

FOCUS GROUP STUDY: SELECTION OF APPROPRIATE PARENTING
CURRICULA FOR SOCIAL SERVICE CLIENTS AT THE
HELEN ROSS MCNABB CHILDREN AND
YOUTH CENTER

by

Trisha L. Wright

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The Graduate College
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751

ABSTRACT

Wright _____ Trisha _____ L.

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Studies have found positive results with parent education on adolescent risk taking behaviors, behavioral problems, and family relationships. There are a large number of parenting curricula available to educators and a very limited number of sources to assist educators in selecting an appropriate curriculum for their target audience. The purpose of this research was to complete qualitative evaluations of three parent education curricula for possible purchase by the Helen Ross McNabb Children and Youth Center in Knoxville, TN. The researcher and the center as appropriate for the study mutually agreed upon three parent education curricula. A focus group of program coordinators at the Center was conducted. These coordinators serve a parent population. The focus group was held for a forty-five minute period. During this meeting participants were asked structured questions designed to identify components that would be

important to the group when making a purchase of parent educational curriculum. The meeting was audio taped and then used to compile a list of criteria important to the group. The list was returned to the participants and they were asked to rank the importance of each item on a five-point Likert scale. The weighted averages were then used as an instrument with which to evaluate the selected curricula. Because it was difficult to tell from web sites and catalogs exactly what the programs contained, the companies offering the curricula were contacted and asked which components their programs met. Two of the three programs contacted responded by answering each of the questions. These programs were evaluated using the designed instrument and recommendations were made. This instrument should be used with caution, as it may not generalize to needs of specific programs. The results of the research indicated a need for companies offering curricula to make more information available to educators and for educators to have better tools when making decisions between curricula programs.

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This research is dedicated to parent educators. Thank you also to the focus group participants whose willingness to share made this research possible. May their efforts greatly improve the lives of the children and parents they serve. This research is also dedicated to the children, whose lives could be greatly improved through parent education.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Parenting is a full-time job with no necessary qualifications. Literature on the subject suggests that parent skills training can improve the relationship between the parent and adolescent and have numerous positive effects. There is a wealth of programs that attempt to educate parents in skills they will need when raising children. Literally hundreds of parenting curricula are available for purchase. It is difficult to distinguish between programs and to tell from web sites and/or catalogs exactly what the curricula offers. The research, however, does indicate a need for curricula selection guides for professionals. Many educators may not be able to invest large amounts of time when making purchasing decisions and sometimes judgments may be made with very limited information.

This study was conducted for the Helen Ross McNabb Children and Youth center in Knoxville, Tennessee in order to assist parent educators in the selection of curriculum materials. Seven of the Center's program coordinators were asked to participate in a focus group to gain information regarding important components of parenting curricula relevant to their specific programs. The researcher then used this information to develop an instrument and then evaluate two parent educational programs based in the information obtained through the focus group.

Statement of the Problem

A review of parenting curricula programs suggests that while a variety of programs are available for educators, selecting a program that is most appropriate for specific social services programs and targeted to client needs is difficult.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the significant criteria of parenting curricula appropriate for clients of the Helen Ross McNabb Children and Youth Center, and to determine the relative importance of each criterion in making an objective purchasing decision.

Assumptions

The focus group participants were chosen because of their experience with the client population for which the parenting materials were to be reviewed. It was assumed that this group of individuals would be able to articulate the requirements and the components they would look for in a curriculum program. These participants work with families on a regular basis, thus they have a concrete idea of what parenting and/or communication skills are lacking in the target audience.

Limitations

A major problem, which surfaced during the early stages of this study, was that the information given in catalogs and on the Internet is inadequate to help the educators searching for curricula to distinguish between programs. Two programs responded to a request for additional information. Because the two programs were so similar it was difficult to compare the two programs using only the instrument developed during this study.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

This chapter examines parent skills and the effect they have on children, and the effects of parent education. Changing family structures and the complexities of today's society bring new complications to families. There is a paucity of research and related literature pertaining to the selection of parent educational programs. The literature review focuses on problems associated with deficits in parenting skills. It also presents a brief overview of communication within the family structure. The literature review suggested that although there are so many parenting curricula available, it is difficult to distinguish between programs. There are few guidelines available to professionals selecting programs. Information regarding selection of programs is included. The Helen Ross McNabb Center, for which this study was done is described.

