Parent education for economically nondisadvantaged parents
by Linda (Mattelin) Snedigar

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract:
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Date May 16, 1974

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to determine the need for and organizational structure of a parent education program for economically non-disadvantaged parents with children of either preschool or school age (grade 2).

Questionnaires were distributed to 191 preschool parents and 178 parents of children in second grade in Bozeman, Montana. Returns were received from 104 preschool parents and 58 school parents. Most respondents indicated that they would be interested in attending a parent education program. The data indicated that the primary target group should be parents with their first child enrolled in preschool. Rank orders of topics for both types of parents had a high level of agreement and indicated concern about the most advanced aspects of the child's development. The sponsoring agency of the program should be the school or preschool in which the child is enrolled. Length of program should be set by the participants and would probably last between six and ten weeks. Lecture and discussion were the most preferred format.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Parenting in today's world carries great responsibilities. As the adults most intimately involved with their child from birth onward, parents are considered the primary change agents in the life of a child (Boger, 1969). This places them in the unique position of being most able to influence the development of the child. It follows then that

> Any appreciable and enduring improvement in the child's development can only be effected through an appreciable and enduring change in the behavior of the parents (Dusewicz, 1972, p. 1-2).

Armin Grams states this in yet another way when he writes:

> Today no one seriously questions the importance of early childhood experiences in human personality development. Child rearing is coming to be valued for its essential place in human development, and far more conscious attention is being focused on the process (Grams, 1973, p. 1).

Many research reports support this position that specific parenting practices are a major factor in a child's development (Hess & Shipman, 1965; Brady, 1968; Radin, 1971).

Parenting in today's world is quite different from even a generation ago. It is a function so vital it cannot be left to trial-and-error methods. Parents today are more

mobile and do not have the support of an extended family. Change is an accepted way of life and

> lacking the reassurance and self-confidence that a stable, more predictable world provided for their parents, today's child rearers frequently operate at a disadvantage, their efficiency and effectiveness reduced by the gnawing fear ambiquity can generate (Grams, 1973 p. 5).

Parent education refers to the attempts to help parents learn the principles and practices of effective parenting in a formal, relatively structured situation. The specific goal of parent education is to aid the development of children by providing the opportunity for their parents to gain the information and practice needed to reinforce or change their individual child-rearing patterns.

This concept, though not the wide practice, of parent education has existed for many years. As early as 1932 a committee of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection, formed specifically to investigate types of parent education, content, and method, published a 354 page volume. In spite of their concern, parent education continued to be scattered and informal. In 1949, Edith Norton urged that parent education be used to "provide unity in the efforts of home and school and to help parents grow as parents and people" (Norton, 1949, p. 40). In more recent years, parent education programs have aroused fresh

interest as they have been incorporated into compensatory programs for the economically disadvantaged child. Parent education programs, primarily activity-oriented home training of parents by visiting instructors or center-based practice sessions, were found in many cases to be the critical variable in the success of the total program in promoting the development of the disadvantaged child (Radin, 1969).

The policy of these programs, however, has been to limit enrollment to only disadvantaged parents. This eliminates parents in the middle and high income groups for they are above the designated poverty level and are considered economically non-disadvantaged. Yet these economically non-disadvantaged parents may also be in great need of a parent education program.

NEED OF THE STUDY

Parent education activities should be expanded to meet the needs of all children of the 70's. The success that parent education programs have had in aiding the development of the children of disadvantaged parents raises the possibility of similar gains for the children of economically non-disadvantaged parents. And while many of

the problems of child-rearing are universal, environmental and educational differences make it likely that even a successful program for the disadvantaged parent could not be used for economically non-disadvantaged parents without extensive revision. Parent education must be designed to truly help parents in the parenting function. Supplementing rather than supplanting the existing patterns of child-rearing must become the major aim (Zigler, 1971). There is a need, therefore, for research on the specific needs of the economically non-disadvantaged parent.

Much has been written about Head Start and similar programs designed to incorporate opportunities for parent education into the total compensatory program. The investigator was unable to find even a single study directed at parent education among the economically non-disadvantaged which further substantiates the need for a project aimed at developing a program for these parents.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the need felt by economically non-disadvantaged parents for parent education. If there was a need for a parent education program, what should be its content, sponsoring agency,

length, and format? The study also sought to compare these needs as seen by parents of children in two different age groups to determine if the child's age influences the parental needs.

To do this the following questions were asked:

1. Would the parents be interested in attending a parent education program and did this interest relate to the ordinal position of the child in the family or previous parent education program attendance?

2. What topics should be covered and what is their priority ranking?

3. Who should the sponsoring agency be?

4. If meetings were weekly, how long should a parent education program continue?

5. What format should a program follow?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Many of the terms used have meanings that may be unfamiliar to readers who do not have a child development background. To facilitate understanding, the following terms are defined as they will be used throughout the study.

