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Parent Education: A Historical Perspective and the Perceptions of Parent Education Facilitators toward Program Participation in Iowa

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Parent Education: A Historical Perspective and the Perceptions of Parent Education Facilitators toward Program Participation in Iowa

PARENT EDUCATION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND
THE PERCEPTIONS OF PARENT EDUCATION FACILITATORS
TOWARD PROGRAM PARTICIPATION IN IOWA

An Abstract Submitted In
Partial Fulfillment
Of The Requirements For The Degree
Master of Arts

Marisa Rivera
University of Northern Iowa
July 1992

Abstract

This study was designed to provide a historical perspective of parent education and to identify barriers to participation as they relate to Iowa. This study came about as a result of the low response level to parent education programs in the Cedar Falls/Waterloo community.

The study was specifically limited to 22 parent education facilitators who are members of the Iowa Chapter, National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse. A questionnaire was designed which gathered parent education facilitator's perceptions of barriers to participation with regard to their respective programs. The respondents were also asked: (a) how those barriers are addressed, (b) type of program utilized by the agency, (c) makeup of their target audience, (d) community awareness of parent education programs (e) availability of parent education programs, (f) identification of barriers to program participation and how those barriers are addressed, (g) the percentage of participants who complete the program and what percentage of them are mandated or voluntary, (h) the number of participants involved at any given time, (i) the qualifications of program facilitators and whether they are paid or volunteer and, (j) the method of program evaluation. The reported barriers were: (a) the time commitment required by programs is too extensive, (b) parents feel that attending parent education programs is admitting failure,

(c) apathy of parents towards children and the amount of time required by parents to build effective communication and relationship skills, (d) securing child care, transportation, and language.

PARENT EDUCATION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE AND
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Finally and most importantly, I thank God for answering my prayers and giving me the endurance and inner strength to change my life.

This Study by: Marisa Rivera

Entitled: Parent Education: A Historical Perspective and
the Perceptions of Parent Education Facilitators
Towards Barriers to Participation in Iowa
has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Children are this country's most valuable resource. They are the hope for the future. So, why were over 2.7 million cases of child abuse and neglect reported in the United States in 1991 (National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse)? The problem has reached epidemic proportion. Can society continue to turn away from these children as they are scarred both mentally and physically? The incidence of child abuse is one which does not discriminate against color or socio-economic level. It can happen to any one. The causes are varied and many, but what can be done to deter the problem and make a difference?

According to Bavolek, parenting is learned (J. Hartz-East, personal communication, March 12, 1992). Parent education provides purposive learning activities to parents who are attempting to change their method of interaction with their children for the purpose of encouraging positive behavior in their children (Croake & Glover, 1977, p. 151). Parent education programs provide education and information to parents about what to expect at various ages and developmental stages; how to manage children; how to deal with the stresses and frustrations which children often present; and assist parents in establishing and maintaining nurturing parenting skills and relationships with their

children and within their families (Governor's Advisory Council on the Child Abuse Prevention Program, 1992).

The purpose of this study was to identify the variables which are perceived to be barriers to participation in parent education programs. The identification of these variables will help in determining ways in which programs can be designed to meet the needs of specific target populations as well as whether each respective program is accomplishing their goals. With funds within the non-profit sector becoming scarce, it is important to have knowledge of these variables in order to provide accountability to funding sources as well as to other human service agencies. A wide range of research questions were addressed: Do the children and the parents participate in the program together or is it just for one of the two groups? Parents and children need to work together in developing and maintaining a positive relationship. Many of the more successful programs follow this belief. Who is the target audience? The needs of those in low socio-economic situations are different than those in the middle and upper middle class. Should those needs must be addressed differently? How many parents starting a program complete it? If those wanting or needing services are not completing the program, why not? Is there something wrong with the approach of the program presentation? Perhaps the commitment expected is too long.

What are the qualifications of the facilitators? Are the facilitators experienced and comfortable teaching people and are they presenting the information appropriately? These answers are important because they will give credibility to the programs, the program's existence and its continued funding. Although programs exist in Cedar Falls/Waterloo which address strengthening the family, agency directors, funding committees and program facilitators in Black Hawk County voiced concern over the limited levels of participation and program attrition of those programs. It is important to investigate those variables which may prohibit successful program implementation and enhance those variables which foster successful programs.

The hypothesis for this study was that the barriers to participation are associated with the way in which the programs are designed and implemented. Like children, parents have different developmental stages as well as life circumstances and experiences. A program which would work well with a suburban career mother is unlikely to be effective with a teenage mother in a rural area or a single-parent father in a large city. Even parents with similar characteristics, however, often have difficulty understanding the most important attributes of a parent program (Powell, 1986, p. 49). The implementation process of a program may be as important as the curriculum content.

More specifically though, the study addressed the following questions:

1. Does the public's attitude toward parent education programs create a barrier to participation?
2. Is there awareness of the existence of parent education programs offered in the community?
3. Is availability (scheduling) of parent education programs a barrier to participation by parents?
4. Is one program approach more effective than others in the parent education process?

Statement Of The Problem

The purpose of this study was to identify the variables which were perceived by parent education facilitators as barriers to participation in parent education programs. This study was a result of professional concern by parent education facilitators regarding the low number of program participants in Cedar Falls/Waterloo. Forces such as parents, schools and agencies have influenced the recent increase of interest in parent education programs. There is concern over the increase of pressure on today's families because of greater participation in the work force among mothers; geographic mobility which breaks up the extended family and friendship ties; divorce rates; and economic uncertainties. Second, intervention programs highlight the importance of parents in facilitating their children's

development. In Bronfenbrenner's (1974) report on early intervention, he argued that it was more effective when parents were involved in parent education programs. Third, the impact family life has on a child's development, as well as the quality of existing social conditions and support systems has emerged as a tremendous research interest (Parke, 1984). In order to improve upon the quality of childrearing and increase the prevention of abuse, parents must be encouraged to participate in parent education programs and complete them. Only then will children cease to be at the mercy of their caretakers.

Significance Of The Study

This study was designed to identify the variables which influence participation in parent education programs. One organization which is committed to making a difference is the Family and Children's Council of Black Hawk County, Inc. located in Waterloo, Iowa. This study was a result of the low response level to parent education programs in Cedar Falls/Waterloo. The agency was interested in determining if other programs in the Iowa Chapter of the National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPA) were experiencing the same low response level.

The mission of the Family and Children's Council is "to prevent child abuse and to strengthen families." The Council is comprised of professional and private citizens

who are working together to help prevent the devastation of child abuse and encourage the essence of family. The Council defines family as any group of people connected by relationship of either shared genetics or commitment.