Rationale for parent training with McNabb clients

Parent education is a broad topic area, however for the purpose of this research it can be defined as, "Parent education is the process of providing parents and other primary caregivers with specific knowledge and child-rearing skills with the goal of promoting the development and competence of their children." (Mahoney & Kaiser, 1999).

According to Mertensmeyer and Fine (2000) authors have suggested an increasing need for parent educational materials that are comprehensive, integrated, responsive to community needs, and flexible (Carter & Kahn, 1996 and Simpson, 1997 as cited by Mertensmeyer and Fine, 2000.) Studies suggest that, "teens who have good relationships with their parents are much less likely to engage in those risky behaviors so often associated with adolescence- tobacco, alcohol,

and other drugs; sexual activity; gang involvement; dropping out of school; violence and suicide” (Benson, 1995 and Resnick, 1997 as cited by Sheriff, 1999).

Family structures are becoming more complex, and with these changes comes increased complications. These complications include new family structures, complex authority systems, bi-residential living, threat of diseases (e.g. AIDS), and increases in teen pregnancy, and dual family careers (Socha, 1995).

Widom (1990) estimates cases of child-abuse or neglect in the United States between 500,000 and 2.3 million cases annually (as cited by Socha, ix). Single parent families are increasingly prevalent in today’s society. Single parenting often makes child rearing more difficult (Dangel & Polster, 1984). According to Blechman (1982) ninety percent of single parents are women, many of whom must work receiving lower incomes than their male counterparts all while fulfilling household duties without the help of a spouse (As cited by Dangel & Polster, 1984).

Deficits in parenting skills are predictive of behavior problems in children (Patterson, 1982; Patterson, Reid & Dishion, 1992; as cited by Webster-Stratton, 1997). Parent skills can be improved through empowerment. Empowerment can be defined as, “making it possible for people who are dis-empowered to exercise power and to have more control over their lives. This means having a greater voice in institutions, agencies, and situations that effect them” (Beresford and Croft, 1990, p.3 as cited by Neville, 1995). Empowerment of parents has many expected outcomes including increased dignity, increased self-respect, better decision-making skills, improved problem solving skills, and greater choice of available/appropriate services (Neville, 1995).

Zill and Schoenborn (1990) found that 20% of children in the United States suffer from

developmental, learning, or behavioral problems (As cited by Thompson & Grow, 1993).

Behavior parent education has been effective with parents of children suffering from these difficulties (Dangel & Polster, 1984; Graziano & Diament, 1992; and Schaefer & Briesmeister, 1989 as cited by Thompson & Grow, 1993).

Research has found parent training to be an effective treatment for changing children's problem behaviors (Dumas, 1989; Graziano & Diament, 1992; Kazdin, 1987, 1991 as cited by Ruma, Burke, & Thompson, 1996). Ruma et. al. examined clinically significant changes in child behavior problems and found group parent training to be effective for children from early childhood through adolescence. Furthermore, the only significant predictor of treatment effects was due to the seriousness of the child's behavior problems before the treatment.

The parent-child relationship can be viewed as a system. The parents, children, and relationships between the family members are components affecting each other. Other elements of the system include peers, teachers, grandparents and environmental factors (Socha, 1995). According to Belsky (1981) "Parenting affects and is affected by the infant, who both influences and is influenced by the marital relationships, which in turn both affects and is affected by parenting" (Belsky, 1981, p.3 as cited by Socha, 1995). Emery and Tuer (1993) state, "not only do mothers and fathers affect their children independently as parents, but the relationship between the parents can also have a profound influence on children...marital and parenting roles are inextricably linked in day-to-day interaction" (Emery and Tuer, 1993, p.121 as cited by Socha, 1995).

In the search for available parenting curricula the researcher found that many programs attempt to improve family communication patterns. Parent-child communication impacts both society as a whole as well as the future of the child and caregiver (Socha, 1995).

