

A SUMMARY OF “See How We Grow: A Report on the Status of Parenting Education in the U.S.”

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The following document represents a summary of Dr. Carter’s article, “See How We Grow: A Report on the Status of Parenting Education in the U.S.” The summary was created by Families First Parenting Programs and is not intended to replace the original work.

SUMMARY

In 1994, the PEW Charitable Trust commissioned a research project to help determine what strategic funding opportunities might exist in the field of parenting education. The PEW Trust decided not to fund parenting education (for reasons undisclosed), but realized that the results of the research project provided a valuable summary of the state of parenting education in the U.S. This report, written in 1996 by Nick Carter, who headed the project, is a summary of the results.

In his foreword, Carter says:

“This is the adolescence of an emerging discipline, filled with great promise but plagued by the tensions of maturity and immaturity. Our collective challenge is to understand what nurturing is necessary in order to delivery on the promise of this youth.”

Parenting education is a young field, full of energy and commitment. It is working to fill a gap left by the disappearance of support systems parents used to have and to address the difficulties of raising children in today’s society. The education provided to parents and families is making a difference to many thousands of parents and professionals who work with children across the country. Parenting programs are increasingly becoming part of the Family Support movement, which is having a growing impact on policy makers. More than that, parenting knowledge is increasingly being understood as something that is not innate, but can be taught. And that more knowledge and a better set of parenting “tools” improves a parent’s effectiveness and therefore a child’s experience and development.

Carter traveled the country visiting parenting education programs and with his staff from Parents, Inc. compiled the report. The report summarizes what the team found out about parenting programs in the U.S. and the field of parenting education, its strengths and assets, and its weaknesses and challenges. Carter defines parenting education and family support, creates a typology to categorize the many different kinds of parenting programs and provides a list of characteristics with which to compare programs and help evaluate their effectiveness. He also provides lists of example programs, an invaluable resource. He discusses the challenges facing the field at some length, making it clear what needs to be addressed for parenting education to mature as a discipline.

Because there is no consensus on industry definitions, Carter came up with his own definitions for parenting education and family support. He defines parenting education as: “Programs, support services and resources offered to parents and caregivers that are designed to support them or increase their capacity and confidence in raising healthy children.” Carter also defines, then identifies 5 key principles of family support: ecological orientation, community context, value of social support, developmental perspective on parenting and affirming cultural diversity and promoting cultural competency. In 1996, he estimated that only about 10% of parenting education programs could be classified as based upon family support principles. He sees this percentage rising rapidly over the upcoming years and believes that the family support movement is here to stay, has much to offer and will “reshape the nature of care for children and families.”

In order to make sense of the parenting programs he reviewed, Carter came up with a typology, different from the ones Kagan/Shelley and Levine had come up with previously. Carter’s typology categorizes each parenting program by the “fundamental orientation that shaped its development.” He believes his typology provides some insight into the assumptions underlying the programs, enables all parenting programs to be included and does not confuse methods with program type. His categories are: Education, Multiple & Complex Needs, Work, Health Care, Normative, Special Needs, Advocacy, Research and Collaborative Design.

The field of parenting education has many challenges to address. In Carter’s words, the field “*does not need to grow more branches, it needs to dig deeper roots.*” Infrastructure, standards, discipline, training, evaluation and research – all necessary elements for the field to deliver fully on all its potential – are missing. An infrastructure would provide the field with support, leadership, dialogue, networking and professional growth opportunities. Lack of an established infrastructure also makes parenting programs more vulnerable to backlash from opponents of parenting education or co-opting by groups like the religious right. The decentralization of communication and media results in most programs being very isolated from each other. Often programs re-invent the wheel, rather than learn from one another.

Another significant challenge is the field’s interdisciplinary nature. Parenting education draws from four disciplines: education, health care, human services and mental health. In order to move forward most effectively, parenting education needs to come up with a common language and a conceptual framework that each of those four disciplines can embrace.

There exists a lack of standards for training practitioners. Carter sees this as probably the most significant area in which the field needs to invest. Only four colleges and universities currently offer degree programs in parenting education and family support. For both in-service or pre-service training, no nationally recognized curricula exists. Two aspects of parenting education complicate the resolution of the deficits in the training and preparation area. One is the multi-disciplinary nature of the field. Professionals from each of the 4 discipline areas are trained in their field. If they are participating in parenting education programs, they may take formal or informal education in parenting education, but still most

likely retain the filters related to their discipline. Second, there is an “*inherent tension between collaborative, nonauthoritarian, asset-based approaches and the traditions of many professions whose fundamental training advances a ‘we know best’ expert approach (FIS, 1991).*” How to maintain the positive aspects of community based programs and yet establish some standards for leader preparation and training will be one of the field’s most important challenges.