The finding of the study will impact the Family and Children's Council development and funding of programming which addresses the enhancement of relationships between parents and children. Research indicates that educating parents as to the development levels of their children will help ameliorate the incidence of abuse (Powell, 1986). The question remains, "why is it that despite programming availabilities, relationships between parents and children continue to be tense?" Although reports of child abuse in our society are increasing, funding sources for programming are becoming more scarce. It is important for program developers, facilitators and agencies to become responsive to addressing the needs of parent education participants. The results of this study will help agencies realize the benefits and value of collaboration and the strength of the network process. The collaboration among agencies will serve to avoid duplication of services, cut back on expenditures and to bring about programming which will meet the needs of those seeking it.

Assumptions

This study was conducted under the following assumptions:

1. The questionnaire design was appropriate and obtained the necessary information.
2. The program facilitators understood the survey questions.
3. The survey was a valid instrument for obtaining the desired information.
4. The findings of this study are only applicable to Cedar Falls/Waterloo or areas similar to it.
5. This study was the only one done in Iowa.

Delimitations

This study is delimited to:

1. The use of a self-report questionnaire to determine the perceived barriers to success of selected parent education programs.
2. Twenty-two facilitators belonging to the Iowa Chapter of the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse.

Limitations

The following limitations were identified for this study:

1. Facilitators' responding to the survey questions were interpreted appropriately.

2. Facilitators' responding to the survey questions answered them honestly.

Definition Of Terms

Parent Education--purposive learning activities of parents who are attempting to change their method of interaction with their children for the purpose of encouraging positive behavior in their children.

Parent Involvement--inclusiveness of parents into decisions of services, workshops or needs that will benefit them or their children.

Child Abuse/Child Neglect--is any action or inaction that results in the harm or potential risk of harm to a child.

Parents--an adult who has a commitment to a child as defined by the state.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to identify the variables which elicit participation in parent education programs. The concept of parents being involved in the education of their children is not new. Since prehistoric times parents have been their children's first educators. The roots of parent involvement and parent education today are a result of parent involvement and parent education of yesterday. The direction that parent participation takes tomorrow will be influenced by changes in the future as well as by the events of the past (Berger, 1991, p. 209). It is for this reason that the related literature is presented as follows: (a) historical background, (b) parent education today (c) challenge for the 90s, (d) factors which affect parent participation, and (e) summary.

Historical Background

As long ago as prehistoric times, parents were the most important educators of their children (Berger, 1991, p. 210). Before history was recorded, evidence indicates that parents were nurturers and educators of their children through modeling, care giving, and guidance. The skills and values of children were influenced by the life experiences of the parents', the environment in which they lived, and the culture. No formal education existed other than what

was offered by the immediate family, extended family and their clan.

Civilization progressed and children continued to receive their primary education in the home; as time went on, though, formal education outside the home was added. The first formal education outside the home originated in Egypt in the Middle Kingdom, 3787-1580 B.C. (Berger, 1991, p. 210).

In Greek society, children were seen as the future-- the bearers of the culture (Berger, 1991, p. 210). How children were guided was important. There were regulations governing schools and parent responsibilities in the sixth century B.C. Plato felt that what was said and done in the presence of children would influence their character and that children should not be allowed to hear casual tales spoken by casual people. Both Plato and Aristotle suggested that the care given by adults affected the child's developmental characteristics, a view similar to Locke's description of the child as a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) (Locke, 1989, p. 83). In Greek society, good care and education of the child was for the benefit of the state, not the family. Children were society's hope for the future; they needed to be guided properly.

During the Middle Ages, as the Roman Empire declined, a feudal system emerged which provided a protective and

restrictive social order (Handel, 1988, p. 22). The period between 400-1400 A.D. was a period of family survival. Formal education was maintained by the church and basic skills were taught by the parents. Infancy was from birth through age 7, at which time children were expected to participate as little adults.

In Western societies, by the seventeenth century, childhood was considered to be a special time. The importance of interaction between children and their parents as well as care-givers emerged as significant. "It is the nature of everything that comes into being, that while tender it is easily bent and formed, but that, when it has grown hard, it is not easy to alter. Wax, when soft, can be easily fashioned and shaped; when hard it cracks readily" (Comenius, 1657/1967, p. 58).

Just as Aristotle before him, John Locke (1632-1704) believed in the importance of parents as care-givers. For example, in his book, Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693), he discusses many issues of parenting and the responsibilities parents have toward their children. He warned parents, "You must do nothing before him, which you would not have him imitate" (p. 133). Locke felt that those who could not participate as parents of their children should relinquish any rights to them because children needed the proper environment in order to become productive adults.

The current emphasis on parent education can be seen in the writings of Rousseau (1712-1778) and Pestalozzi (1747-1827). In Rousseau's writings he describes children as needing freedom to grow unspoiled by society, and he warned mothers to "cultivate, water the young plant before it dies. Its fruits will one day be your delights. . . . Plants are shaped by cultivation and men by education" (p. 38). In other words, raising children is an ongoing process which needs attention and nurturing in order for children to grow, develop and lead fruitful lives.

Greatly influenced by Rousseau's books was Pestalozzi (1747-1827). He spent his life teaching and helping children in need and recognized the importance of the mother. He viewed her as the child's first educator. "As the mother is the first to nourish her child's body, so should she, by God's order, be the first to nourish his mind" (Pestalozzi, 1951, p. 26).

Childrearing theories in the United States were based on European ideas. There were three theories apparent in the nineteenth century. The first one was based on the Calvinist doctrine of infant depravity which required strict guidance by parents and obedience by the child. The second, which was implemented in the United States, was influenced by Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel, who all believed in a child's natural goodness. Froebel (1887) believed that the

family's care and nurturing were important. Because Froebel felt that parents were an important part of early education, parent involvement in the kindergarten movement was instituted. "Thus maternal instinct and love gradually introduced the child to his little outside world, proceeding from the whole to the part, from the near to the remote" (Froebel, 1887, p. 66). The third, was a result of John Locke's perspective of children being influenced by the environment, paved the way for education intervention.

Settlement houses came into existence as a result of the surge of immigrants entering the United States. This became an avenue of teaching immigrants the dominant culture's ways as well as health habits, neatness, industry, and nutrition. Along with this came additional support systems. First, women's groups began to form, including American Association of University Women (1882), the Congress of Parents and Teachers, the PTA (1897) and the National Association of Colored Women (1897). These incorporated the study of children into their educational programs. The second support system was the evolution of the researcher. These people would work together with the associations in bringing forth knowledge of children as well as working toward the passage of child labor laws, pure food and drug acts, and housing legislation (Schlossman, 1976).

The interest in children found its way into professional organizations such as the American Home Economics Association, federal programs, college research, independent sources, public schools, and the media. The increased attention to children's early education included putting forth child care and nutrition programs. In an attempt to share childrearing practices with parents, the media began to reach an even larger audience through printed publications.