“Communication is certainly an integral part of the process of attaining stability, satisfaction, and fulfillment in contemporary parent-child relationships. Moreover, both parents and children most likely mutually influence one another through their communication as well as learn about themselves” (Socha, 1995, p.xi).

Research suggests that family communication affects children’s susceptibility to persuasion, aggressiveness, and interest/knowledge in politics (Chaffee & Timms, 1976; McLeod & Chaffe, 1972; McLeod, Fitzpatrick, Glynn & Fallis, 1982; as cited by Huang, 1992) use and interpretation of media, consumer behavior, and materialism (Austin, Roberts & Nass, 1990; Kremer, 1996, 1998; Lyll, 1980. Moore & Moschis, 1981; Morgan, Alexander, Shanahan & Harris, 1990 as cited by Huang, 1999). Children tend to be more aggressive when raised in conditions where free expression of opinion is discouraged (McLeod, Atkin & Chaffe 1972; as cited by Huang, 1992). Aggressive child behavior is increasing and occurring at younger ages in children (Campbell, 1990; Webster-Stratton 1991 as cited by Webster-Stratton, 1997).

Socha (1995, p.43) gives three assumptions about communication and relationships as follows:

1. Relationships occur both in the minds of the interactions as well as between the interactants.
2. Relationships are defined, changed, and embodied through interaction.
3. Relationship work is accomplished through routine interaction.

Assumption one attempts to explain that behaviors as well as interpretations should be taken into account. Socha also notes that interpretations of actions are changeable over time. Assumption two reasons that communications within relationships should be a focus of study. And, in assumption three routine interactions include everyday conversations allowing the

family to function (Socha, 1995). Parents may be sending messages to their children unintentionally through routine conversation. Often routine conversations are processed at a lower level of consciousness (Bergen, 1987 as cited by Socha, 1995). Routine conversations are prevalent in parent-child relationships and are a large part of how the relationship is experienced (Socha, 1995).

Selection of appropriate parenting curriculum

Since the invention of the printing press in the 1400's parenting information has been a popular topic. Parenting information is often based on author experience, untested assumptions and social convention. "Unfortunately, even though so many sources of childcare recommendations are available to parents, no dependable way has been offered for parents to determine whether or not the suggestions are correct or applicable to their children" (Dangel & Polster, 1984, p.3).

This researcher found very limited information on how to choose a parent training program thus validating the purpose of this study. What was found suggested that when selecting appropriate parenting curricula one should examine the content of the program, objectives and methods of training. Content should be based in theory and shown effective. It is important that program content and components be empirically supported in research literature. According to Matthews and Hudson (2001) the evaluation of the content of a parent training curricula should be conducted with reference to the relevant theoretical and empirical literature and to consumer opinion of the appropriateness of the parenting strategies.

One concern of the Helen Ross McNabb Center is cost of programming. Thompson and Grow (1993) suggest that group parent training is a cost-effective approach to parent education when compared to individual parent training attention with a highly paid professional.

Many clients of the Helen Ross McNabb Center come from families with low-socioeconomic status. Unfortunately parent education studies have traditionally found that parent training has been more effective with middle-income families than it has with low-income families (Dumans & Wahler, 1983 as cited by Thompson & Grow, 1993). Poor children account for 21% of children nationally (U.S. House of Representatives, 1989 as cited by Thompson and Grow, 1993). Children in this category are more likely to suffer from developmental and behavioral problems than children with higher socioeconomic status (Escalona, 1981, Fuchs & Reklis, 1992 as cited by Thompson and Grow, 1993). Thompson and Grow (1993) found positive effects of parent training in both middle and lower socioeconomic status families. Mischley, Stacy, Mischley, and Dush (1985) reported significant improvements in both parent skills and children's social compatibility six months after the educational program ended (as cited by Thompson and Grow, 1993).

Objectives or the predicted outcomes for the children and parents involved in the program should be ethically, culturally, and developmentally appropriate. Parents of different cultural backgrounds may view behavioral techniques as more or less acceptable. The objectives should be stated positively building upon the strengths of the family rather than weaknesses (Matthews & Hudson, 2001).

Furthermore, according to Matthews & Hudson (2001) the objective should address four criteria:

1. Objectives are based on client outcomes rather than trainer intentions.
2. Objectives should contain a description of the behavior to be learned.