1. Disadvantaged. The term disadvantaged has commonly been used to designate those families or individuals

who are members of the lowest socio-economic group. Income is the criteria used to determine if an individual or family is disadvantaged and therefore eligible for compensatory programs. Under the Head Start guidelines, this would be all families with a gross annual income equal to or less than $4,320 (Head Start Newsletter, 1973).

2. Economically Non-Disadvantaged. Those families and individuals who have incomes above the poverty level.

3. Head Start. Head Start was initiated during the summer of 1965 to try to correct some of the deficiencies in the early lives of poor and disadvantaged children living in the United States. The program was designed to provide comprehensive services to help these children develop to their maximum potential (Read, 1971).

4. Parent Education. In this study, the term parent education refers to all programs organized for the purpose of providing opportunities for parents to consider concerns and issues important to them as they carry out their function of parenthood. Parent education programs offer a chance for parents to voice anxieties, profit from the experience of others, consider information and knowledge available from specialists and printed materials regarding

the growth, development, and guidance of children (New York State Education Department, 1968).

5. Parenting. In this study, the term refers to the functions of parents in their child rearing role as they accept the responsibility for maximum development of their child.

6. Preschool Child. The generally accepted definition of the preschool child is one whose age is in the three to five year range (Leeper, Dales, Skipper, & Witherspoon, 1968). In Bozeman, the kindergarten program provides for the five year old children so in this study the term preschool refers to those children aged three and four.

7. Preschool-Nursery School-Child Development Center (Synonymous Terms). In this study, the terms preschool, nursery school, and child development center all refer to facilities designed to help the three and four year old child develop their potential under the guidance of a trained staff. Appropriate materials and learning experiences are provided (Leeper & Others, 1968).

8. School. As used in this study, the term school refers to the public school system.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The current emphasis on compensatory education for the disadvantaged has provided an opportunity for research on a variety of parent education projects. Though limited to the economically disadvantaged parent, these projects contribute to the over-all understanding of parent education at this time. The development and objectives of these programs are especially important in considering the possible similarities and differences in the needs of economically non-disadvantaged parents.

PROGRAMS FOR DISADVANTAGED PARENTS

Head Start Parent Programs

Since its beginning in 1965 as a compensatory program for the disadvantaged preschool child, Head Start has recognized the importance of parent involvement. The rationale behind this belief was clearly stated in a Project Head Start Bulletin:

> Almost all those who work with children recognize the importance of the cooperation of parents in the education of their children. The Parent-Teacher Association came into being to meet the need. Child Guidance Clinics recognize the role of parents in the therapy of children; many require the child's parents to participate with the child in the therapeutic process.

> Yet with the increasing complexity of modern life and the increasing distance of today's schools from the homes of the children, fewer and less satisfying contacts are possible. Many schools have discontinued home visitations and parent conferences because of scheduling difficulties. Many parents still feel that the school is only interested in the family when the child has done something wrong; they hesitate to take the initiative to contact teacher or school.
>
> It is at the preschool level that this trend may be most easily reversed (Project Head Start Bulletin, No. 6, 1973, p. 3).

The original Head Start plan was to involve parents in the Head Start advisory structure, as paid workers and volunteers, and in self, family, and community development. The major parent education component was self, family, and community development for it included consideration of parent-child relations and social and cultural activities (Project Head Start Workbook, 1968).

While Head Start aimed at involving parents as one means of helping the child, Home Start was developed to involve parents as the major means of helping the child. This experimental program, developed in 1972 by Head Start personnel, focused on

> enhancing the quality of children's lives by building upon existing family strengths and helping parents in their role as the first and most important educators of their own children (O'Keefe, 1972, p. 1).

The program was designed to bring comprehensive services to children and their families in their own homes, including

demonstrations of educational activities. In December 1973, this home-based program was considered a successful alternative option to the standard Head Start model (Head Start Newsletter, 1973).

Florida Parent Education Programs

The University of Florida at Gainesville has been the site of several experiments in parent education for the economically disadvantaged. Ira J. Gordon's Parent Education Follow-Through Model was intended to directly intervene in the home so that the home situation might lead to better school and life performance for school age children. This was an activity-oriented program in which periodic home visits were made to demonstrate and teach tasks devised to increase the child's intellectual competence and personal and social development. All parents involved in this program, termed successful by Gordon's research, had school age children. Specific objectives of the program were to change parental attitudes toward school, language, involvement in school activities, parental teaching behavior, and provision of intellectual and cultural experiences (Gordon, 1968).

Another Florida project with Gordon as the principal investigator was designed for early intervention into the

lives of very young children to break the poverty cycle. Parent educators demonstrated stimulation exercises once a week in the home. At the end of the project's first year, children whose mothers had been involved in the project were superior to control children on Griffiths Mental Development Scales and other measurements (Gordon, 1969).