Another area Carter identifies as a critical one for the field to address is research and evaluation. Proof of the effectiveness of parenting education is in short supply. Many programs lack interest in or appreciation of research and evaluation. There is strong evidence that parents play a critical role in raising healthy children and that well-designed programs, especially those with a family support orientation, tend to have longer lasting effects. Research and evaluation are needed to answer: “*What programs work best for whom, when and for how long, and why are they effective? (FIS, 1991)*”

In summary, Carter thinks there is much to celebrate about the field of parenting education and its positive impact on parents, children and families. He also sees significant challenges facing this adolescent field. The need for national leadership, training, evaluation and advocacy are at the top of the list. National leadership needs to emerge, training standards and opportunities need to increase significantly, research and evaluation need to become priorities and be funded and there needs to be more advocacy of parenting education, of parents playing more powerful roles and of lobbying of policy makers. Investments in these areas will ensure parenting education can deliver on its tremendous potential.



Outline

FOREWORD

- This publication is the result of a research project commissioned by the PEW Trusts in 1994 to help determine what strategic funding opportunities might exist in the field of parenting education.
- Nick Carter, then president of Parents, Inc., lead project. Lauren Kahn was his research assistant.
- PEW Trusts decided not to pursue funding in parenting education, but realized the document was a comprehensive overview.
- Not a scholarly work, illustrative, not exhaustive, opted for insight over detailed documentation.
- Young and exciting field in its adolescence “filled with great promise but plagued by the tensions of maturity and immaturity”. “Our collective challenge is to understand what nurturing is necessary in order to deliver on the promise of this youth.”

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO PARENTING EDUCATION (SEE PAGE 1 OF PART 1)

- Support system for new parents has all but disappeared due to a mobile society, lack of informal supports (immediate family, church and communities), number of mothers who work, reduction in traditional, 2 parent families and lack of health insurance for many.
- Challenge of raising a child today is more difficult than it has ever been, due to disease, media, lowering age of puberty, pressures for adult-like behavior.
- Expectations for parents have risen
- History of Parenting Ed:
 - Around turn of the century, formalized support – “Friendly visitors” and Settlement Houses – centered around children in need.
 - 1946 publishing of “Baby and Child Care” by Dr. Benjamin Spock – instant best seller. Revealed that parenting is neither instinctive or simple and that everyone needs help, not just the needy. Parenting education started in this medical arena.
 - Evolved the idea that parents need quality information and meaningful, emotional support.
 - 60’s – many important works by Fraiberg, Gordon, Erikson, Dreikurs, Hold, Ginott and Bowlby published. Parenting education emerging as legitimate learning activity for parents and practitioners.
 - Major shift from didactic, medical and prescriptive parenting education focusing on problems to be solved to parents wanting a partnership with a practitioner who would share the journey with them and respect their being an “expert” on their own child. Head Start took this approach.
 - By 1980’s, parenting education growing at geometric rate. In 1996, estimate more than 50,000 parenting programs reaching millions of parents

and caregivers everyday. Widely diverse and broad variations in quality. Most small, community based efforts with budgets under \$25,000. But also large, multi-million dollar programs. And, the media has just discovered parenting.

- **Questions that arise:** How do we know these programs are effective? What are the underlying assumptions about families and healthy parenting? Who is doing the parenting education and are they qualified? What constitutes good practice? Who is holding programs accountable?
- **PEW report** – Provide a road map of terms and types plus highlight critical issues for future. Attempt to “see the forest”, the whole picture. Primary objective of report is analysis, not inventory. Look at commonalities and differences of the programs.

CHAPTER 2: GETTING GROUNDED: DEFINITIONS (SEE PAGE 10 OF PART 1)

- No current consensus on definitions
- **Parenting Education** – “Programs, support services and resources offered to parents and caregivers that are designed to support them or increase their capacity and confidence in raising healthy children. Within the realm of family support, parenting education is seen as a central strategy for nurturing and empowering parents in ways that are consistent with family support principles.” Use “parenting” instead of “parents” to be more inclusive on non-biological or legal individuals who have parenting responsibilities.
- **Family Support** – “A broad array of services and activities that are ‘designed to enable and empower by enhancing and promoting individual and family capabilities that support and strengthen family functioning in general and parenting capabilities specifically’ (Dunst)”. Can include parenting education, but also include child care, job skill training, health services and other activities designed to strengthen families – not just intervention, but build on a family’s assets. History and scope of family support detailed by Weissbourd and Kagan (1994). Carl Dunst (1994) identifies 5 key family support premises:
 1. Ecological orientation
 2. Community context
 3. Value of social support
 4. Developmental perspective on parenting
 5. Affirming cultural diversity and promoting cultural competency

His central paradigms are:

- Promotion
- Empowerment
- Strengths based
- Resource based
- Family centered

Author of PEW report is convinced a family support orientation is necessary for effective work with parents. Less than 1/5 of parenting programs adhere to family support principles.