The 1920s

In the 1920s, mainstream immigrants decreased due to the restrictions placed by the legislature on the number allowed into the United States. Many of the new parent education programs were not established for immigrants but for middle-class parents who wanted to become enlightened as to developmental as well as health related concerns. Membership in PTA's grew from 190,000 in 1920 to almost 1,500,000 in 1930 (Schlossman, 1976). With sponsorship by the Child Study Association of America, the first parent education university course at Columbia University took place in 1920 (Whipple, 1929). This organization went from 56 parent groups in 1926 to 135 in 1927 (Whipple, 1929). The importance given to parent education during this period is demonstrated by the emergence of study groups, curriculum guides, and the formation in 1925 of the National Council of

Parent Education. Until 1938, the council continued to use its influence to establish parent programs through federal agencies, conference leadership, and advice to parent education groups. Due to the turmoil and the lack of funds brought on by the crash of 1929, the priority for parent education was reduced. This was caused by a number of upheavals in industry as well as the economy. However, school and government continued to support parent education.

The 1930s

In 1930 a conference attended by 4,000 education specialists was held in Washington, D.C. These specialists recommended that educational associations and organizations and the educational departments of several states be requested to study the possibilities of organizing parent education as part of the public school system.

The hope of these specialists was that:

1. Parents would learn appropriate ways of raising their children through parent education programs.
2. Parents would change their attitudes toward their children.
3. Parents would improve their own adjustment to stressful situations.
4. Parents would understand social and economic issues.

5. A forum would provide parents the ability to verbalize ideas of the norms of society and their ability to adapt to them.

6. An understanding of the functions and purposes of education would be provided (Pennsylvania Department of Public Instruction, 1935).

These objectives were developed with the intent of helping not only European immigrants but the indigent poor in the United States leaving the farm for the city. This was represented by the movement of southern blacks, the immigration of Puerto Ricans to New York, the Chicano in the Southwestern United States, and the Appalachian poor (Gordon, 1977, p. 72).

Agencies such as The Works Progress Administration offered an avenue for parents to learn about home management practices; the Federal Emergency Relief Administration allowed work-relief (unemployment) for unemployed teachers to organize and direct nursery schools.

The 1940s

The 1940s brought with it not only World War II but a dramatic change in childrearing practices (Berger, 1991, p. 214). Due to the war, women going into the work force became a common occurrence. This is one of the first indicators of change in the family structure; the "nuclear family" (father, mother, and children) became threatened by

war. Women were forced to leave the home to work and to hold the family together while their husbands served their country. The need for child care services outside the home became a necessity which facilitated a mother's ability to work and help in the war effort.

The 1950s

The 50s became known as the "baby boom era." The returned of husband from the war brought with it a boom of babies being born within the nine months of its termination. With World War II over, families proceeded with their lives and the emphasis of family returned. In 1957 Benjamin Spock wrote "The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care"; this focused on raising healthy children. Spock believed that children given the proper guidance were able to self-regulate their actions. Erik Erikson (1960) introduced the need for children to be nurtured early in life in order that they would achieve the necessary mental health to develop trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry.

In 1953 the Department of Health, Education & Welfare was established with the Social Security Administration, the Office of Education, and the Public Health Service under its umbrella (Brim, 1965). Within the Social Security Administration was the Children's Bureau. Working through state social services and maternal and child health

programs, the Division of Health trained nurses to be leaders in parent education.

The 50s were time for regrouping after the depression and the war. It was also the beginning of the civil rights movement to obtain rights for African Americans. In 1954 the court ruling of *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* stated that separate schooling was not equal (Berger, 1991, p. 214). Implementation and changes in the segregation of schools were slow to take place. Opportunities for parents of low socioeconomic status did not begin to take shape until the 1960s. Even today, parents who are in a low socioeconomic status contend with many of the same pressures of the 50s which are compounded by other social issues such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and economic oppression.

The 1960s

The standard of living in the United States had improved to the highest in the world, but minorities, the disabled, and the economically disadvantaged were still underemployed, poverty stricken, and ignored (Berger, 1987, p. 65). The Civil Rights Act of 1965 came about due to the prevalence of racism and its effect on African Americans. Even when African Americans did assimilate into the dominant society's norms, they were still not accepted as equals.

A change within the educational system began to take place in the mid 60s in the form of the Head Start Program

in 1965 (Berger, 1991, p. 215). Head Start consisted of three components: (a) Head Start Center Committee, (b) Head Start Policy Committee for the delegate agency, and/or (c) Head Start Policy Council (for the grantee funded by the federal government). By including parents on Head Start committees, educators were provided with insight as to the needs and desires which would empower parents in their decision making process. Head Start educators recognized the importance and feasibility of diverse cultural backgrounds and to draw from the richness of the diversity. Educators leading Head Start realized that "all people" have cultures and that children, rather than being deprived, are of diverse cultures. The last emphasis during this time was on support for the whole family, services which focused on health, social concerns, and career ladders.

The 1970s

During the 70s the programs begun in the 60s continued to flourish. Programs such as Parent and Child Centers, Home Start, Parent Child Development Centers, Title I, Follow Through, and those brought about by Public Law 94-142 (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act) brought about the inclusion of parents on their boards. The passage of Public Law 94-142 (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act) came about when it was discovered that one million children and youth with disabilities were receiving

no education at all (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1989). With the passage of this law, parental participation in the program development for handicapped children (the Individualized Education Programs [IEP]) was encouraged. In 1986 the passage of Public Law 99-457 included an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). This change was made in order to not only meet the needs of each child but the family as well.

Financial support for parent involvement programs came from the federal government and they were strengthened by that support. Whether educated middle-class or immigrant parents there were three main themes in the programs. They were: "(1) the home is important and basic for human development; (2) parents need help in creating the most effective home environment for that development; and (3) the early years of life are important for lifelong development" (Gordon, 1977, p. 72). In addition, Gordon suggested three approaches for parent involvement and parent education: (a) the family impact model, (b) the school impact model, and (c) the community impact model. The family impact model required working with the family members to enable them to cope with the social and educational systems. It worked on the premise that families wanted to be able to participate in the system but did not know how to socialize and help their children acquire the necessary prerequisites for

success; thus, parent education was offered. The school impact model, was based on the idea that teachers learn from parents and parents learn from teachers. "Teachers and school administrators, or any other professional need to learn new attitudes toward parents, new skills in communication and group processes and sharing" (Gordon, 1977, p. 77). The comprehensive, was the community impact model. According to Gordon, it is the one that the powerless are least able to initiate or implement due to the amount of interaction and collaboration required of those involved. It is evident that there are many ways in which to put forth parent education programs: the problem is finding a formula which meets the needs of each individual family. It is important to identify the variables which in today's changing society will elicit parent participation and completion of programming. During this time, evaluations of research programs began to be reported in the literature.

The 1980s

The 80s brought responses by the U. S. Office of Education in Washington, DC, and individual public schools responding to the need for parents' involvement in their children's education. The encouragement for collaboration of home-school involvement came from both professional educators and public agencies.