A later report by Malcom Garber reported on developments of the Florida Parent Educator Program as it was related to Head Start preschool children. The broad objectives of this program were to develop educational competence in the child, enhance cognitive development, and to help generate a home atmosphere which would allow the child to be resiliant to the demands which public schools make on him. This was accomplished through activity demonstrations in the home (Garber, 1972).

Early Education Programs of Ypsilanti, Michigan

Ypsilanti, Michigan has had a series of experimental early education programs with Norma Radin as research director. The Gale Preschool Program, in operation between January and mid-June of 1967, was a cognitively-oriented preschool program focused on work with both parents and children. One phase of this program was tutorial sessions with activities based on the child's needs, the mother's

predisposition, the facilities in the home, and the ease of replication by the parent. The basic curriculum focused on concept formation and language training. The Cognitive Home Environment Scale was used to evaluate the parents and it was found that the amount of education they expected their child to receive increased, the number of years of schooling they felt their child must have increased, and grade expectations became more realistic. It was assumed that if these parental changes were stable, they would have a favorable long-range effect on the child (Radin & Sonquist, 1968).

Ypsilanti established the Supplementary Kindergarten Intervention Program in the fall of 1967. It was a follow-up of the Gale Preschool Program designed for high ability, low income kindergarten children. There were two components, one a special class supplementing the regular kindergarten session. The second was intense parent involvement in the educative process. A home counselor planned activities for the mothers to engage in to reduce the diagnosed problems of the child. These activities were presented and discussed on home visits. At all times, effort was made to have the mother see herself as a resource person who could help her child learn using materials commonly found in the home. When the results were examined, it became clear that home

parent education was the critical variable in the success of the program. The largest gain in IQ, 16 points, was made by the group of youngsters who had been involved in a parent program at both the preschool and kindergarten levels (Radin, 1969).

Between fall 1968 and spring 1969, a program was designed in which the experimental variable was degree of maternal involvement. The study involved 71 children who were divided into three matched groups, A, B, and C. All children attended preschool four half days each week and had biweekly tutorial sessions with the teachers. All Group A mothers were present at all tutorial sessions and also participated in weekly small group meetings where they were taught how to reinforce desired behavior, stimulate intellectual growth of the child through regular housekeeping routines, and foster qualities related to success in school. All Group B mothers were present at home tutorial sessions but had no small group meetings. Group C mothers were not present at home tutorial sessions and had no small group meetings. On tests given immediately after preschool, there was no significant difference in the scores of the children in the three groups. At the end of the kindergarten year, however, both groups A and B scored significantly higher on

the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and higher, though not significantly, on the Stanford-Binet IQ test. Mothers were given the Parental Attitude Research Instrument and the Cognitive Home Environment Scale as pre- and post tests. Group C mothers showed no change, Group B mothers' grade expectations increased, and Group A mothers increased in educational materials available in the home and decreased in authoritarianism. These results indicate the importance of parent education if a child is to continue to grow (Radin, 1972).

Hawaii Parent Education Programs

Beginning in 1967-68, a variety of parent programs have been used in conjunction with Hawaii Head Start. The first plan was to combine a parent education program with a specifically designed language curriculum to be taught by regular classroom teachers. Attendance at this program was poor until concrete reinforcers (stainless steel flatware and certificates of participation) were given. No significant improvement, however, was noted in the language development of the children of participating parents.

The second year, 1968-69, two types of parent programs were conducted. One again focused on the curriculum, stressing actual methods of teaching a child at home. The

second, and more successful, was a parent awareness program focusing on understanding of self and others. The success, however, was suspected to be due to the specific personality of the leader involved rather than the method used.

In the 1969-70 school year, the parent awareness program was tried again by new leaders and met with failure. A home visit program initiated with two groups was considered partially successful. Specific activities were taught and problems were discussed on these home visits.

The final conclusion of the report suggested that parent education programs must be planned for each individual center involved. These programs must recognize community differences and the strengths of each center's staff (Adkins, 1971).

Pennsylvania Curriculum Guide

A curriculum guide for use by teachers conducting parent education programs as part of over-all compensatory preschool projects was written by the Pennsylvania State Department of Public Instruction in 1966. In this program, teachers were to be released in the afternoon to teach parents how to remedy some of the serious language and perceptual deficiencies of their children. Teachers diagnosed the disabilities and then demonstration sessions

were conducted with the parents observing. Some of these sessions were individual while others grouped parents whose children had similar problems. The parents were taught games, exercises, and activities and either helped to make materials or received them on loan. The main aim of the program was to encourage maximum follow-through at home. No research results indicating success or failure of the program were given (Pennsylvania State Department of Public Instruction, 1966).

Parents As Resources Program

Started in 1968 in the Chicago area, the Parents Are Resources or PAR team devised concrete learning tools for parents. They developed a series of activity booklets and a participatory workshop format to give parents the tools and confidence needed to work with children in an educational way. The PAR team now trains parent leaders who later conduct workshops in their own communities. This program has included both disadvantaged and economically non-disadvantaged parents. No research results were given (Weinberger, Haas, Heller & Cole, 1973).