- **Parent** – Anyone who carries the responsibility for raising a child.
- **Caregiver** – Persons who may not be identified as “parent”, but who play a significant role in providing care and nurture for a child. May include professionals and paraprofessionals, as well as volunteers and extended family.

CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING WHY: THE COMPELLING EVIDENCE (SEE PAGE 15 OF PART 1)

- **Why is parenting so important?**
 - Dependent upon its parents for essential ingredients of life: food, clothing, shelter, health care, nurturance and love.
 - Shape a child's attitude, confidence and skills in engaging the world.
 - Shape a child's abilities to solve problems, develop eagerness for learning, sense of self and values.
 - Therefore, how well a parent is prepared to do these things are of critical importance.
- No schools for parents and no licenses required. Thing most parents rely on is how they were raised themselves – positive or negative, and on informal information gathered from friends, neighbors and books.
- **Changing Families** – Decreasing number of children live with 2 parents (now less than 70%). For black children in 1994, 63% were living in a household headed by a lone woman.
- **Child Abuse and Neglect** – In 1990, the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect concluded that child abuse in the U.S. represents a national emergency. A child who is abused is 6 times more likely than his or her non-abused counterpart to be an abusive parent (Kaufman and Zigler, 1990). Single most effective strategy for preventing child abuse is to provide parents with education and support beginning with the birth of their first baby.
- **Juvenile Delinquency** – Child abuse increases the odds of future delinquency and adult criminality by 40% (Widom, 1992). Number one key strategy for preventing and reducing at-risk behavior and delinquency was “strengthen families in their role of providing guidance and discipline and instilling sound values as their children's first and primary teachers” (Wilson, 1993). “Parenting practices are the most powerful predictors of later delinquency” (Buka, 1993).
- **Crime and Violence** – Healthy home environment, with affection, cohesion and involvement in the lives of their children, is the single most important factor in preventing delinquency.
- **Conclusion** – No time in history of our country is the need for quality parenting education and meaningful family support more critical. It cannot, however, solve the negative effects of poverty, racism or the welfare system. At best parenting education can strengthen a struggling parent's ability to offer love, health and heritage to a child, perhaps giving a child a chance for success in life. It cannot change the world the child lives in, but strengthen his or her ability to survive and succeed in it.
- **Families have not lost their values** – “What families lack is the societal commitment to support them in tangible and effective ways as they raise their children.”

CHAPTER 4: THE UNIVERSE OF PARENTING EDUCATION: A TYPOLOGY (SEE P. 22 OF PART 1)

- Propose a typology to classify parenting education programs. Critical factor in classifying the program is the fundamental orientation that shaped its development, even if this varies from what is now its primary activity.
- Previous typologies: Kagan and Shelly – proposed 8 types of family support programs. Carter calls this a quantitative inventory and that it did not provide much insight into the assumptions upon which programs developed or outcomes sought. Levine – proposed 10 types. Carter sees as more useful, but seems to have confused descriptives and methods with assumptions and outcomes. Both exclude many programs, have a hard time classifying parenting programs that are employed in more than one category and confuses methods with program type in some cases.
- Carter’s typology groups by basic orientation. Do not distinguish those that are exclusively parenting from those where parenting ed is a part.
- **Education (Service Intensity Level 1-4 (see Ch 5 for definition of intensity levels))**

Generally, these programs are school based, school related, or try to have a positive influence on traditional academic markers. These programs:

 - Impact academic success, school readiness or parent involvement in education
 - Target populations for remedial or educational skill development
 - Focus on parent’s own skills or abilities to nurture skills in their children
 - May include life skills and health care issues (readiness programs)

Sub-categories are: Literacy, Life Skills, School-Linked services, Parent Involvement, Preschool and Day Care, Readiness (single largest are of parenting programs in U.S.). See text pp. 27-30 for program examples of each type.
- **Multiple & Complex Needs (Service Intensity Level 2-5) -** Diverse group of programs that have been intentionally designed to address specific “at-risk” social/medical issues or other negative outcomes. Usually the family situation has been disrupted or is in jeopardy of being disrupted. Program participants may have mandated attendance, families have multiple issues, staff often requires specialized training and higher levels of supervision and programs may be sponsored by or require interaction with city or state agencies or judicatories. Programs fall into a number of sub-categories, all of which have components that focus on some aspect of parenting education: Divorce and Separation, Corrections, Teen Pregnancy, Child Abuse Prevention, Anti-Violence and Delinquency, Substance Abuse, Therapy, Family Preservation, Kinship Care, Foster Care, Adoption, Child Protective Services, Residential Treatment. See text 30-39 for program examples of each type.
- **Work (Service Intensity Level 1-2) -** These are programs that are targeted to reach parents in the workplace and positively impact the work environment by creating a more “family friendly” situation. Include programs to strengthen parenting skills and or help them balance work/home life. Sub-categories are: Employee Assistance, Training for Management and Staff, Work and Family Research, Welfare to Work programs. See text 39-41 for program examples in each sub-category.