A leadership role was taken by the schools in developing models of successful parent-school collaboration. The encouragement of developing reading skills at home was prevalent. In Becoming a Nation of Readers: What Parents Can Do by M. R. Binkley (1988) told parents, "Contrary to popular opinion, learning to read does not begin in school. Learning to read begins at home" (Binkley, p. 1). This book was a result of a report conducted by the Commission on Reading. The report indicated that preschool children should not only be read to by their parents but should informally be taught about writing and that this should continue throughout the growth process. In addition, Family Math and Family Science programs also demonstrated the difference families do make in the development of a child's skills in these two areas. This was the beginning of substantiating the importance of parent involvement and a child's success in school.

Parent Education Today

In recent years there has been dramatic growth in the number of programs which seek to help parents carry out their childrearing tasks effectively. Approaches in programming vary from discussion groups to drop-in centers to home-based interventions. Despite the recent growth and the long history of parent education, parent programs and their value continue to be questioned by many policy makers,

funding sources, and even some parents the program may wish to serve. The vast variety of programs also brings up questions about the effectiveness of different approaches. What program approaches are most effective? Additionally, there are perennial issues in the field with regard to the difficulty of retaining parents in the programs.

The term parent education typically evokes the image of an expert lecturing a group of mothers about the ages and stages of child development (Powell, 1986). Viewing parent education and support groups as only staff-directed and filled with assorted activities is neither a complete nor accurate portrayal of the many programs of parent education and support. The concept and approaches in the parent education field has broadened and expanded considerably in the past two decades. Literature suggests numerous approaches to parent education, but it should be noted that they are a combination of many approaches. A synthesis of approaches resulted in the following categorization:

1. The Group Approach--education directed to learners organized in a group.
 - (a) A course using presentations, discussions, and possibly some skill building tasks.
 - (b) Group discussions with participants in the learning group determining content and process, and learning primarily from exchange of ideas and experiences of participants.

- (c) Directed observation of children, and group discussions.
- (d) Parent participation and modeling of trained staff-child interaction.

2. Individual Approach--education directed to one parent or one set of parents at one time.

- (a) Provide parents with a home-visitor program.
- (b) Provide a center-based program.

3. Mass Media Approach--education material directed to a large, usually anonymous audience.

- (a) Provide books which will give directional support.
- (b) Provide booklets, small pamphlets and, newsletters.
- (c) Provide magazines and newspapers.
- (d) Put together radio and TV shows.
- (e) Supply educational films and slides.
- (f) Give lectures on related topics in parenting.

The choice of approach is as individual as the needs of those desiring help. Adding to this are the needs of "at-risk" families (this includes families with low income and ethnic diversities) which are different from those of the general population. It is becoming increasingly important to develop partnerships in order to realize active participation among each respective group. Communities need to realize though that because low-income and ethnically diverse families historically have had few linkages with the

schools, many of these parents lack key information and, by virtue of their isolation, are unlikely to approach the school on behalf of their children (Zeldin & Bogart, 1989, p. 5). While research shows that at-risk parents value education and are interested in their children's education, many administrators and teachers believe that this population lacks the interest or skills needed to participate.

In response, many parents have been found to internalize negative beliefs about the group into their own self-image, to feel powerless to support their children's growth, and to view the school as an institution unwilling or unable to develop the strengths in their children (Zeldin & Bogart, 1989, p. 6).

While school support and involvement for their children is only one element of positive, healthy parenting, the significance of a child's educational development and resulting success in life based on the parent's educational support and awareness cannot be overestimated.

It is increasingly suggested that program staff in agencies serve as facilitators of goals and activities jointly determined by parents and program staff, and not as experts who assume they know what is best for parents. Research suggests that parent programs need to maintain a balanced focus on the needs of both parent and child. The

content of parent programs has broadened and expanded in recent years to include significant attention to the social context of parenthood. The substance of this change reflects an interest in the interconnectedness of child, family, and community, and assumes that providing parents with social support in the form of helpful interpersonal relationships and material assistance (if needed) will enhance parent functioning and, ultimately, child development. Efforts in programming to achieve these goals include strengthening of parents' social networks, social support, and community ties as a buffer against stressful life circumstances and transitions. The term "parent support" is a reflection of the change. While there are strong justifications for the change, there is the potential problem that the parents' needs and interests may overshadow program "attention" to the child. Halpern and Larner (1988) indicated that program workers serving high-risk populations tend to become heavily involved in crisis intervention regarding family matters.

Recent developments in parent education and support have resulted in programs being tailored to be responsive to the needs and characteristics of the population being served. The idea that a particular program model can work with almost any parent has given way to an interest in

matching parents to different types of programs. This interest is especially evident in efforts to design programs that are responsive to cultural characteristics and values of ethnic populations, and in programs serving parents living in low income and high risk circumstances.

In high quality programs, a significant amount of program time is devoted to open-ended parent dominated discussion (Powell, 1990). Principles of adult education recommend that programs include a strong experiential component. This is critical, because parents are likely to process new information according to existing beliefs about their child and child development. Discussion provides an opportunity for parents to digest new insights in relation to existing ideas.

In today's ever changing world, it is crucial for educators, parents, policy-makers and communities to find ways to increase communication in order to promote the family's contribution to the development of their child's life skills.

Challenge for the 90s

The 90s have brought with them the complexity and challenges associated with severe social problems. With these problems comes the proliferation of books, movies and prepackaged programs addressing the interest of parents as they become frustrated with childrearing. The demise of the

extended family as a predominant family structure has brought forth fewer inter-generational guidelines and supports for parenting. No longer does the extended family make-up the dynamics of "family." With the increasing work status of women, sex role changes have caused the traditional authority patterns to change. This has also created a greater need for child care and forced corporations to look differently at policies which address maternity/paternity leave. Divorce and remarriage have created single-parent families and step families which need unique services. As children enter adolescence, parents struggle with the fear that their children may encounter the devastation of alcohol, drug abuse, premarital sex and pregnancy.

For parents undergoing family transitions and struggles, guidance, support and direction are sought from within the school system. Oftentimes the school counselor is the individual sought by the parent to help identify the needs and resources as well as the support needed by the family. An increase in teenage pregnancies has increased the number of youth requiring both financial and educational support. Technology has decreased the number of jobs available to unskilled, uneducated persons. The challenge for the future is here, and how it is handled will be crucial to the future not only of the country but of the

children. Schools, parents and society must work together so that the needs of the children will be met successfully. Collaboration and recognition of each groups responsibilities is essential in order to achieve positive results.

Issues which need to be addressed include instruction for young parents which provides them the opportunity to learn about their responsibilities as parents. Another issue is providing positive enriching experiences for children who attend before and after school programs. If this is not done, many children will be left alone and unattended for long periods of time. Youth serving agencies, social service agencies and school systems need to develop a strong network and communication system in order to become aware of local issues which affect children and provide a continuity of care.

