
Impact of the Creative Parenting Program

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Abstract

Seventy parents volunteered to participate in a program called Creative Parenting. A Solomon four-group design was used to register change on measures related to program content. Two of the five measures resulted in statistically significant gains. The results supported the proposition that the Creative Parenting program was effective in changing parental behaviours on two dimensions. Parents became more accepting of their children and relied less on parental authority in their relationship with their children.

Résumé

Soixante-dix parents se sont portés volontaires pour participer à un programme appelé Creative Parenting. Le Modèle de groupe de quatre de Solomon a été utilisé pour cumuler les mesures reliées au contenu du programme. Deux des cinq mesures ont montré des gains statistiquement significatifs. Les résultats ont supporté l'hypothèse selon laquelle le programme Creative Parenting était efficace pour apporter des changements comportementaux chez les parents sur deux plans. Les parents se sont montrés plus réceptifs envers leur enfant et faisaient moins usage de leur autorité parentale dans leur relation avec leur enfant.

Parenting has never been easy at the best of times. Today, when significant lifestyle changes have occurred and new family structures have evolved, parenting continues to be a challenge. Numerous programs have been developed in response to parenting needs and struggles (Croake & Glover, 1977; Fine, 1976; Harman & Brim, 1980). Recent literature includes references to diverse programs to assist parents (Holland & Hallersley, 1980; Schumaker, 1980). Anglin (1984) has described the wide variety of parenting programs as a "field with a thousand flowers blooming (p. 3).

While some programs are designed from one theoretical framework, such as Gordon's (1975) Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.) and Dinkmeyer & McKay's (1976) Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (S.T.E.P.), others, like Green's (1975) Positive Parenting, integrate several theories. The literature identifies four major orientations from which parenting programs have developed. These are behaviour modification programs, communication oriented programs, Alderian programs and human development programs.

Parent education programs like P.E.T. help parents become better facilitators of their children's emotional growth (Summerlin & Ward, 1981; Therrien, 1979; Pain, 1984). The results from these studies showed

significant positive change in parents' attitudes, particularly in the dimensions of independence, trust and communication.

A number of other researchers have evaluated the effectiveness of S.T.E.P., an Adlerian based skill training program. Findings from studies by Steed (1971), Berret (1975), Kierans (1976) and Nordal (1976) reported no evidence of significant change in parental attitudes concerning the parent-child relationship using the S.T.E.P. program.

Levant and Doyle (1983), employing Porter's Acceptance Scale (1954), focused on the effectiveness of the Systematic Communication Skills program. Their study involved fathers of school age children and found no significant change as a result of treatment.

Creative Parenting (Neufeld, 1983), a relatively new parent education program, offers a perspective and approach that differs from these better known programs. The theoretical perspective that Creative Parenting offers is based on the psychology of human development. Historically, this perspective finds its roots in the writing of Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Rousseau (1962) proposed that human development proceeds according to an inner, personal timetable which unfolds in a series of developmental stages. During these stages, children experience the world in different ways and make decisions for themselves based on their own experiences and understanding (Crain, 1980). John Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment behaviours, Jean Piaget's (1964) theory of cognitive development and Erik Erikson's (1950) stages of identity developments expand Rousseau's key concepts and together

TABLE 1

*Skeleton Outline of the Program**

<i>Part</i>	<i>Title/Topic(s)</i>	<i>Session</i>
I	Parenting in Perspective: introduction & program overview	1
II	Building a Foundation of Trust: factors in development of trust	2
III	A Child's Sense of Self:	
	a) stage of autonomy	3
	b) stage of initiative	4
IV	A Child's Self-Beliefs:	
	a) self-beliefs	5
	b) self-confidence	6
V	Emotional Development:	
	a) respect for the child	7
	b) effective ways of caring	8
VI	Approaches to Discipline:	
	a) purpose of discipline	9
	b) styles/models of discipline	10

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<i>Group</i>	<i>January</i>		<i>March/April</i>	<i>June</i>
0	0 (13)*		0 (13)	
1	0 (14)	X	0 (14)	
2		X	0 (11)	
3			0-(32)-0 (18)	X 0 (11)
(4)			-0 (14)	X 0 (9)

*0 = observation(s); X = treatment; n in brackets.

FIGURE 1

Design employed for the study

form the basis for the topics and concepts presented in the Creative Parenting program.

The course content involves the application to parenting of principles taken directly from the psychology of human development. Creative Parenting emerges from insight and understanding, not technology and skill. Prescription and advice are avoided since they focus on training, not education. The object is to release the individual developmental process within the child.

Table 1 provides a brief summary of the program's content. An evaluation of the effectiveness of this ten-session, twenty-hour program was the focus of this study.

METHOD

The Creative Parenting program was advertised in the Vancouver, British Columbia area using brochures and notices distributed to community, day care and family drop-in centres. People registered for either the January-March or April-June classes by completing and mailing attached registration forms. They could also register by telephoning the instructor.

Following registration, participants were contacted, first by letter and then by a follow-up telephone call, to ascertain their willingness to participate in a research-based evaluation of the program. Willing participants were assigned to groups according to a Solomon four-group experimental design. This design was chosen because of the possibility of pretest-treatment interaction especially when attitudinal measures are used (Borg & Gall, p. 641).

Those participants choosing the January-March classes became experimental groups 1 and 2 (Figure 1). One of these groups (1) was randomly assigned a pretest. Those willing participants who requested the April-June classes were randomly assigned and used as the two no treatment groups (0 and 3) required by the Solomon design. Again one group (Group 0) was assigned a pretest.

Group 3 posttest scores functioned as pretests as well since their April-June treatment followed immediately. Following the initial posttesting and before the April-June treatment, Group 3 was separated into two groups (3, 4) (see Figure 1.)

Instruments used were the Porter Acceptance Scale (1954), the Schluderman Report of Parent Behavior Inventory (1979) and the Olson Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scale (1979). The first of these has a page used for collecting demographic data from each participant.

All members of the first treatment group (Group 1) received copies of the three instruments at the first session in January with the request to complete them independently and return them at the second session a week later. Members of the pretested control group (Group 0) had the instruments delivered in January and were collected a week later. These same procedures were repeated in March during session nine of the program at which time the instruments were applied as posttests to all groups (Groups 0, 1, 2, 3). The independent completion of all instruments was again emphasized.

RESULTS

An important consideration for the purpose of generalizing the results of this study was whether the volunteer sample of 70 parents (55 female, 15 male) was representative of some defined population. The demographic data revealed that most parents (84%) were in the 25-35 year age range; that most (83%) were married and living with a spouse; that 82% had been married five years or more; that 84% had one or more years of post-secondary education and that 85% had either one or two children. As a result, the target population was defined as parents who (i) are married, (ii) are relatively young, (iii) have one or two children, and (iv) have one or more years of post-secondary education. Generally, parents volunteering for the program tended to come from the middle to upper-middle socio-economic population.

Equivalency of the randomly assigned groups was also a concern. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) F-test applied to the pretests revealed no statistically significant differences among means at the .05 level (Table 2). A third concern involved a threat to internal validity, namely, the possibility of pretest-treatment interaction. A two-way ANOVA F-test revealed no significant posttest mean differences between those taking and those not taking the pretests. (F-ratio probabilities ranged from .084 to .782.)

Posttest results are presented in Table 2. No significant mean differences appeared for the two Olson subtests (Cohesion, Adaptability) nor the "family disharmony" subtest of the Schluderman scale. A statistically significant mean difference was revealed for the Porter Acceptance Scale and the "authority" subscale of the Schluderman.

A multiple-comparisons procedure revealed that three groups (1, 3, 4) had mean scores that were significantly different from the control group. None of the experimental group means were significantly different from each other.

Despite the conclusion reached earlier that there was no significant pretest-treatment interaction effect, it was of interest to note that the Group 2 (no pretest) mean score was not significantly different from the control group (0) mean while Groups 1, 3 and 4 (pretested) were.

