (1975) and the Anchor and Thomason (1977) studies along with three other studies (Williams & Sanders, 1973; Schofield, 1979; and Pinsker & Geoffrey, 1981) which compared PET with the behavioral approach. These investigations failed to find differential effectiveness of any one educational program over the others.

Dembo et al. (1985) supported Tramontana et al. (1980) by concluding that "the search for the most effective parent education program has been nonproductive" (p. 183). The authors found the selection of instruments to compare outcomes in the different approaches as an important concern. Each of the orientations had different goals and objectives which could lead to some bias in instrument selection.

Future Research Implications

Dembo et al. (1985) questioned the basic conceptualization of PET, Adlerian parent study groups, and the behavioral group approach citing that each program was based on unidirectional interaction models in which the parent was the change agent while the child was the target of change.
Dembo et al. (1985) stated that there was extensive literature (Bell & Harper, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) indicating that parent-child interaction is much more complex than the common parent education unidirectional approach. Dembo et al. (1985) also cited Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development which emphasizes that each member of a family influences the others as another important consideration in parent education conceptualization.

Other concerns addressed by Dembo et al. (1985) focused on the failure of these parent education programs to involve "both" parents or caretakers of the child(ren), to assess parent/family needs before beginning the educational program, and to consider parent perceptions of their roles and the processes they need to experience in order to be effective parents.

Getz and Gunn (1988) reiterated the concern that parent education design and research have generally not addressed the family system and the effect of parent education programs on the entire family. The authors stated that parents and children are involved in a process of mutual influence that most parent education programs ignore.

Getz and Gunn (1988) cited Student Effectiveness Training (Getz & Morrill, 1978) as a program which attempted to balance FET parent training by teaching the students similar skills.
No results of the matching program's effectiveness were reported.

Common research problems were identified in many of the studies (Tramontana et al., 1980; Henry, 1981; Dembo et al., 1985). Concerns included lack of randomization of subjects, absence or inappropriate use of control groups, failure to collect process data, and limited long-term follow-up designs. There was no solid base of research from which to generalize.

Tramontana et al. (1980), Henry (1981), and Dembo et al. (1985) addressed future implications for group parent education implementation and empirical evaluation. Effective evaluation and measurement issues were linked to a variety of factors in parent education program selection and implementation. Factors included were parent's and children's characteristics, such as ethnicity, socio-economic status, age, and family design; program goals and facilitation orientation; pre and post assessment to address entry level parent knowledge and needs; methods of delivery (lecture, speakers, audiovisual presentations, demonstrations and modeling techniques, laboratory sessions, and one-to-one instruction); group size and composition, and instructor skills and style (Tramontana et al., 1980; Henry, 1981; Dembo et al., 1985).
To address this variety of factors Tramontana et al. (1980) and Dembo et al. (1985) recommended further development of the process and evaluation components of parent education studies. The process variables should answer the following questions:

Does the instructor actually teach the appropriate content?
Do parents acquire the skills?
Do parents increase the use of the skills within their homes?

The evaluation variables should be able to validate parent education effectiveness across behaviors, settings, and times by answering these questions:

Do parents' attitudes and feelings toward their children change?
Do children's attitudes towards their parents change?
Do children's and parents' behaviors change?

Discussion

The literature review regarding critical issues for consideration in implementation of group parent education as related to the studies of three prominent parent education programs (Parent Effectiveness Training, the behavioral approach to parent education, and the Adlerian parent study group) has revealed that there are not enough well-designed
studies to draw definite conclusions and implications about the general effectiveness of parent education or whether one type of program is more beneficial than another. Johnson and Katz (1973), O'Dell (1974), Rinn and Markle (1977), Tramontana et al. (1980), Henry (1981), and Dembo et al. (1985) all found that few studies approached all or most of the criteria for a well-designed investigation.

The perceived effectiveness of a program often depended on the type of assessment used positioned with the educational approach used. The behavioral approach was recommended for parents with elementary and middle school children when the focus was on changing observable behaviors (Henry, 1981), while the Adlerian approach, which presented a well-balanced content of communication skills and disciplinary techniques, was regarded as appropriate for children of all age levels (Henry, 1981; Dembo et al., 1985). The PET approach was not considered well-suited for parents working with young children (Henry, 1981). The content of the PET approach appeared to be less substantiative than the Adlerian or behavioral approaches (Rinn & Markle, 1977; Henry, 1981; Dembo et al., 1985).

Based on this literature review the need for and the acceptance of parent education are documented; yet there are still many variables to be addressed. Parent education shows
some promise as a means of prevention and intervention, but its effectiveness has yet to be empirically demonstrated (O'Dell, 1974; Tramontana et al., 1980; Henry, 1981; Dembo et al., 1985). Although there is improvement in the quality of research utilized in parent education, further definitive studies are needed to appraise the comparative efficacy of different approaches and techniques employed in parent education.
References