The task before the schools, parents and society is a difficult one, which will only be made easier when a strong parent-teacher-community alliance occurs. The experiences of the past can be used to formulate positive action, but it needs to be done now. Everyone must join together in order to provide the children with a productive, safe future.

Factors Which Affect Parent Participation

Observers of parent programs are aware of the various factors which determine the differences in terms of the

amount of participation. There are differences in how parents participate in programs. Some parents relate to staff, while there are some who may focus most of the time spent in a program with other parents (Powell, 1986). There are some parents who make contributions while there are those who do not. Some parents are more receptive to new ideas and activities while others are threatened.

It has been noted that personality often factors into how parents participate in programs. Expressive parents have been observed to be more likely to make verbal contributions and form friendships with others in a program.

Circumstances in a parent's life also influence the extent of their participation. In 1985, Cochran and Henderson determined that program effectiveness varied greatly in relation to ethnic group and family structure. In a study of program participation among mothers who were experiencing a great deal of stress, it was found that they attended less often and were in a group longer before they contributed to group discussions (Cochran & Henderson, 1985). These mothers were also found to take a longer period of time in forming friendship with others within the group.

Due to the changes occurring in family dynamics, (e.g. increase in single parent homes, cultural and language

differences, etc.) research findings now available with regard to program design need to be sensitive to related issues (Powell, 1986, p. 51). One of those issues is the social skills, which are needed in order to encourage productive program participation and contribution to group discussion. A pattern of responses indicates that parents are more likely to believe the program had an impact on them than on their children.

Program designers need to respond to parents and their personal characteristics and life conditions. These are oftentimes important factors which can not be changed or controlled by any programming. It is also unrealistic and perhaps unproductive to expect a parent/s to be the ideal participant.

The review of literature indicates that the need for parent education programs and parent support groups are still as important and strong as they have ever been. Collaboration with agencies, schools and parents is essential in order to bring forth positive results. Research is necessary in order to determine how child development information can best be disseminated to parents. A closer look needs to be taken at the role of social support in terms of adopting new and pertinent information.

An understanding of parents and the changes they go through is an important element to be considered in the

design of programming (Powell, 1984). A closer look at the needs of the parent education and support programs are increasingly an important part of the early childhood field. The development and growth of programs over the history of this movement must be accompanied by an informed interest in and a committed search for the right mixture which will create quality programs.

Summary

The importance of identifying variables which influence the extent of parent participation and attitudes towards programs is imperative if we are to make an impact on family dynamics. The historical background presented indicated, that past attitudes regarding the parent education movement has had an effect on present day parent education programs. The growth of this movement along with the numerous demands on parents and the changes in family dynamics will keep the need for clear identification of the needs of target populations. It is important to realize that each group has their own individual needs and hence should be reflected in program design.

As the number of single parent homes, teenage pregnancies and culturally diverse communities increase, the need to include parents in the designing of programs will be

integral to participation. Currently, there is interest in the programs but factors such as time, money, parent self-esteem and fear play an important role in the commitment made by parents.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

The purpose of the study was to discuss the variables which influence participation in parent education programs. As society changes, so do the needs of parents and their children. It is becoming more apparent to educators and members of the community that there is a need for improved understanding and awareness of the different developmental stages of children. Helping parents to understand the development in a child's life may help to decrease the incidence of child abuse. Research has shown that parent education programs serve to improve and strengthen communication between parents and children.

An explanation of the research design, population, subject selection, survey instrumentation, procedures and data analysis are discussed in this chapter.

The findings of this study may impact The Family and Children's Council development and funding of programming which address the enhancement of relationships between parents and children. With funding sources becoming more scarce, it is important to help agencies determine the factors which will enhance existing parent education programming. The findings of the study may also encourage collaboration among agencies in order to avoid the duplication of services.

Research Design

This study was conducted by using a non-experimental design employing a survey approach to discuss the factors which may determine participation in parent education programs. The study utilized a researcher designed self-report questionnaire (see Appendix A & B) consisting of 13 open-ended questions which would address the following issues:

1. Is the attitude of the public toward parent education programs a deterrent to participation?
2. Is there awareness of the existence of parent education programs offered in the community?
3. Is availability (scheduling) of parent education programs a barrier to participation by parents?
4. Is one program approach more effective than others in the parent education process?

The researcher felt that open-ended questions were necessary in order to elicit specific information with regards to the program facilitators' perceptions and ideas about parent education.

Subject Selection

The population of study included facilitators of parent education programs. The subjects included 22 facilitators of selected parent education programs in the state of Iowa. These individuals were chosen due to their base of expertise

in the field of child abuse prevention in the form of parent education programming. The subjects were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) the individuals currently or had in the past facilitated a parent education program; (b) were employed with an agency in Iowa which addressed child abuse/neglect and building family strengths; and (c) were employed by non-profit agencies belonging to the Iowa Chapter of the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse and are funded by government and private sources.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire which would require a self-reporting process was developed as the method of instrumentation. The questionnaire was comprised of 13 open-ended questions. The purpose of utilizing an open-ended approach was to elicit specific information from the parent education facilitators with regard to their particular programs. This information would address the facilitators perceptions toward parent education programs and their utilization by parents. The initial design of the questions came about as a result of interviews of child abuse "experts" within the Cedar Falls/Waterloo community. The Executive Director of The Family & Children's Council was given the questionnaire for review after which modifications were made and a preliminary draft was given to members of the Parent Education Committee

at a monthly meeting. Because a study such as this had never been conducted by the agency, the design of the questions was important. Final modifications to the instrument were made based on comments and suggestions from the parent education committee members.

A cover letter (Appendix A), survey (Appendix B), and self-addressed return envelope were sent to the 22 parent education program facilitators in the state of Iowa. The cover letter explained the purpose of the study, addressed the importance of completing the survey and returning the information to the researcher.

Some of the threats to external validity were: (a) the reliability of the responses by the parent education facilitators and, (b) the generalizability of the study. Due to the nature of services provided (child abuse/child neglect prevention) by the parent education facilitators and their level of expertise, the level of reliability of the responses was perceived to be high. It is important when looking at the implications of the study, to consider whether or not it is generalizable to other settings and situations. The findings and implications may be generalizable to areas similar to those responding or in other settings in order to compare and contrast the needs of

different geographic environments. The needs of participants vary with the level of education, socio-economic standing and different locations.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this study was to identify the barriers to participation by answering the following questions:

1. Is the attitude of the public toward parent education programs a deterrent to participation?
2. Is there awareness of the existence of parent education programs offered in the community?
3. Is availability (scheduling) of parent education programs a barrier to participation by parents?
4. Is one program approach more effective than others in the parent education process?