Pennsylvania Parent Involvement Program

The parent involvement program developed by the Learning Research Center of West Chester State College (Pennsylvania) was designed to make maximum use of the phenomenon of modeling. It was believed that the parents, as the significant older persons in the life of the child, serve as models whose qualities and behavior the child attempts to emulate. Parents in this program were given the opportunity, motivation, and exposure to instructive and enjoyable kinds of activities that would aid the development of their children. This was shown to build a firmer foundation for the child's learning experiences (Dusewicz, 1972).

Other Studies

Parent programs developed by other researchers (Lillie, 1972; Boger, Kuipers, & Beery, 1969; O'Piela, 1968) have also emphasized an activity-oriented approach. The programs relied on demonstrations and practice sessions to teach economically disadvantaged parents.

NURSERY SCHOOL PARENT EDUCATION

Though no nursery school parent education programs are reviewed in recent research, authors of textbooks on

the organization of nursery schools (Read, 1971; Leeper, Dales, Skipper, & Witherspoon, 1968; Todd & Heffernan, 1964) have regularly devoted one chapter to parent education. Many ways parent education can be accomplished are included though these are largely informal methods. Those most often mentioned are to provide books and magazines for parents' use, the display of educational bulletin boards in the school, encouragement of parent observation, casual visits, planned conferences, newsletters, and study or discussion groups.

CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURES

The study was designed to determine the need for, and the preferred content, format, length, and sponsoring agency of a parent education program for the economically non-disadvantaged parent. The study also sought to compare the stated needs of parents whose children were in two different age groups.

SAMPLE

Parents in the Bozeman area were considered essentially economically non-disadvantaged. Using the 1970 Census information, the mean income in Bozeman was $10,010 while the median was $8,776. Only 6.3 percent of all families in Bozeman had incomes falling below the federally computed poverty level. This is the second lowest percentage in Montana among places over 10,000. Also, while the area might possibly have enough low income children to qualify for a compensatory preschool program, attempts to begin one met with failure for parents were unwilling to participate in a program for the "disadvantaged."

It was believed necessary to examine the needs of parents who might be a target group for a parent education

program. Parents whose children (ages three and four) were enrolled in preschool were chosen as the first group while parents whose children (age seven) were enrolled in second grade were selected as the second group. Parents of preschool children were selected because the role of being a parent is relatively new when the child is at the preschool level and a need for a parent education program might be felt at this time. There were 191 parents who had children enrolled in the four Bozeman preschools, Montana State University Child Development Center, First United Methodist Nursery School, Pilgrim Preschool, and Toddlers Inn Nursery School. All parents were included in the sample. For simpler identification, this group was named Preschool Parents. Parents of second grade children were chosen for the second group because these parents had experienced the added educational and socialization responsibilities created by the demands of the school system for at least one full year. There were 288 children enrolled in the second grade at the time of the study. Schools suggested by the Bozeman School Administration for the study were Whittier, Longfellow, and Irving Grade Schools. This gave a total of 178 parents of second graders to be

included in the sample, which was 61.8 percent of the total population. This group was labeled School Parents.

INSTRUMENT

A written questionnaire was developed to determine the following:

1. The interest of parents in attending a parent education program and its relationship to ordinal position of the child in the family or previous program attendance.
2. The topics which should be covered and their priority ranking.
3. The sponsoring agency.
4. Meeting weekly, how many weeks the program should continue.
5. The format a program should follow.

The instrument was tested for content validity by using the instructors and graduate students in the School of Home Economics at Montana State University. Some revision of the instrument was made after consultation with this group. To encourage a high rate of return, the questionnaire was designed to elicit brief responses to a small number of questions. A cover letter to the parents, encouraging them to participate in the study, was attached to the

questionnaire. Copies of the cover letter and questionnaire may be seen in the Appendix.

DISTRIBUTION AND COLLECTION

Personal contact was made with the Bozeman School Administration, school principals. and preschool directors to explain the study and gain the necessary permission to distribute the questionnaires. The preschool teachers gave the questionnaires directly to the parents as they called for their children, while the second grade teachers gave the questionnaires to their students with instructions to take them home to their parents. Parents were asked in the cover letter to complete the questionnaires within one week and return them to the teacher. The researcher then collected all the completed survey instruments which had been returned.

Bozeman School Administration regulations eliminated follow-up procedures. The low response rate received as a result must be considered as a limitation of the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to obtain information necessary in determining the need for and organization of a parent education program for the economically non-disadvantaged parent.

SAMPLE

Parents of 191 preschool children and 178 school children received the survey instrument. Responses were received from 104, or 54.4 percent of the preschool parents. All of these were fully completed questionnaires. School parent responses numbered 58, or 32.6 percent. Three of these, however, stated that they did not feel qualified to answer specific questions. These were eliminated from the sample. The school parent data, therefore, is based on 55 fully completed questionnaires (30.9%). The results must be considered with these low response rates in mind.