3. Objectives should identify during which conditions the new behaviors should be performed.
4. Objectives should identify standard criteria to measure performance of the desired behavior.

The method through which the new skills are taught to clients can influence whether or not the consumer acquires the intended skills. Instructional methods should be based in theories of learning. “It is important to employ instructional methods that are associated with skill acquisition and that facilitate maintenance of skills and promote generalization across people, settings, and behavior” (Matthews & Hudson, 2001). A variety of instructional methods are available for parent training including self-administration, therapist-administration, and live or videotaped modeling with feedback (Matthews & Hudson, 2001).

Sometimes written training techniques are effective (Egon-Rowe, Ichinose & Clark, 1991; Endo, Skane, Hawkins & Jenkins, 1991 as cited by Matthews & Hudson, 2001). However often the reading level of these materials is too high for the targeted population (Abram & Bowling, 1979; Davis et. al., 1994; as cited by Matthews & Hudson, 2001). According to Davis et. al. (1994) parent education materials used in public health settings should be at a level lower than high school (as cited by Matthew & Hudson, 2001). Sanders (1996, p.229) describes active training programs as follows “clear written and verbal instructions to parents, model parenting skills, use behavioral procedures...and provide contingent feedback following direct observation of parent-child interaction” and states that this type of programming is required for parents of children with substantial behavior problems (as cited by Matthews& Hudson, 2001).

Knapp and Debuty (1989) in a study of low socio-economic status mothers found that participants were more successful if they had received parent education including both modeling

and role playing than those who were taught using written materials, discussions, and quizzes (as cited by Matthews & Hudson, 2001).

Individual family functions are influenced by several factors including but not limited to temperament, developmental factors, social isolation, parental psychological state, and parental relationships (Dadds, 1995; Patterson & Reid, 1984; Sanders & Dadds, 1993; Wahler, 1980; Wierson & Forehand, 1994; as cited by Matthews & Hudson, 2001). Therefore gaining information about potential clients can assist in the selection for consumer appropriate components in a program (Matthew & Hudson, 2001).

Educators should consider that clients may be or have been involved in violent relationships:

We urge those who develop or teach parent education programs to examine their programs carefully for messages that may be inappropriate for parents who have or have had an abusive relationship. Although a smattering of current programs specifically address domestic violence, we propose that all programs be designed for heterogeneous groups that encompass participants from nonconflictual thorough violent families. Making parent education sensitive to the presence of domestic violence would allow victims and perpetrators to self-identify, would teach rather than disparage alternatives to cooperative parenting, and would allow parent educators to disseminate information about resources and referrals for those in highly conflictual or violent relationships (Furmann, McGill, & O'Connell, 1999).

Description of the Helen Ross McNabb Center

Mrs. Helen Ross McNabb founded the Helen Ross McNabb Center in 1948. The purpose of the center was to provide children's mental health services. "Today it is a regional, not-for-profit, integrated system of mental health, substance abuse, and social services with 20 locations serving 21 East Tennessee Counties." The goal of the center is to "provide quality mental health services to the greater Knoxville community" (Crawford, 2001, p.i).

The vision statement and mission of the center are as follows:

Vision Statement

To provide a regional system of behavior health treatment, rehabilitation and support services that improve the lives and well being of those persons in the community who suffer from the most impairing disadvantages and social circumstances.

Mission

Our mission is simple-improve the lives of the people we serve. We will succeed by:

- Embracing the differences among staff and people in the community as fundamental to our success and fostering and advocating respect for diversity throughout the organization and the communities we serve.
- Encouraging the creativity of our staff, empowering them to find new and better ways to fulfill our mission.
- Listening to our customers and to one another.
- Maintaining a well trained and highly motivated staff.
- Surpassing the standards of excellence in all that we do.
- Practicing fiscal responsibility and programmatic innovation (Helen Ross McNabb Center, 2000, p.iii).