TABLE 2

Pretest and Posttest Means, Standard Deviations (S.D.) and F-ratios for One-way ANOVA Across All Groups

Group		Pretest (n=59)			Posttest (n=56)		
		Mean	S.D.	F-value	Mean	S.D.	F-value
Porter (Acceptance)	0	147.2	18.4		146.5	17.00	
	1	145.4	15.2		160.8	16.8	
	2	—	—		155.4	16.1	
	3	151.6	15.2		162.7	15.4	
	4	143.9	15.4	0.71	165.9	10.8	2.54*
Olson (Cohesion)	0	248.2	23.8		256.1	21.8	
	1	255.9	10.8		254.2	19.6	
	2	—	—		246.0	16.8	
	3	252.6	16.8		245.7	15.6	
	4	241.4	16.5	1.87	242.7	19.7	1.10
Olson (Adaptability)	0	178.0	15.2		173.8	11.1	
	1	180.0	14.0		182.4	12.7	
	2	—	—		179.8	13.2	
	3	177.2	9.0		179.1	12.8	
	4	170.9	16.7	1.29	166.4	15.1	2.31**
Schluderman (Authority)	0	12.0	0.8		11.8	0.9	
	1	11.5	1.0		11.4	0.8	
	2	—	—		11.2	0.6	
	3	11.5	0.6		10.8	0.5	
	4	11.7	0.6	1.27	11.6	0.6	3.38*
Schluderman (Family disharmony)	0	13.2	2.3		13.5	2.2	
	1	13.7	1.9		13.6	1.8	
	2	—	—		14.1	1.4	
	3	13.9	1.9		13.4	1.4	
	4	13.8	1.4	0.45	14.0	1.6	0.37

* $p \leq .05$ ** $p < .10$

However, the Group 2 mean was not significantly different from Group 1, 3 and 4 means either. One might conclude a weak, non-significant interaction. Nevertheless, the evidence does suggest greater parental acceptance of children following treatment.

The post hoc multiple-comparisons test also revealed a statistically significant difference among the Schluderman "authority" subscale mean scores. Two of the experimental group means (2, 3) were significantly different from the control group mean but the other two experimental group means (1, 4) were not. A statistically significant difference was also registered between the means for Groups 3 and 4. Hence, only two of the four "equally treated" groups registered significant gains on this measure reflecting a reduction in parental use of authority when relating to their children.

DISCUSSION

The three instruments chosen for this study attempted to document change as a result of participation in the Creative Parenting program. Two measures (Porter's Acceptance scale; Schluderman's "authority" subscale) registered change while three (Schluderman's "disharmony" subscale; Olson's "cohesion" and "adaptability" subscales) did not.

Parents' acceptance of their children increased significantly as a result of taking Creative Parenting. This evidence suggests that once parents better understand the developmental stage of their child, their acceptance of that child is greater.

This result is similar to the research findings of Summerlin and Ward (1981), Therrien (1979) and Pain (1984). Their research revealed a significant positive change in parents' attitudes as a result of participating in a parenting program. Parents tended to extend greater trust and independence to their children and parent-child communication improved.

The second significant change was registered with the "authority" subscale of Schluderman's Report of Parent Behavior Inventory. The evidence suggested that there was a significant reduction in the parents' use of authority in the parent-child relationship. Along the socio-political continuum one would tend to associate such reduction in the use of authority with a movement toward democratic parenting. Researchers such as Stearn (1971), Stolzoff (1980) and Pain (1984) have also shown that parents have taken a more democratic stance toward their children as a result of being involved in parenting programs.

CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the Creative Parenting program has provided evidence to support the proposition that the program is effective in changing the attitudes of parents in two ways: (i) acceptance of one's

child, and (ii) the parent's use of authority in the parent-child relationship. While this study has demonstrated that the program is effective in these two dimensions, it must be remembered that the subjects represented a rather specific population and that the instructor was the author of the Creative Parenting program. Hence, external validity is somewhat circumscribed. Further research will be needed to expand and extend how these preliminary and promising results apply generally.

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