PARENTS' INTEREST IN PARENT EDUCATION

Most of the parents of preschool children, 85 respondents or 81.7 percent indicated interest in attending a parent education program. School parents responding

indicated that 37, or 67.3 percent were interested in a parent education program.

TABLE 1

RELATIONSHIP OF INTEREST TO ORDINAL POSITION IN FAMILY BASED ON PRESCHOOL OR SCHOOL STATUS

	Preschool Parents		School Parents	
	Interested	Not Interested	Interested	Not Interested
First Child	63	7	19	5
Later Child	22	12	18	13

$x^2 = 9.86$ Significant at .05 level

$x^2 = 2.81$ Not significant at .05 level

A Chi square analysis of parents with first children and later children enrolled in preschool reached significance at the .05 level. A Chi square value of 3.84 was required and the computed value, 9.86, was significant at the .05 level. This indicated that ordinal position in the family of the child enrolled in preschool was significant in determining the interest shown in a parent education program. The Chi square analysis of school parents with first or later children enrolled in second grade had a computed

value of 2.81, which failed to reach significance at the .05 level. This would indicate that there is no significant difference in the interest in parent education shown by school parents of first children or later children (Table 1).

TABLE 2

RELATIONSHIP OF INTEREST TO SCHOOL OR PRESCHOOL STATUS BASED ON ORDINAL POSITION IN FAMILY

	First Child		Later Child	
	Interested	Not Interested	Interested	Not Interested
Preschool Parents	63	7	22	12
School Parents	19	5	18	13
	$x^2 = 1.89$ Not significant at .05 level		$x^2 = .31$ Not significant at .05 level	

The Chi square analysis of preschool and school parents with first children enrolled had a computed value of 1.89 while the value of the Chi square analysis of preschool and school parents with later children enrolled was .31. Both of these failed to reach significance at the .05 level. This indicated no significant differences in the two groups (Table 2).

TABLE 3

RELATIONSHIP OF INTEREST TO PREVIOUS PROGRAM ATTENDANCE BASED ON SCHOOL OR PRESCHOOL STATUS

	Preschool Parents		School Parents	
	Interested	Not Interested	Interested	Not Interested
Previous Attendance	16	7	10	4
No Previous Attendance	69	12	27	14
	$x^2 = 2.90$ Not significant at .05 level		$x^2 = .15$ Not significant at .05 level	

A Chi square analysis of the previous attendance at a parent education program by preschool parents had a computed value of 2.90. A Chi square value of .15 was computed for the previous attendance of school parents. Both of these failed to reach significance at the .05 level which indicated that previous attendance of a parent education program was not a significant factor in determining present interest in a program. This suggested that prior attendance may have had one of several effects. A good program may either have met all needs so that the parent

has no further interest in attending, or have been helpful in meeting some needs so that the parent is eager to participate in a parent education program again. Similarly, a poor program may either have completely discouraged parents so they have no present interest in attending, or it might have left them with so many needs unmet that they are anxious to try another program. Therefore, in designating a target group, all parents should be considered whether they have previously attended a parent education program or not (Table 3).

TABLE 4

RELATIONSHIP OF INTEREST TO SCHOOL OR PRESCHOOL STATUS BASED ON PREVIOUS PROGRAM ATTENDANCE

	Previous Attendance		No Previous Attendance	
	Interested	Not Interested	Interested	Not Interested
Preschool Parents	16	7	69	12
School Parents	10	4	27	14

$x^2 = .02$
Not significant at .05 level

$x^2 = 6.16$
Significant at .05 level

The Chi square analysis of school and preschool parents who had previously attended a parent education program had a value of .02 which did not reach significance at the .05 level. This indicated no difference in the interest shown by the two groups. The Chi square analysis of preschool and school parents who had not previously attended a parent education program had a value of 6.16, which was significant at the .05 level. This indicated that more preschool parents who had not previously attended a parent education program were presently interested than school parents (Table 4).

Consideration of the results suggested that parents who have their first child enrolled in preschool should be a primary target group for a parent education program.

CONTENT OF THE PROGRAM

TABLE 5

PROGRAM CONTENT RANKED (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE TO PRESCHOOL AND SCHOOL PARENTS) BY HARE BALLOT PROCESS

Rank	Preschool Parents	School Parents
1.	Parent-child communication skills	Building the child's self-concept
2.	Building the child's self-concept	Parent-child communication skills
3.	Mental development and creativity	Mental development and creativity
4.	Positive approach to discipline	Positive approach to discipline
5.	Setting and enforcing "livable limits" for children	Setting and enforcing "livable limits" for children
6.	Social skills and development	Physical care, nutrition, growth, and health
7.	Language development	Social skills and development
8.	Physical care, nutrition, growth and health	Language development
9.	Perception training activities	Perception training activities
10.	Home use of educational toys and materials	Home use of educational toys and materials

The Hare ballot process was used to rank ten broad topics (Table 5), chosen for the frequency of their appearance in parent education literature. A Spearman rank order correlation was computed, giving a value of .95. A value of .746 was required for significance at the .01 level, so the value of .95 was significant. This indicated a high level of agreement by preschool and school parents on the rank importance of the topics. Inspection of the table reveals that preschool and school parents ranked identical topics third, fourth, fifth, ninth, and tenth and that they chose the same topics in reverse order for first and second.