As previously stated in the literature review, family structures are becoming more complex. The center serves a variety of families with a number of issues including substance abuse, behavioral problems, and low socio-economic status. Also represented in the center's client population are single parents and minority groups. These diverse qualities should be taken into consideration when selecting a program to best serve the needs of the clients. Seven of the centers programs were selected to be a part of this study. The program descriptions are in the methodology section and include program specific participant information

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

The Helen Ross McNabb Children and Youth Center has many programs. A portion of the programs educates parents on skills they can use when raising their children. The researcher and the Director of Clinical Operations at the Center identified seven programs at the Center currently educating parents and in need of better ways to select curricula. The programs are described in this section. A focus group was held to gain information about program relevant curricula necessary when making choices between different curricula. The information gained during this focus group was used to develop an instrument to assist educators in evaluating parenting programs.

Description of Participants

Eight focus group participants were chosen based on their involvement with the parent population served by the Helen Ross McNabb Children and Youth Center. All participants were coordinators in programs which have a parental component. In order to increase the parenting skills of the parents in these programs with components relevant to the population, participants were selected based on their ability to draw on experience with the target population. During the meeting, participants were encouraged to make recommendations for program criteria skills lacking in the client population.

Children and youth programs represented by the focus group participants include Interchange, School-based, Adolescent Alcohol and Drug (Werner Center), Tennessee Regional Alternative Care Environments (TRACES), Outpatient, and (GPI). These programs are described in the following paragraphs.

Interchange

The Interchange Program works with adolescents ages 12 through 18 who are on probation. This is a collaborative effort with the Knox County Juvenile Court System. The goals of the program include reduction of court involvement and prevention of custody granted to the Department of Children's services. The program targets issues involving the family and the adolescent, which lead to involvement in the court system. The design assesses family needs and strengths, identifies problems, and develops service plans. Services include case management, group counseling, in-home individual and family therapy, school liaisons, and crisis intervention (Crawford, 2001).

School-Based

School-based programs serve Blount County. They include the Bridges program, the Journey program, and behavior consultation. The Blount County Bridges program serves ninth through twelfth graders identified as having emotional and/or behavior problems. Mental health counselors are located within the school and provide direct treatment as well as consultation. Bridge program services include individual, group, and family counseling; medication monitoring, medication education, crisis intervention; as well as liaison contact with the juvenile court system, the Department of Children's Services, and other agencies. Goals of the Bridges program include reduction of psychiatric hospitalization, improved grades, improved attendance, increased communication/cooperation between home and school, less restrictive academic placements, reduction of court involvement, and reduction of school suspensions. The Journey program services include adventure-based groups, individual counseling, and case management. The program works with two intervention classrooms in Blount County. Behavior consultation services in Blount County provide a part-time behavioral consultant who conducts Functional

Behavioral Analyses and consults with teachers working with special needs students (Crawford, 2001).

Adolescent Alcohol and Drug (Werner Center)

The Werner Center is an adolescent residential home with a substance abuse treatment program serving youth ages 13 through 18. The program utilizes a holistic approach designed to facilitate the youth's recovery. Services include individual and group counseling, alcohol and drug education classes, recreation, adventure based counseling, community service projects, and aftercare. The program takes into consideration differences in learning style, developmental perspectives, and social needs. The program stresses family involvement in the youth's recovery (Crawford, 2001).

TRACES

The TRACES program is a therapeutic foster care program serving children ages 2 through 18. These children have been removed from their homes and placed in state custody. Children in the program have behavioral, emotional, or social problems affecting academics, development, family relationships, and overall functioning. Support services include 24-hour on call assistance, in-home training, and support groups (Crawford, 2001).

Outpatient

This program is a day treatment program for juveniles ages 14 through 18 who have substance abuse issues. In the Outpatient program clients learn communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, peer pressure, and other life skills. Services include individual and group counseling. Goals of the program include the development and maintenance of a "chemical-free" lifestyle. Family involvement is encouraged by this program and considered a key element (Crawford, 2001).

Community Prevention Initiative (CPI)- Roane County

The CPI program is grant-based and community designed to serve children through the age of twelve. The program is prevention focused and deals with the issues of alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, youth violence, and juvenile delinquency (Crawford, 2001). The CPI program in Roane County involves “case management services and family support for at risk third graders and their families.” The goal of the program is to build upon family strengths rather than weaknesses and to build a system of support within the community (Crawford, 2001, p.8).