- **Health Care (Service Intensity Level 1-5)** – These are programs whose design is intended to positively impact one or more health-related outcomes, may focus on parent or child health, can be preventative or promotional, majority connected to child birth programs. Parenting programs in this category are offered by Hospitals and Clinics, HMO's, Public Health departments (maternal and child health), M.D.s and Health Care professionals, Prenatal and Perinatal programs (connected to hospitals or independent), Women's Health Organizations, Immunization and Nutrition, Childbirth Education, Lactation Groups and Family Planning Organizations and Services. See text pp 41-45 for program examples.
- **Normative (Service Intensity Level 1-3)** - These are programs that are primarily promotional in design, often decentralized and local, widest variation in quality of programs and preparation of practitioners, most prevalent in middle-class communities. These programs are: Grassroots Programs (offer support groups to play groups to outings), Entertainment, Play and the Arts (museums, Dad and me programs), Skill Development-Workshops and Educational Classes, Information and Referral (electronic media and telephone, books), Parent Support, Safety Programs and Services, Product Evaluation and Discounts, Religious Education. See text pp. 45-50 for program examples.
- **Special Needs (Service Intensity Level 2-5)** - Most people with developmental disabilities live at home with their families. Parents and families with children with special needs require parenting education for the unique skills they need. Some programs also serve parents with special needs themselves. Programs focus on: Disability and Impairments, Diseases, MR/MH, Developmental Delays, Resources for Parents and Research. See text, page 50-51 for specific examples.
- **Advocacy (Service Intensity Level 1-3)** - These are program that seek to impact public opinion and/or policy makers on issues of importance to parents. Includes lobbying and training and support of parents to develop capabilities to advocate for themselves. Program types include: Public Education and Media, Training and Empowerment, Lobbying. See pp. 51-52 for specific examples.
- **Research** - There has been significant research conducted in the field of parenting education and family support, but more is needed. Colleges and Universities, Authors and Individual Researchers, Centers and associations sponsor research. See pp 52-54 for specific examples.
- **Collaborative Design** – Programs that are interdisciplinary in nature provide a comprehensive array of services and emphasize sustainable change or have integrative designs and approaches to problem solving. These might be: Multidisciplinary Programs and Initiatives, Consortia for “at-risk” Communities and Partnerships between agencies. See pp. 54-55 for specific examples.

CHAPTER 5: DESCRIPTIVE CATEGORIES FOR PARENTING PROGRAMS (SEE PAGE 1 OF PART 2)

- Identify common characteristics or categories of individual programs to help compare programs and to assess their effectiveness.
- Studies have examined commonalities of family support programs, notably: H. Weiss (1987), Kagan and Shelly (1987), B. Weissbourd (1987) and D.R. Powell

(1993), Porter and Rice (1995). One of most helpful is by Carl Dunst (1994). Author identifies a schema of eight general characteristics with clarifying distinctions.

- **Theory** – Most parenting programs articulate some theoretical base, though few are aware of the intellectual roots of that philosophy and the connection it has to practice. Author found that programs advance a set of principles to guide their work, though these are most often “deductively” developed from practice, rather than “inductively” developed from established theory or theories. A surprising number of program use an eclectic approach, using several principles or theories. Danger is that it can lead to use of techniques developed from two or more very different and sometimes conflicting approaches. Recommend that programs be more precise about the underpinnings of their programs.

Common Theories used in parenting programs:

- Child Development Theory
 - Parent Development Theory
 - Family Systems Theory
 - Humanistic Theory – focus on personal development
 - Ecological Systems Theories
 - Social Improvement Theory – adults should grow and also contribute to the betterment of society
- Integrating the Theories. Two types of programs have made a concerted effort to integrate theories.
 - Family Support programs focuses on the family, but seeks to include child and adult development theory, family systems, humanistic and ecological theories. “Goals of family support programs focus on enhancing the capacity of parents in their child rearing roles; creating settings in which parents are empowered to act on their own behalf and become advocates for change; and providing community resource for parents” (Weissbourd and Kagan, 1989). Called Family Support principles. Only about 10% of existing programs can be classified as based on Family Support principles.
 - Clinical Infant Mental Health – focused treatment orientation that “utilizes direct intervention to reverse maladaptive parenting” (Stott and Musick, 1994). It assumes education and support are not sufficient to change parenting behavior. Emphasize and work to change the relationship between the parent and child.
 - **Approach** – Approach used by the parenting program – best if it logically grows from the theory being advanced. Different approaches include:
 - Family Systems – could be oriented around Intervention, Prevention or Promotion.
 - Empowerment and Self-efficacy
 - Community Based – sensitive to culture, values and mores of a particular setting and sees these things as resources for quality programming.
 - Interdisciplinary and Collaborative Infrastructure – programs that intentionally designed to connect to other disciplines.
 - **Methodology** – Every parenting program has a methodology, either intentional or unintentional. If it is the latter, it likely has mixed or poor results. “How a