The preschool parents chose parent-child communication skills most important while school parents' highest ranked topic was building the child's self-concept. These same two topics in reverse order were the second ranked topics. These and the third ranked topic, mental development and creativity, indicate an interest by both preschool and school parents in the more advanced development of the child. This is in contrast to the disadvantaged parent whose needs have been considered more basic. Economically non-disadvantaged parents also appear to have had more exposure to the concept of environment enrichment. This is indicated

in finding home use of educational toys and materials as the topic ranked lowest in importance by both preschool and school parents.

In the space provided for personal suggestions of topics, those suggested by preschool parents were fairly specific. Topics mentioned by two or more preschool parents were allowances, sibling rivalry, single parent problems, rights of parents, and developmental stages. Fewer school parents made topic suggestions and these included teaching responsibility, sibling relations, communicating love, importance of spending time with children, teaching sharing and getting along with others, and the awareness and understanding of the emotions of both parents and children. All these were mentioned only once.

SPONSORING AGENCY OF THE PROGRAM

TABLE 6

PARENTS' WILLINGNESS TO ATTEND PROGRAM UNDER THREE POSSIBLE SPONSORING AGENCIES

Program Sponsor	Preschool Parents		School Parents	
	Would Attend		Would Attend	
	No.	%	No.	%
School or preschool in which child is enrolled	86	82.7	36	65.5
Local community group	62	59.6	20	36.4
Fee basis through adult education, university extension	43	41.4	14	25.5

Each parent indicated his willingness to attend a program under three possible sponsors (Table 6). Inspection of the data indicates that most preschool parents (82.7%) and school parents (65.5%) prefer the preschool or school in which their child is enrolled as the sponsoring agency. Offering the class on a fee basis, as through university extension or adult education, was seen as the least preferred with only 41.4 percent of the preschool parents

and 25.5 percent of the school parents indicating a willingness to attend. The parents' frequent contact with the personnel, especially in the preschool situation, could be a factor in their preference for the school or preschool as the sponsoring agency. Also, organizing the program on a fee basis could make it appear too structured or expert-oriented and the parents' response could be interpreted as a rejection of a strictly "student" role for themselves. With the school or preschool as the sponsoring agency, parents would be more able to consider themselves partners in the child's total development. This could also indicate a desire by parents to have more coordination between home and school efforts.

LENGTH OF THE PROGRAM

TABLE 7

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF NUMBER OF WEEKS SUGGESTED FOR LENGTH OF PROGRAM

No. of Weeks	Frequency	
	Preschool Parents	School Parents
1	0	1
2	0	0
3	2	2
4	10	4
5	2	3
6	32	21
7	0	0
8	14	5
9	6	2
10	27	15
11	0	0
12	11	1
13	0	0
14	0	0
15	0	0
16	0	1

The length of any program is a factor in its success. All parents were asked how many weeks a parent education class meeting once a week should last. The mean response of the preschool parents was 7.8 weeks, while the mean response of school parents was 7.3 weeks. Inspection of the frequency distribution of the responses (Table 7) indicates modes of six weeks for both preschool and school parents. This would indicate that six weeks is stated most often as the preferred duration of a parent education class by both groups. Further inspection of the data indicates another, though smaller, cluster of responses at ten weeks for both preschool and school parents.

The distribution of the responses suggests that length should be set by the participants in each parent education program in order to meet the specific needs of that group. This belief was supported by additional comments made by parents. "The number of weeks or months I would actually attend a parent education course would be determined by the quality of the course" and "I would attend as long as I was getting something from the class" were two comments typical of several written by parents.

FORMAT OF THE PROGRAM

TABLE 8

PARENTS' PREFERENCES FOR FORMAT OF PROGRAM

Format	Preschool Parents		School Parents	
	No. Choosing	%	No. Choosing	%
Lecture	4	3.9	1	1.8
Group discussion	4	3.9	3	5.5
Combination lecture and discussion	80	76.8	34	61.8
Demonstration	0	0	0	0
Role-playing	0	0	0	0
Combination of observation and discussion	16	15.4	17	30.9

Parents chose the format they would most like a parent education class to follow. Responses indicated that 80 preschool parents (76.8%) and 34 school parents (61.8%) prefer the combination of lecture and discussion (Table 8). This would suggest that parents want most a combination of expertise from the leader or speaker and an opportunity for individual participation. The activity-oriented demonstration and role-playing are the formats most used by parent education programs for the disadvantaged. These

received no votes as the most preferred format of economically non-disadvantaged parents. This is important to know in setting up or attempting to adapt a program for the economically non-disadvantaged parent.