Data Collection

The focus group members were contacted directly and asked to participate in the study. At the beginning of the meeting a consent form was distributed by the researcher (See Appendix A). Seven participants attended the focus group. Participants were informed that the meeting was being recorded for future use by the researcher in developing a list of criteria relevant to the evaluation of potential curriculum programs. The researcher then facilitated the meeting using a structured questionnaire (See Appendix B). The meeting lasted for approximately forty-five minutes.

The focus group questions were designed to encourage participants to discuss criteria important to clients when choosing an appropriate curriculum program. The discussion was tape- recorded and then listened to by the researcher who then used the recording to compile a list of criteria necessary when selecting a program. Once the list was established it was returned to the focus group participants who were then asked to rank the importance of each item on the list using a five point Likert scale (See Appendix C).

Ratings for each of the items were then averaged to form a weighted scale with which

each of the programs was evaluated (See Table 1). The weighted averages for each criterion were then used to evaluate the programs (See Table 2). A program was given the points for the criteria if they met the requirement. If the program did not contain the individual component no points were given for that item.

The researcher and the center agreed upon three curriculum programs as appropriate for this evaluation. A resource guide for selecting educational materials for adolescents was ordered from Parentlink. The guide was developed for parents and educators to give advice on selecting parenting curricula that would assist in improving family relationships.

Parentlink staff felt, and the research supported out belief, that parents' influence on teens' risk taking behaviors would grow out of the relationship that parents had established with their adolescents. We proceeded with the idea that if we could empower parents to develop positive relationships, the parents' involvement in their teens' lives and the teens' connectedness to their parents would serve as protective factors for the adolescents in terms of those risky behaviors" (Sheriff, 1999, p. xiii).

The three programs selected were Parents Who Care, STEP/Teen, and Parenting Your Teen: Leaders Kit.

The researcher contacted two parenting curricula companies selected for the study and one author of a program (the author's email address was given on the website for contact information) and asked if the programs contained each of the components. In response, two of the contacts (the author and one company) answered all of the questions (yes or no), whereas the other contact responded by sending a catalog with information regarding their program. The author also telephoned the researcher and offered to mail an outcome study regarding the effectiveness of his program.

The original goal of the study was to develop a scale with which to evaluate three potential curriculum programs for the center. Because web-sites and catalogs did not offer

information regarding each of the specific components the focus group came up with; this self-reporting on behalf of the resource contacts was necessary. Because the third program chose not to respond to the questions they were not included in the evaluation.

Chapter Four

Results

Introduction

This section focuses on what criteria of parenting curricula programs was found to be significant to the focus group participants and describes how two parenting programs were evaluated using the instrument developed during the study. The tables in this section describe the average weightings of each component by the focus group participants, and if each program met the desired criteria.

Findings

The original goal of the study was to use this scale to evaluate the potential appropriateness of three curriculum programs. However, as previously stated information on web sites and catalogs did not contain adequate information. The web sites of all three parenting programs selected for the study contained an email address to contact requesting further information. In attempting to determine which of the programs contained each criterion the investigator sent email to the information addresses requesting information regarding the specific criteria. Two of the three programs answered all of the questions. The third responded by sending a catalog through the mail. It was difficult to determine which components this program would meet and the researcher did not believe that it would be valid to compare this information to the self-report measures. Thus only two programs were evaluated using the developed measure.

Table One lists the criteria of parenting curricula programs significant to the focus group participants and describes the relative importance of each criterion in making an objective purchasing decision. The table shows the average rankings of each criterion as given by the

focus group participants. It was assumed that the items with higher rankings would be more important in a purchasing decision and therefore should be weighted in accordance. These averages were then used to evaluate the programs.