service is delivered can dramatically affect the outcome of that service, often more than program leaders understand.” Major methodologies include:

- Center Based – Offered in centers, in traditional classrooms or meeting rooms. Most use a group design
- Home Based – usually employ home visitors to deliver services. Most of these programs offer services to individual families or parents.
- Institution Based – delivered in institutions as an integrated part of a more comprehensive plan of care.
- **Duration and Frequency** – Generally agreed that longer programs are more effective, though there is little research on what is the optimum length.
- **Staffing Patterns** – Four staffing patterns at work now in the field:
 - Professionals
 - Paraprofessionals
 - Volunteers
 - Combinations of any of theseTraining of practitioners is of concern. Field is filled with inconsistent standards for practice. There are very few formal educational programs in parenting education. Traditional professions rely on their basic preparation to qualify them for work with parents.
- **Intensity** – Needs of families range from simple (casual interest) to complex (clinical or therapeutic treatment). In direct correlation to the level of need is the intensity of the service required. William Dougherty, professor of family social science at University of Minnesota, suggested 5 levels:
 - Level 1: Information presented with little or no interaction
 - Level 2: First real level of parenting education – workshops on specific subjects
 - Level 3: Discussion groups and support groups
 - Level 4: Systematic assessment and planned intervention (usually home visitation and intensive group work)
 - Level 5: Therapeutic and clinical interventions
- **Supervision** – Feel there is great concern in this area. Many programs run without any form of supervision and of those that do have it, it is usually weak or inappropriate and too infrequent. Most frequent causes are cost, lack of adequately trained supervisors and an understanding/commitment from the program managers about how important it is.
- **Cultural Diversity** – Widely accepted that programs should be culturally relevant and sensitive. Debate between those programs that are culturally specific versus those culturally sensitive. Concern re parenting education and family support still being a predominately “white” exercise and not enough people of other cultures/races playing significant roles in designing, managing or executing programs.
- **Target Population** – Most programs target a particular population. Largest portion target early childhood and the smallest target the middle years. More common targets include:
 - Prenatal and Perinatal
 - Birth to Three

- Preschool
- Teens
- Low-Income Families
- Specific Cultural/Ethnic Groups
- Geographic areas
- Workplace
- Other
- **Program Activities** – See the end of Chapter 5 for a list of activities Parenting programs employ.

CHAPTER 6: OVERVIEW OF CONTENT IN PARENTING EDUCATION (SEE PAGE 32 OF PART 2)

- Underlying principles most parenting education programs adhere to:
 - Parenting is a learned skill
 - All parents have the ability to be good parents
 - All families have strengths
 - All families need and deserve support
 - No family exists in isolation; healthy families are connected
 - Every child is different and every family is different. Different things work for different children and different families.
 - There are no “quick fixes”.
 - Families must participate in shaping their own education and support
 - Best programs nurture partnerships with parents
 - Diversity of individuals, families and communities is a resource for strengthening families.
- What do parenting programs teach? Here are the most common subjects:
 - Child Development: Ages and Stages
 - Setting Limits/Effective Discipline
 - Building Self-Esteem
 - Health
 - Communication Skills
 - Stages of Parenthood
 - Parent Involvement in Education
 - Balancing Work and Family
 - Family Systems
 - Transitions in the family
 - Conflict Resolution
 - Advocacy and Parent Empowerment
 - Parents with Specialized Needs and Concerns
 - Collaborations and Networking

CHAPTER 7: TRAINING, SHARED LEARNING AND PRACTITIONER SUPPORT (SEE P. 38 OF PART 2)

- One of the most critical issues facing the development of parenting education today is how practitioners are trained, supervised and supported in their work with

parents. In no other area is the field in need of a greater investment. Lack the national consensus and the infrastructure necessary to prepare the parenting education practitioners who can deliver the quality programs and services parents need.