In discussing the format, four preschool parents added comments that stressed the importance of a qualified leader, one saying,

> A parent education program would have to have knowledgeable, experienced leaders and speakers who would have something new to offer and who wouldn't let discussion become a gripe session.

This parent also made an organizational suggestion, saying

> I would suggest a reading guide for parents with references for the specific areas of interest to the particular parents. A study group could read, discuss, and share experiences as they try to apply it to their home situations.

ADDITIONAL PARENT COMMENTS

Preschool parents made many additional comments. Timing of the program was considered by three parents. One stated that it was important to

> educate the parents before the action has taken place or simultaneously with the age of the child so that mistakes can be eliminated and the parents can make corrections before damage is done or habits formed.

Another stressed the preventive aspect by saying

> I think parent education classes are a worthwhile endeavor but would like to see some consideration given to pre-parenthood classes, where I feel a real need exists due to lack of knowledge of what parenting entails, the romanticization of parenthood in our culture, etc.

Two preschool parents qualified their lack of interest in a parent education program because of prior exposure, one saying, "I do not feel in need of a program like this because of my education and family background."

Four preschool parents commented on the questionnaire itself, particularly on the difficulty of ranking the content topics. One wrote, "At any given time each topic could rank first in importance," while another felt that "This was like trying to decide what is more important, eating or drinking?"

Only six school parents made written comments on their questionnaires. Two felt there was a "definite need" for a parent education program in the community and one couple gave their names and volunteered to help develop it.

One school parent emphasized individual needs saying,

> If I encountered a problem with a child, I would seek professional help suited to my child and myself. I do not feel that group sessions accomplish a great deal, because what may be great for one child or even the majority of children, may actually be wrong for another child in an entirely different situation.

And finally, one school parent suggested as an alternative to a program, the distribution of a weekly or

monthly newsletter to the parents for "their own reading and discussion."

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

Concern has been expressed about the expertise of today's parents in meeting the multiple demands of the parental role. Much research in the field supports the belief that parents, as the adults most closely involved, must have the knowledge and confidence necessary to maximize their child's potential through effective parenting.

Parent education programs have been used to provide the needed knowledge. Many programs are now in existence for the economically disadvantaged parent and research has shown that the programs are valuable to both parents and to the child's development. It was believed that parent education programs could also benefit the economically non-disadvantaged parents.

The study was conducted to determine if economically non-disadvantaged parents did feel a need for a parent education program and if they did, how it should be organized. The study also sought to compare the needs of parents who have children in two different age groups.

A one page questionnaire with a cover letter was given to 191 preschool parents and 178 school parents in

Bozeman, Montana in January 1974. Responses were received from 104 (54.5%) preschool parents and 58 (32.6%) school parents. This low response rate must be kept in mind when considering the results and interpretations.

Eighty-five, or 81.7 percent of the preschool parents and 37, or 67.3 percent of the school parents responded that they would be interested in attending a parent education program. A Chi square analysis indicated that parents who have their first child enrolled in preschool are significantly more interested in attending a program than those with later children enrolled. The Chi square analyses of the interest shown by preschool and school parents who have and have not previously attended a program both had computed values that did not reach significance at the .05 level. This suggested that previous attendance did not affect present interest.

A Spearman rank order correlation computed on the content choices of preschool and school parents was significant at the .01 level which indicated a high level of agreement on the ranked importance of the topics. The preschool parents chose parent-child communication as the most important topic while school parents' highest ranked topic was building the child's self-concept. These same

topics in reverse order were the second choices. The lowest ranked topic by both groups was home use of educational toys and materials. The topic choices indicated a major difference in the needs of economically non-disadvantaged parents compared to the disadvantaged.

Each parent was asked to indicate his willingness to attend a program under three possible sponsors. A majority of preschool parents (82.7%) and school parents (65.5%) preferred the preschool or school in which their child is enrolled as the sponsoring agency. Offering the class on a fee basis, as through university extension or adult education, was seen as the least preferred by both groups.

All parents stated how many weeks a program should last if it met once each week. Inspection of the frequency distribution indicated that six weeks was the length most often suggested by both groups. The computed mean of preschool parent responses was 7.8 weeks while school parents had a mean response of 7.3 weeks.

The most preferred format of a parent education program was the combination of lecture and discussion. Eighty preschool parents (76.8%) and 34 school parents (61.8%) chose this format. The activity-oriented

demonstration and role-playing, formats usually used by compensatory parent education programs, were chosen by none of the non-disadvantaged parents.

CONCLUSIONS

From the data collected in this study the following can be concluded:

1) Economically non-disadvantaged parents are interested in attending a parent education program.