Table 1: Summary of Likert Scale Items

Component	Average*
1. How to say no to your child...	4.57
2. When discipline is appropriate...	4.12
3. What types of discipline are appropriate...	4.57
4. Teaches active listening skills...	4.12
5. Contains information about mental illness...	3.43
6. Encourages development of self-esteem...	4.12
7. Contains information on how to talk to your kids about drugs and alcohol...	3.57
8. Teaches verbal praise techniques...	4.71
9. Teaches anger management...	4.43
10. Teaches positive/negative reinforcement of behaviors...	4.71
11. Contains information on how to provide for your child...	3.67
12. Encourages family time...	3.71
13. Give outcome measurements showing effectiveness...	4.14
14. Feedback from families using the program is available...	4.43
15. Program is available for examination before purchase...	4.86
16. Uses repetition of materials as an instructional technique...	4.57
17. Program utilizes handouts...	4.14
18. Program utilizes videos...	4.00
19. Program utilizes role-playing...	3.86
20. Program utilizes discussion...	4.29
21. Program utilizes real-life examples...	4.86
22. The program can be used for an extended period of time...	4.57
23. Written materials are at or below an eighth grade level...	4.29

* Likert scale items were as follows:

1=not very important	4=very important
2=somewhat important	5=essential
3=important	

The second table describes how the parenting curricula were evaluated using the instrument designed in this study. It tells which criteria each program met. If a program met the criterion then the points for the item were given; if the program failed to meet the criterion then no points were given for that item. The points each program was given were then totaled to determine which program may be more appropriate for the programs at the center. The

Parenting Your Teen Leader's Kit had 90.64 points suggesting that using this instrument this program would be more appropriate for the needs of the clients of the programs. The STEP/Teen program had 86.35 points.

Table 2: Program Points from Evaluation

Component	STEP/Teen	Parenting Your Teen Leaders Kit
1. How to say no to your child...	4.57	4.57
2. When discipline is appropriate...	4.12	4.12
3. What types of discipline are appropriate...	4.57	4.57
4. Teaches active listening skills...	4.12	4.12
5. Contains information about mental illness...	0	0
6. Encourages development of self-esteem...	4.12	4.12
7. Contains information on how to talk to your kids about drugs and alcohol...	3.57	3.57
8. Teaches verbal praise techniques...	4.71	4.71
9. Teaches anger management...	4.43	4.43
10. Teaches positive/negative reinforcement of behaviors...	4.71	4.71
11. Contains information on how to provide for your child...	0	0
12. Encourages family time...	3.71	3.71
13. Give outcome measurements showing effectiveness...	4.14	4.14
14. Feedback from families using the program is available...	4.43	4.43
15. Program is available for examination before purchase...	4.86	4.86
16. Uses repetition of materials as an instructional technique...	4.57	4.57
17. Program utilizes handouts...	4.14	4.14
18. Program utilizes videos...	4.0	4.0
19. Program utilizes role-playing...	3.86	3.86
20. Program utilizes discussion...	4.29	4.29
21. Program utilizes real-life examples...	4.86	4.86
22. The program can be used for an extended period of time...	4.57	4.57
23. Written materials are at or below an eighth grade level...	0	4.29
Totals	86.35	90.64

Summary

In summary, if the Center were to decide between these programs the results of this study would indicate that they should select the Parenting Your Teen Leaders Kit because it had a greater number of points than STEP/Teen. It should be noted that the scores of the two programs were close and that the Parenting Your Teen Leader's Kit was not available for review before purchase. However a one hundred percent guarantee is offered and the Parenting Your Teen Leader's Kit can be returned after review so the program was awarded the points for this component. This instrument could also be used to evaluate other curriculum programs as identified by the center.

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary

Parent education can have many positive effects within the family and society. Because the effects of parent education can have such an impact; it would seem logical that finding the most appropriate parenting program for the consumers is essential. There are a number of curriculum programs available to professionals in the field. Many of these professionals may not have the time or expertise to choose the program that will best benefit their clients. This study was conducted to assist in the selection process.

The results of this study would only be appropriate if the center were to purchase a curriculum for all of the programs involved in the study. Each program seemed to have program specific needs. Because the list of components the focus group generated was broad and members seemed to agree that the items were important, individual programs could use their rankings to evaluate potential curriculum programs for their use. They may also add other program specific components to the list. If anything, the instrument will give the center a list to consider when distinguishing between programs. Similar agencies may be able to utilize this instrument in the same manner.

Conclusions

Research indicated a need for better resources for professionals purchasing curriculum materials. It was very difficult to distinguish between programs and to understand exactly what the programs contained from the catalogs and web sites available to professionals.