An interpretive commentary of the salient details contained in the subject's responses to the various questions was used to provide interpretation of the data and to discuss the potential significance of the findings. In addition, the statistical procedure utilized for this study included frequency of responses, mean frequencies and percentage.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to identify the variables which influence participation in parent education programs in the state of Iowa. The findings of this study are applicable only to Iowa or environments with similar population compositions.

A survey approach was used to address the perception of parent education facilitators toward existing programs utilized by their respective agencies. Surveys were sent to 22 parent education facilitators in the state of Iowa who belong to the Iowa Chapter, National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA). A total of 17 responses were received, yielding a 77% response rate. Two responses to the survey were unusable for the study due to the following reasons: (a) parent education programming was no longer provided by the agency; and (b) incorrect address placed on the outgoing envelope of one of the surveys resulted in the questionnaire being returned unopened. Therefore, the results of this study are based on completed surveys from 15 respondents, or 68% of the total sample.

For the purpose of this study, the survey was designed to elicit specific information regarding the facilitator's perception of the parent education programs used in their community. Based on this criteria, respondents were asked

to answer questions which addressed the following issues:

(a) the type of program utilized by the agency, (b) the makeup of their target audience, (c) community awareness and availability of parent education programs, (d) identification of barriers to program participation and how those barriers are addressed, (e) the percentage of participants who complete the program and what percentage of them are mandated or are voluntary participants, (f) the number of participants involved at any given time, (g) the qualifications of program facilitators and whether they are paid or volunteer and, (h) method of program evaluation.

Program Characteristics

In order to help identify the variables which influence participation in parent education programs, it is important to know which programs are utilized by the organizations surveyed. Of the responses received 73.3% indicated the use of The Nurturing Programs. The Nurturing Program was designed by Stephen J. Bavolek, PhD., and Juliana Dellinger-Bavolek, M.S.E. The Nurturing Programs are a series of home-based and group-based family programs which meet the needs of parents with children as follows:

Parent & Children Birth to Five Years
 Parents & Children 4 to 12
 Parents & Adolescents 12 to 18 (New)
 Teenage Parents & their Children
 (Birth to Five)
 Parents with Developmental Disabilities and
 their Children

The philosophy of The Nurturing Program is that parenting is learned and how parents raise their children is a direct result of how they were raised. Hence, some families get along well, while others, due to negative experiences growing up, display abusive interactions between themselves and their children. The Nurturing Program is an extensive program. For example, a commitment of 45 weeks, 1 1/2 hour sessions each, is required for the birth to 5 age group. This program is home-based and it involves a facilitator going into the home during a 45 week period and conducting discussions and activities with the family. The activities can be as simple as holding the baby and discussing the importance of touch and communication. According to the facilitators, the researcher interviewed, this program has proven very successful in helping parents better cope with the demands placed on them by infants and young children.

The other programs are conducted in a group setting with no more than 12-15 families participating. One group facilitator is suggested for each 7 children; two group facilitators are recommended for the parents' program. These programs all include a parents' program and a children's program, but half-way through each session both groups come together for an activity. According to Bavolek,

"family-based programs are the single most effective strategy for treating and preventing family dysfunction" (The Nurturing Programs Handbook, p. 3).

There were two common concerns voiced by the parent education "experts" regarding The Nurturing Program as well as other programs.

1. There is a lack of follow-up with program participants. A monthly support group setting after completion of the program would be advisable in order to provide participants with ongoing reinforcement of skills as well as a forum to voice new concerns.

2. The time commitment required of participants is too long. Participants often find it difficult to commit for the entire length of time.

According to the survey respondents, the majority (85%) of those seeking to participate in parent education programs were female, their ages ranging from 19-35. The age of the children was contingent on the program which is offered in the respective county. The income levels of the participants was low to medium. The respondents indicated that 80% of their participants are voluntary and 20% were mandated by the court system through the Department of Human Services. Those who are mandated by the court are at-risk to abuse their children because they themselves are being abused or were abused as children; or are foster parents

required to attend a form of parent education in order to meet the criteria to be a foster parent.

Research suggests that understanding the characteristics of parents who drop out of education groups may indicate a need for alterations in programming (Lochman and Brown, p. 137, 1980). For example, offering education groups which are less problem-oriented and focus on enhancing the positive aspects of familial relationships. Parents who may act defensively and display high levels of family harmony, unrealistically denying problems, may need a modified version of present parent education groups (Lochman and Brown, p. 137, 1980). According to survey respondents, this may help to alleviate the rate of attrition. Lochman & Brown (1980) agree that programs already utilized can be modified in order to meet the needs of clients who drop out or are not successful.

Barriers to Program Participation

The purpose of this study was to identify the variables which influence participation in parent education programs in order to provide practical recommendations for existing programs. One of the major concerns expressed by facilitators was that of community awareness about program offerings. Seventy percent of the respondents to the survey indicated that parents are aware of programming and that other reasons exist for the lack of program follow through

and/or participation. Oftentimes the court or social services will mandate parents or foster parents to take part in programming either because they are at risk to be abusive or because it is required in order to be a foster parent. Being a voluntary participant or a mandated participant can affect the attitude parents display upon entering a program as well as affect what the family or parent/s may get out of the program. The respondents indicated 80% of participants are voluntary, 12% are mandated, 5% gave no response and 3% indicated a referral source. Considering the high number of participants who voluntarily attend parent education programs, determining availability of programs is important. Many agencies in Iowa provide transportation and child care to families interested in participating in programs. In other words, transportation and child care are not deterrents to program participation.

In this study, concerns addressed as barriers to participation were the following (in order of importance as indicated by frequency of response). Some program facilitators expressed more than one barrier.

1. Forty percent responded that the time commitment required by programs such as The Nurturing Programs was too extensive. Parents are willing to attend a program but will not or can not commit to an extended period of time.

2. Thirty three percent of those responding expressed the following to be of equal concern: (a) many parents feel that attending parent education programs is admitting failure. Facilitators expressed concern over the manner in which television portrays parenthood and the effect it has on parents. Parents view parenting skills as being "innate" and not something that should be taught to them. Doherty and Ryder (1980) stated that they have found some parents who become paralyzed with doubt and feelings of incompetence when participating in parent education programs. (b) Apathy of parents towards children and the amount of time required of parents to build effective communication and relationships skills. Cheryl Buss (Personal Communication, February 12, 1992) suggests that parents often feel their job as a parent is over when a child reaches adolescence. This is not the case, adolescence brings with it a unique set of problems requiring a special kind of direction. For example, adolescence brings the many changes in the body, puberty, confusion over right and wrong and fitting in with your peers. Croake and Glover (1977) suggest a need for program evaluations specific to the needs of adolescents.

3. Twenty six percent responding indicated securing child care and transportation as a concern. There are agencies which sponsor parent education programs and provide child care services either at the agency or through a

referral process. Transportation is provided by some agencies but that is often determined by whether a person resides in a rural or urban community. In other words, it is not available in all areas.