- Some of the things that affect training:
 - No nationally established or accepted training for parenting educators
 - Multidisciplinary field borrows insight from health care, education, mental health and human service
 - Over 200,000 current practitioners
 - 300 known parenting curricula, at least 1000 books, in excess of 7,500 designs being used in 50,000 programs
 - Many parenting programs are grassroots, poorly funded, so rely on paraprofessionals and volunteers – not only financial but a choice to be community based.
 - Inherent tension between collaborative, non-authoritarian, asset based versus the traditional “we know best” expert approach of many professions.
- Types of training available:
 - In-Service Training – Practitioners in the field already, who supplement their basic preparation with formal or informal education in parenting education. Used for professionals with credentials in another discipline – largest group of parenting educators, uncredentialed professionals, paraprofessionals and volunteers. Some national models.
 - Pre-Service Training – Only 4 colleges and universities offer degree programs in parenting education and family support: Wheelock College, Nova University, Bank Street College, University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration.
- Content of the programs – There is consistency of content, almost all beginning with child development. Programs that do training are usually focused on a target group and desired outcomes for that group. Content parallels what is offered to the parents. Methods and practices of parenting education are inconsistently taught. Movement towards some underlying key practices based upon Family Support principles that move towards a strengths and asset-based approach, which is far more flexible and responsive to family needs. Moving to a core competency design – author anticipates this will become a standard for the field.
- **Certification and Standards** – Significant movement towards fixed standard for the certification of practitioners, but there is not universal support for such a move. Tension between concerns for quality assurance and whether fixed standards are out of synch with family support principles. Also, fear if don’t have multi-tiered system, many practitioners would be left out. Some states moving forward with credentialing.
- **Interdisciplinary Training** – One of the great needs of the parenting education field is to develop a means for training across disciplines. Rarely did the author see programs or training that overcame barriers between disciplines. Each discipline has its own language, authority and approaches.
- **Supervision** – Of reviewed, fewer than 10% had adequate provisions for supervision of staff. This has resulted in some critical issues:

- Widespread absence of reflection on one's work with families
- Much evidence for collaboration in many programs, but not all
- Lack of understanding of appropriate boundaries in work with parents.
- Quality assurance issues – adjustments continually made to programs, without the benefit of a supervised review of such adjustments and the effect they might have on the framework and goals of the program
- **Infrastructure** – A handful of national and regional bodies that provide some support and network for parenting educators, but none created by and for parenting educators. So, practitioners look to the one most closely associated with their training or profession. Results in issues of identity and common concern that parenting educators struggle to have recognized. Such a national organization could help with developing standards and certification, and provide opportunities to network, something parenting educators are hungry to do.
- **Questions to Consider:**
 - How far are we from the consensus we need? – Author believes not far.
 - What about the existing training programs?
 - Who will do the training?
 - How can we help the trainers who are already working to do a better job?
 - How do we best recruit and prepare a new generation of trainers?
 - How do we begin to move away from models to a “core competency” approach?
 - How can we promote pre-service training programs without falsely pumping up college programs that can't sustain themselves in the long run?
 - How can we encourage and support emerging efforts to create some kind of infrastructure for parenting educators?
 - What can be done to encourage communication and dialogue at all levels of practice?
 - Funding. Where is all the money going to come from to pay for this?
 - Is it realistic to talk about a universal credential or standard for practice?
 - How do we nurture the nurturers?
 - How do we cross disciplines and work with others who see things differently?

CHAPTER 8: EVALUATION, RESEARCH AND ACCOUNTABILITY (SEE PAGE 1 OF PART 3)

- “What programs work best for whom, when and for how long, and why are they effective?” (FIS, 1991)
- “Nowhere is the “adolescence” of this field more apparent than here.” Few programs have been evaluated and the results measured.
- Three types of evaluation being done. Parenting field is weak on all three, but especially weak on Outcome and Economic.
 - Process – examines the type and amount of services provided
 - Outcome – monitors the impact of the services provided, determining what changes occurred and how important they were
 - Economic – measures cost-effectiveness, what is being accomplished for a fixed amount of money and/or what costs are saved by this activity.
- There is some research that has been done. It shows there is solid evidence on the critical role parents play in raising healthy children and that well-designed

programs can have a positive effect on parenting outcomes. Programs committed to a family support approach tend to have longer lasting gains.

- Concerns:
 - Lack of commonly agreed upon definitions hampers evaluations
 - Evidence gathered is promising, but needs more rigor, longer follow-ups.
 - Lack of interest in or appreciation for evaluation and research (other than most basic kind- feedback)
 - Funding – finding the funding to support serious evaluation
 - Programs under \$500,000 not much evaluation, \$500,000 to 1 million – struggle to find a place for evaluation, over \$1 million – take evaluation seriously, though primarily because it is required, not because there is a lot of interest in it.
 - Not planned for in advance and a difficulty in framing their work in terms that lend themselves to evaluation.
 - Awareness of and a willingness to use evaluation tools and data is relatively low, though growing slowly. Awareness of evaluation studies is also low.
 - Anecdotal evidence is mostly what is used. They are effective in increasing enrollment, even though not traditionally useful for evaluations. However, “soft” evidence does have its place, because of how dependent many programs are on the facilitation skills of the group leaders. Nevertheless, reliable studies with outcome evidence and economic consequences are critical for moving the field forward towards universal parenting education.
 - There are too few researchers dedicated to parenting education.
 - As move to family support orientation, makes it harder to evaluate. What caused the parent to change? How do you measure the growth of self-esteem or empowerment?
 - Programs cannot rely on reflection, but need to build in continuous feedback to practitioners, designers and other stakeholders.
 - Cost – serious evaluations cost a lot. Because so many programs view serious evaluation as so expensive, they opt out and do none at all.
 - There is a need to educate the program leadership on the importance of evaluation. It is not understood. And, if the director is not sold on the idea, the program usually does not perform evaluations.
 - Isolation – what serious evaluations there are, are not read by other programs. And, program evaluators keep re-inventing the wheel. Need a way to share across programs.
 - Some instances of “stretching”, i.e., exaggerating claims from a program or extrapolating from one program to another.
 - **What’s needed:**
 - Foster new approaches to evaluation – take into consideration ecological approach to families
 - Data Collection – begin collecting even just who, what, where, when and how often programs run. This could be done fairly cheaply.
 - De-mystify evaluation.
 - Reconcile need for evaluation that fits with non-hierarchical values of programs and the need for objectivity.

- Evaluators, program designers and front-line practitioners need to be engaged in regular, quality dialogues
- No longer want “a thousand flowers to bloom”, if want to change the way children and families are cared for in the U.S. – need bigger programs with effective outcomes demonstrated over time.

CHAPTER 9: FUNDING FOR PARENTING EDUCATION AND FAMILY (SEE PAGE 16 OF PART 3)

- Public Funding – difficult to determine, since parenting education is not usually a separate line item. Expanding interest in public agencies, but shrinking dollars. Author estimates nearly \$700 million being spent on parenting programs by local, state and federal agencies.
- Federal Level – see pp. 17-24 for a description of programs as of 1996.
- Shift from intervention to prevention and then to promotion in public funding, while not the dominant paradigm, has begun to take hold.
- Private funding – probably around \$100 million spent on parenting education. 3,500 foundations and 200 corporations that have demonstrated a significant interest in the funding of programs for children, youth and families. See pp. 33-40 for some examples.
- Community foundations – about 400 in the U.S. and are key to community solutions and most have supported local parenting programs.
- Corporations – Some have shown a growing interest in parents and parenting.

CHAPTER 10: REVIEW OF KEY PROGRAMS (SEE PAGE 41 OF PART 3)

- See pp. 41-70 to see overviews of some leading parenting programs in the U.S.

CHAPTER 11: PARENTING EDUCATION AND FATHERS (SEE PAGE 70 OF PART 3)

- Parenting programs are theoretically designed for both mothers and fathers, but vast majority (80-85%) reviewed and visited for this study served mostly women.
- Only a handful of programs have adapted or designed their programs so they appeal to and address the needs of men.
- Importance and value of father’s involvement has been documented by extensive research.
- **Concerns for Programs:**
 - Safety for mothers and children – programs designed for “families”, often in reality serve mothers. Important that the mothers feel safe and the programs must ensure this safety. Especially in low income populations, the families are often headed by single mothers who are often estranged from the fathers, some victims of violence or abuse. These realities present significant barriers to involving the fathers.
 - Resistance from mothers – Male involvement can be perceived as a threat to a mother’s identify and to her relationship with their child. Fathers may then receive direct or indirect messages they are not welcome.
 - Staff – Needs to be male staff who can serve as role models and mentors.

- Program Design – Activities that appeal to men are quite different from those that draw women. Some programs have found that coed programs do not work as well as having separate groups for men and women.
- Systemic/Policy Issue – Welfare system acts as a deterrent to male involvement with their families by penalizing a mother for having a male in her home.
- **Features and Examples of Model Programs:**
 - Male-Involvement Specialists – programs most successful in integrating men have male-involvement specialists who dedicate their time to addressing the needs and interests of men.
 - Atmosphere – needs to make men feel safe and valued.
 - Expectations – Programs that expect men to be involved find they have more men participating. Send letters to both parents, consistently invite fathers to all events and celebrate Father’s Day.
- **National Programs:**
 - See pp 74 – 76 (section 3) for some examples of good father programs

CHAPTER 12: PARENT LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY TRAINING PROGRAMS (SEE P. 77 OF PART 3)

- Family support movement has called for “empowerment” of families, the success of which has put parents in roles on school boards, community groups, etc., that they want, but are not necessarily prepared to handle. Could result in failures and parents withdrawing.
- More programs are providing leadership training for parents. Most clearly this trend is seen in education, where research is clear that kids do better when parents are involved.
- Needed training and support for professionals to change their traditional parent-professional interactions. Shift to “family-centered care” can be threatening to some professionals.
- Grassroots efforts emerging – to develop an “AARP” for parents.
- See pp 78-82 for example programs.

CHAPTER 13: CONCLUSIONS (SEE PAGE 82 OF PART 3)

- Purpose of investigation was to assess the state of parenting education in the U.S., explore the risks and opportunities and offer conclusions.
- **General Conclusions:**
 - **There is much to celebrate** – parenting education is making a difference for tens of thousands of families across the U.S. Field is still young and has some critical growth issues, but has the energy, capacity and commitment to handle them.
 - **Family Support movement is here to stay and has much to offer.** It is an amalgam of theories and principles that share a comprehensive ecological orientation. Growing impact on policy makers. Only 10-20% of programs are currently in synch with family support principles, but they expect that to grow rapidly. Expect an integration of family support principles into health care

and social service fields – reshaping the nature of care for children and families.

- **Reasons for caution and concern** – Parenting education is still an immature practice that is only beginning to wrestle with the more serious dimensions of what it is about. Field is bigger and more complex than people realize and programs function in virtual isolation from each other. And, who will set standards? Need to remember too that violence has more to do with poverty than with parenting skills.
- **Potential for backlash and co-opting** – backlash by opponents of parenting education and co-opting by groups like the religious right. Lack of an established infrastructure and a national consensus makes parenting education vulnerable to attack and compromise.
- **Need to grow roots** – Parenting education does not need to grow more branches, it needs to dig deeper roots. What’s missing is the infrastructure, standards, discipline, training and research that will help parenting education deliver on its promise and protect it from being co-opted.
- **Interdisciplinary Challenges** – Parenting education is a cross-disciplinary exercise built on insight and support from 4 disciplines – education, health care, human services and mental health. Parenting education needs to establish a common language and conceptual framework that can be embraced by each of those disciplines.
- **Research and Evaluation** – Evidence of the effectiveness of parenting education does exist, but it is in short supply and the conclusions one can draw from these studies are limited. Most programs have not taken the issue of evaluation seriously. There are numerous problems underlying this situation (see p. 90).
- **Multiculturalism** – Debate over whether programs and materials should be culturally specific or culturally sensitive. Diversity of staffing is another consideration.
- **Leadership: Changing the Guard** – Many of the seminal thinkers and organizational founders, almost a majority are in their sixties or seventies. Programs too that were begun in the late 70’s and early 80’s some of their founders are moving on, leaving their future unclear. No one national leader has emerged. The field is at the stage where there may be too many programs and some will need to join forces. In all, there are probably a dozen organizations and in excess of 35 individuals who have a role in leading the field of parenting education. Big question about how to train the next generation of leaders.
- **Training and Core Competencies** – Major need for parenting education to have more training and support of practitioners. Pre-service and in-service education is in its infancy. Writers believe core competency training is the future of the field.
- **Funding** – Difficult to measure, since often buried in funding for larger, more comprehensive programs. Still, estimate in 1998 nearing $\frac{3}{4}$ of a billion dollars annually. Family Preservation and Family Support Act of 1993 has had a very positive effect. State funded programs vary in size and funding. Private funding for parenting programs comes from foundations and corporations.
- **Infrastructure** – The field is largely without an infrastructure. Largest degree of support and leadership seems to come from the Family Resource Coalition (FRC)

and Zero to Three (0-3). There are emerging groups of practitioners that are gathering for networking and professional growth opportunities. There is a clear need, however, for some kind of national body to provide the basis for networking and dialogue on the critical issues facing parenting education.

- **Communication and Media** – The decentralized and ad hoc nature of much that is happening in parenting education has created a field that is significantly lacking in awareness of others’ accomplishments, critical issues for quality programming, collegial support and current research and information. There are few magazines for practitioners. This lack of communication causes a constant re-inventing the wheel in parenting education.
- **Advocacy** – Can be categorized in three critical areas: promotion of the value of parenting education generally, training and support of parents to exercise power in the arenas that affect their families, and lobbying of policy makers at local, state and federal levels.
- **Summary** – There is much potential and significant challenges facing the young field of parenting education. Assets are many, but weaknesses are not insignificant. Above all, the problems of effective national leadership, training, evaluation and advocacy loom large. Parenting education does not need more pilot projects or new program designs. Rather it needs to build a secure base. Targeted investments in these areas can leverage what has already been accomplished to produce results that will enable the field to deliver on its enormous potential.