The instrument developed in this study could be used if the programs were to select a curriculum for the center's programs to share. Since the ratings on the importance of each item

were different from all of the coordinators; it may be more appropriate if when selecting a program that coordinators use their own rankings to select a curriculum, instead of using the averages from several programs.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made after careful consideration of the results of this study, the information obtained through the literature review, and ideas from the focus group participants. These recommendations are intended to improve selection of curriculum materials.

1. The information sources on parenting education were so difficult to use when differentiating between programs that it is reasonable to suggest that companies offering the curricula use more specific information.
2. It would be beneficial to see more outcome data on the effects of specific educational programs.
3. Because educators work with such diverse client groups, curricula programs need to be designed and marketed to the specific needs of these groups. Developers of curricula programs should investigate the types of community groups in which their programs may be applied before designing their programs.
4. Companies should be more open to responding to requests for information. In a market where there are so many products available, anything that can differentiate a company from competitors would be an advantage.
5. It would be beneficial to educators and program developers if validated instruments are developed to evaluate potential curricula before a purchasing decision is made.
6. Measures should be specific to the groups which they will involve and should include, but not be limited to targeting parents of children with behavioral problems,

- families with one or more member suffering from mental illness, divorcing parents, as well as program age specific in nature.
7. The Helen Ross McNabb Center and similar community agencies offering parent-educational programs should be aware of the great number of parenting curricula available and chose materials as they apply to specific programs.
 8. Whenever possible curricula companies should be contacted before a purchase is made to gain information not available in catalogs and websites that may affect purchasing decisions.
 9. If the instrument in this study is used to evaluate programs it should be used only as a means of gathering information about the programs and not a means to a final decision.
 10. Educators should specifically look at program contents, outcome data, and if the program was designed or has been used with audiences similar to the one which the program is being selected.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

I understand that by participating in this focus I am giving my informed consent as a volunteer in this study. I understand the purpose of this study is to conduct an evaluation of communication skills programs. There is no risk involved with participation. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that no identifiers are needed and confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse participation and that my right to withdraw from participation at anytime during this study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

Signature _____ Date _____

NOTE: Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to the researcher, Trisha L. Wright, phone (865)691-2492 or research advisor, Dr. Ed Biggerstaff, phone (715)232-2410 and second to Dr. Ted Knous, chair of the UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, 11 HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751, phone (715)232-1126.

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

1. Please describe your client population.
2. What skills would be important to include in an interpersonal communications/assertiveness training program directed towards parents in your programs? (What do you believe they would like to learn? What do you feel they need to learn?)
3. What criteria would be important when evaluating potential communication curriculum?
4. What types of learning materials would be appropriate for the parent population?
5. What would be an appropriate time frame for a communication program?

Appendix C

Thank you for your participation in the focus group. The information from the meeting has been

used to develop a list of criteria. Because so many components were identified it would be helpful if you would take the time to rate the importance of each item. Imagine you are purchasing a curriculum program for your clients and then rate the importance each item would have on your decision. Please return to Deborah Bailey when completed.

Thank you for your time,

Trisha Wright

For each item please circle the number that best describes the value the item would have in your purchase decision...

1	2	3	4	5
Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important	Essential

Program Components

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How to say no to your child... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. When discipline is appropriate... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. What types of discipline are appropriate... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Teaches active listening skills... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Contains information about understanding mental illness... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Encourages development of self-esteem... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Contains information how to talk to your kids about drugs and alcohol... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Teaches verbal praise techniques... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Teaches anger management... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Teaches positive/negative reinforcement of behaviors... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Contains information on how to provide for your child... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Encourages family time... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please continue on the following page...

For each item please circle the number that best describes the value the item would have in your purchase decision...

1	2	3	4	5
Not Very Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important	Essential

Available Feedback

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. Gives outcome measurements showing effectiveness | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Feedback from families using the program is available... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Program is available for examination before purchase... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Instructional Methods

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. Uses repetition of materials as an instructional technique... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Program utilizes handouts... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Program utilizes videos... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Program utilizes role-playing... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Program utilizes discussion... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Program utilizes real-life examples... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. The program can be used for an extended period of time... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Written materials are at or below an eighth grade level... | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |