

Parent Preferences for Learning

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Abstract

Parent involvement and parent education have been topics of concern for teachers and caregivers for decades. However, the recommended practices focus on programs researched with and designed for parents using the White middle-class as its target population (Fine & Henry, 1989; Harman & Brim, 1980; Powell, 1988). This limited focus clearly excludes much of the parent population in this society. There are numerous factors to consider when designing parent education programs.

Parents are pivotal for most families, but consideration must be given to parents as individual learners. Understanding that life stage, age of children, learning needs, economic status, cultural contributions, and social networks all contribute to the design of the program will enable teachers and parent educators to design programs that will meet individual parent content needs plus individual parent learning needs.

In this study, more than 1800 parents were asked to respond to a questionnaire about their parenting information needs. Preliminary findings indicate that differences exist between and among groups in how they prefer to receive parenting information. In the first phase of analysis, findings indicate that parent educators cannot meet the needs of parents as a homogeneous audience. Planned attention should be given to target parent audiences. Parents of different ethnicities vary in how they currently obtain parenting information. For example, African American parents more often than others use immediate family members; primarily their own parents as primary sources of information while Hispanic parents prefer to turn to their medical practitioner as a source of information.

Educational level is a consideration for those designing parent education programs as well. Parents with at least two years of college prefer newsletters, books, and magazines, while parents with less education show preferences for home visits, videos, and learning through computer-aided instruction.

Indications are that parent educators need to understand parents as adult learners and become more creative, diverse and innovative in program design and delivery offering a range of learning opportunities.

Note: Dr. DeBord is continuing to analyze data from this study. Information concerning preferences for learning in a group versus individually, preferred locations, comfort level with others in the group, who should instruct, and topics about which parents want to learn will be forthcoming. Each of these questions will be comparatively analyzed by race/ethnic groups, educational level, gender, and professional skill level, family structure and number and ages of children.

References

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