4. Six percent expressed concern over language barriers as an obstacle to participation. This indicates a need to evaluate population diversification within communities in Iowa.

Having determined the perceptions of facilitators regarding barriers to participation it is important to address the percentage of participants who complete programming. The respondents indicated that 70% of those who participate in parent education programs complete the program with an average of 1-2 absences within the time span of the program.

With the low level of response and the 50% drop out rate in Cedar Falls/Waterloo parent education programs, the findings of this survey need acknowledgement. Typically, the larger the population, the greater the differences of those residing in the communities and in their individual needs. It then becomes important to address certain elements and conditions which may be prevalent in communities of different compositions and suggests areas for future study.

Zeldin and Bogart (1989) indicate the importance of recognizing the difference in the lifestyles of economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse parents and children. It is also important to consider the level of self-esteem and the pre-existing problems many of these families bring with them into a program. For this reason it is essential that the needs of individual populations have a component which addresses building upon the strengths of the families and avoid focusing on their weaknesses. These distinctions offer opportunities for further research.

The following observations are a result of this study and address possible differences in the needs of communities of various compositions. A rural/urban differentiation is used to illustrate these observations. For example, the population of Cedar Falls/Waterloo is diverse and these diversities encompass many levels of education as well as economics.

1. The needs of a rural versus an urban community may affect the extent of participation by parents. Because populations in rural communities are smaller, parents may be more aware of the programming offered.

2. The pressure, pace and stress usually associated with urban living, may cause parents to lose touch with the needs of the family.

3. The Nurturing Program and/or similar programs may need to be modified to meet the needs of the urban community or families of lower educational and socio-economic backgrounds.

4. The factor of safety and trust which is prevalent in a small community may not be as commonplace in a large environment. A small community is not as densely populated. This allows people to know each other and to look out for each other. This brings with it a level of trust and familiarity which is difficult to achieve in a large community.

5. The rate of completion of parent education programs in rural communities may be related to continuous allocation of funding. If programs in these communities have a high percentage of participants completing programs, it will encourage the continuation of funding and the involvement by human service agencies and parents.

6. The need for human service agencies to collaborate and network is important in order to create a pool of resources and strengthen the delivery of programs. Collaboration and networking is important no matter whether rural or urban but may be a necessary direction for agencies in urban environments to look into due to their size. With funds being scarce, human service agencies must look to each other in order to create strong networks not only among

themselves but with communities as well. By doing this, a larger number of people will be reached and the resources shared and exchanged will be greater.

These findings suggest that the human service agencies in the Cedar Falls/Waterloo area and The Family and Children's Council, in particular, need to look closer at these issues. The needs of an urban community such as Cedar Falls/Waterloo will bring with it people with different needs, backgrounds and problems which must be reflected in programming.

Program Evaluation

Many parent education programs (and The Nurturing Program in particular) utilize a pre-test and post-test instrument for evaluation. The facilitators responding to the survey all indicated the use of evaluations. Through the use of evaluation instruments, facilitators and funding sources are able to examine levels of attitudinal changes in program participants. It is important to indicate that, "program outcomes vary with the needs and interests of individual parents as well as the choices made during the programs implementation" (Zeldin & Bogart, 1989, p. 10). Lochman and Brown (1980) suggest that types of parents can be identified as high risk for dropping out of groups or for achieving only minimal success. They further suggest that high risk parents can be identified on the basis of their

perceptions and certain demographic variables, such as marital status, occupation, income level, family composition, and highest level of education. These factors apply when considering the level of participation in rural versus urban communities in Iowa due to the latter's demographic composition. For example, a parent who has lost their job may be preoccupied with finding new employment in order to feed, clothe, and house his/her family. That would take precedence over everything else. Lastly, the retention of lower income families must be addressed. The struggles faced by this group are on an ongoing basis and as such require services specific to their needs. New programs do not need to be designed; rather, modifications can be made which will address specific population needs.

Summary

In conclusion, the findings indicate the importance for parent education agencies in Iowa to address the needs specific to their communities in order to secure higher levels of program participation. The awareness of the issues which may be influencing the lack of participation in this community may serve to build a coalition of support and collaboration among human service agencies in order to strengthen their programs. This awareness will not only help parents, educators, facilitators and agencies but will

help to build upon the strengths of families and decrease the incidence of child abuse and neglect.

The perceived barriers to participation in parent education programs were identified by parent education facilitators as:

1. The level of commitment which is required of parents may be a perceived barrier to participation. For example, 45 weeks, 1 1/2 hours each session for the newborn program.

2. A parent/s may sense failure as a parent if they participate in a parent "education" program. The connotation being that they need schooling to be a good parent.

3. Parents express an attitude of indifference or apathy toward children and parent education programs. Some parents perceive that their "job" is done once a child reaches adolescence.

4. Child care and transportation are also perceived barriers to participation. In a small town securing child care and transportation may not be an obstacle due to the familiarity among the folks in the area. Due to the close proximity of residences or the ability to secure transportation from neighbors, may make it more

possible to attend programs. Whereas, in urban environments, folks usually do not meet their neighbors and most facilities are over a mile away from residences.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed with the purpose of identifying the variables which influence participation in parent education programs. The low response and high attrition rates in parent education programs in the Cedar Falls/Waterloo community created the need and opportunity for the study. The study involved 22 parent education facilitators who belong to the Iowa Chapter, National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NCPCA). The hope was to see if other programs were experiencing similar problems in their respective agencies and with their programs.

Results of this study were based on responses received from 15 (68%) of the facilitators who responded to the survey. It is important to recognize the level of response due to the nature of the service provided by the programs. Preventing child abuse and strengthening families is an important issue in today's society due to the ongoing changes occurring in the make-up of the family. In the past, families received support from extended families and close friends, this is no longer prevalent today. A more common scenario today are single parent households as well as two parent income homes which place more demands not only on the parents but on the children as well.

A historical perspective detailing the evolution of parenting and parent education was presented. The literature indicates that as far back as prehistoric time, parents have had an impact on their children. The literature also stresses the importance of developing a relationship with a child during their early years. The ongoing changes in society as well as the pervasiveness of social problems, have brought childrearing to new heights of confusion on the part of parents and made researchers more curious. Because of the long term effects these changes are having on children, human service agencies strongly support the utilization of parent education programs in an effort to strengthen the bonding of families.

It is important to be aware of factors which may create barriers to participation, because it may influence those needing parent education as well as the amount of funding secured by agencies. Circumstances in a parent's life at the time of the program or their own personality may dictate the level of participation. For example, a parent going through a divorce or having lost their job will be preoccupied with those circumstances causing immediate havoc in their lives. Powell (1986) suggests that it is unrealistic and perhaps unproductive to expect a parent/s to be the ideal participant. The added pressure of expecting parents to be the "perfect parent participant" may hinder

the effect of a program on the parent or family. The rapid growth of programs and their need must be accompanied by an informed interest in and a committed search for the right mixture which will create quality programs. It was a goal of this study to ascertain information which would help to determine barriers to participation and increase the level of participation by parent/s in the Cedar Falls/Waterloo community.

Based on the information given by the facilitators, 73.3% indicated that their agency utilizes one of Stephen Bavolek's Nurturing Programs. The premise of the Nurturing Programs is that parenting is learned and how parents raise their children is a direct result of how they were raised. The other respondents (26.7%) indicated the use of other programming.

In order to provide practical recommendations for program development, a breakdown of perceived barriers are specified. The order is based on frequency of response: (a) the time commitment required by parents; (b) parents may perceive themselves as failures because they attend parent education programs; (c) apathy of parents and the time required to build effective parenting skills; (d) securing child care and transportation; (e) language. Respondents indicated that 70% of those beginning a parent education program complete it and 30% do not, with out occurring after

the 4th or 5th session. The findings of this survey are interesting based on the lack of participation reported in the Cedar Falls/Waterloo communities.

Discussion

The data collected in this study reflect an interest by parents and a strong commitment by parent education facilitators in parent education programs. This conclusion can be drawn based on a 70% completion rate reported by the respondents of the survey. The results of this data may lead to further evaluate or research the factors which affect the level of response in the Cedar Falls/Waterloo community.

Identifying the barriers to participation in parent education programs is essential to human service agencies, because it provides insight as to the needs of those seeking programming. The data collected in this study reflect rural communities in the state of Iowa. This observation leads to discussing the 50% drop-out rate which is prevalent in Cedar Falls/Waterloo.

For the purpose of this study, a rural community is defined as a community with a homogeneous population. This includes people of similar ethnic backgrounds (German, Italian, etc.) upbringing (middle-class, farmer, industry, blue collar, etc.), religious (Lutheran, Episcopalean, etc.). An urban community is defined as being racially

mixed with a population of over 26,000. This would include a population of people of diverse backgrounds living in close proximity to one another whose individual needs and make-up are different from those around them. The state of Iowa is largely comprised of rural communities. The respondents to this survey are facilitators in rural communities. Defining rural versus urban leads to concluding that indeed differences exist between the needs of rural and urban communities. For example, the smaller the geographic area, the more mobile people can be. There is also the factor of trust in a small community which is less prevalent in a large one. The population of Cedar Falls/Waterloo is diverse and represented by various levels of education and socio-economic levels. This suggests that perhaps the Cedar Falls/Waterloo community needs to scrutinize the demographic composition as well as the specific needs of their target population.

Recommendations

As a result of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Human service agencies should create a network of collaboration which will aid in the facilitation of increasing program awareness. This will help to avoid the duplication of services and strengthen the possibilities of securing continuous funding sources. Accomplishing this

will help to bring about high quality programs as well as decrease the cost.

2. There is a need for further study and a needs assessment of special populations in urban versus rural communities (e.g. single parents, parents of adolescents, low-income and multicultural populations). It may improve program effectiveness with different population needs.

3. There is a need to further study the percentage of program participants in total communities in rural versus urban communities.

4. There is a need to further study whether The Nurturing Program and/or similar programs meets the needs of urban populations.

5. There is a need to further study the attitudes of communities towards parent education programs.

6. There is a need to train facilitators to work with economically and ethnically diverse populations.

7. There is a need to recognize the lifestyles of economically disadvantaged and ethnically diverse families.

8. There is a need to provide active support to parents through ongoing direct contact with program staff and through parent meetings.

The findings of this study indicate the importance for agencies in Iowa to be aware that even in homogeneous environments differences do exist. Although the majority of

the population is homogeneous, there does exist a diversity in the urban areas whose needs must be addressed. The results of the survey are an indication that further study is needed in order to address those needs. The awareness of issues which affect specific populations may determine the response levels to programs in Iowa.

The variables which are perceived to be barriers to participation in parent education programs are:

1. The time commitment required by parents and families.
2. A parent/s may sense failure as a parent when they choose to participate in parenting classes.
3. Apathy of parents toward children and parent education programs. Some parents perceive that their "job" is done once a child reaches adolescence.
4. The availability of child care, if needed by parents.
5. The mobility or immobility of a family due to distance of the program offered.

A needs assessment is recommended if agencies are to get positive results of the programs they are offering. An assessment of the populations and their demographic compositions is essential. If children are to blossom and grow to be productive and lead fruitful lives, collaboration among parents, communities and educators must take place.

The information provided throughout history indicates that parents are a child's first educator. It is very important to the development and well-being of children to make sure that parents are able to provide a positive foundation to future generations. Forms of parent education and parent support groups can help positive development process become reality.

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APPENDIX A
COVER LETTER



Family & Children's Council

OF BLACK HAWK COUNTY, INC.

403 Sycamore, Suite 2A, Waterloo, IA 50703

234-7600

April 6, 1992

Dear

I am writing to you on behalf of the Family and Children's Council of Black Hawk County located in Waterloo. The Family and Children's Council is one of the 56 county councils under the auspices of Iowa Chapter, National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse (NPCA).

One of my responsibilities this spring is to research parent education programs in Iowa so the Family and Children's Council can help our community identify successful programming we could implement or learn from. We would like your help!

Enclosed please find a survey which will provide us information with which to make recommendations to our Parent Education Committee and Board of Directors. A return envelope is included for your convenience.

Would you please take a few minutes to answer the questions and return them to me? Thank you in advance for sharing your experience and information with us.

Cordially yours,

Marisa Rivera
Program/Research Assistant

enclosure



A United Way Agency



Parent Connection

APPENDIX B
PARENT EDUCATION SURVEY

PARENT EDUCATION SURVEY
April 1992

1. What type of parent education program do you use, and why?
(e.g. Nurturing Program) _____

2. Who is your target audience? How did you determine this?

3. Please provide a profile of your program participants -
Sex: _____
Age: _____
Age of Children: _____
Referral Source: _____
Income Levels: _____
5. Are parents in your community aware of the existence of parent
education programs? _____
6. Is your organizations' parent education program easily available
to those interested? _____
7. What have you identified as barriers to parent education
participation in your community? How do you address those barriers
in your program? _____

8. What percentage of your participants complete the program? How
long is the course of involvement? _____

9. What percentage of your participants are mandated to take part
in the program and what percentage are voluntary participants? If
mandated, by who? _____

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10. How many participants are involved on an average in your program at any given time? _____

11. What are the qualifications of your program facilitators? Are they paid or volunteers? _____

12. What method of program evaluation do you use? Would you send us a copy of any written evaluation materials you utilize? _____

13. If you have materials to share about your parent education program, would you please send us sample items?

Thank you for your help.