A majority of both preschool and school parents who responded indicated that they would be interested in attending so economically non-disadvantaged parents can be considered to feel a need for a parent education program. Parents who have the first child in their family enrolled in preschool should be considered a primary target group for they showed significantly greater interest. Prior attendance of a program had no significant influence on the present interest of either school or preschool parents.

2) There are major differences in the content needs of economically non-disadvantaged parents as opposed to those of disadvantaged parents.

A parent education program for the economically non-disadvantaged parent should concentrate on the most advanced

aspects of the child's development. Parents feel little need for information on home use of educational toys and materials, suggesting that the educational background and available books and magazines are sources of basic information for these parents.

3) The sponsoring agency for a program should be the school or preschool in which the child is enrolled.

The majority of preschool and school parents responding chose the school or preschool in which their child is enrolled as the most acceptable sponsoring agency. This could be due to the familiarity of the personnel involved, or to a desire for closer cooperation between the home and school.

4) The length of the program should be set by each individual group in a parent education program.

The length of a parent education program meeting once each week most often suggested was six weeks for both school and preschool parents. The mean response of preschool parents was 7.3 weeks and the mean for school parents was 7.8 weeks. The range of responses, along with the additional comments, suggests, however, that each parent education group should set the length of the program for themselves according to their particular needs.

5) The format for a program should be a combination of lecture and discussion.

The majority of parents responding chose the combination of lecture and discussion as the format they most preferred. The formats typical of programs for the disadvantaged parent, role-playing and demonstration, were chosen by no economically non-disadvantaged parents.

All responses make it appear very unlikely that any program for the economically disadvantaged parent could be applied without major alterations to the economically non-disadvantaged parent. A new model is required to meet the very different needs of the economically non-disadvantaged parent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Improvement of the Study

The study would have been improved by the selection of a school parent sample in a economically non-disadvantaged area other than Bozeman. The Bozeman Public Schools have reached the saturation point on studies and the restrictions they have set as a result are quite limiting. Also, responsiveness of the parents is undoubtedly affected by the large number of survey instruments they receive.

The distribution methods used with school parents could also have been improved. Relying on second grade children to deliver anything to their parents is hazardous, and mailing the questionnaires would probably have elicited a higher return.

On the questionnaire itself, the first part requesting parents to rank the ten topics proved difficult for many to do. Rating each topic for its own importance rather than in comparison might have been a simpler procedure. Also, limiting parents to one choice of sponsoring agency would have given more informative results.

For Schools and Preschools

Schools and preschools must accept the responsibility of developing effective parent education programs to meet the needs of parents. The closer cooperation that could be fostered by a program could only benefit the children involved. Montana State University's Child Development Center, as a laboratory school, should assume a position of leadership in this area.

For Future Studies

A future study might investigate what the teachers of school and preschool children feel the goals of a

parent education program should be. Another topic for further consideration should be a clarification of the characteristics desired by parents for the leader of a parent education program.

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APPENDIX

January 21, 1974

Dear Parents:

Informed parents are one of the greatest assets your child can have. Many places now have parent education programs designed specifically for parents with young children. These are intended to give information on developing every child's potential and to help with a variety of child-rearing problems. I am now asking your help in determining the need for such a program in a city the size and composition of Bozeman, and also the possible content.

How important is a child's future? Please take two or three minutes to complete the attached sheet and return it to your child's teacher by _____.

Thank you for your help and interest.

Sincerely,

Linda M. Snedigar
Graduate Teaching Assistant
Child Development Center
Montana State University

Below is a list of ten topics that could be included in a parent education program. Please number them from 1 to 10 in the order of their importance to you.

1. Parent-child communication skills ___
2. Language development ___
3. The positive approach to discipline ___
4. Physical care, nutrition, growth, and health ___
5. Building the child's self-concept ___
6. Home use of educational toys and materials ___
7. Setting and enforcing "livable limits" for children ___
8. Perception training activities ___
9. Social skills and development ___
10. Mental development and creativity ___

Please list any other topics you feel should be included: _____

_____

11. Would you be interested in attending a parent education program?

	YES	NO

Would you enroll in a parent education program if (check the appropriate answer for each of the next three)

	YES	NO
12. it was sponsored by the school or nursery school in which your child is enrolled?	___	___
13. it was sponsored by some local group as a community service project?	___	___
14. it was offered on a fee basis through adult education, university extension, etc.	___	___

15. If you would enroll and the class met once each week, how many weeks should a parent education class last? _____

A parent education class should be mostly (check only one)

16. Lectures ___
17. Group discussion ___
18. Combination of lecture and discussion ___
19. Demonstrations ___
20. Role-playing ___
21. Combination of observation and discussion ___

22. According to age, the child bringing this questionnaire home holds what position in your family?

___ 1st ___ Other

23. Have you ever participated in a parent education program?

___ YES ___ NO

Please use the back of the page for any comments you may have.

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