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Through the Lens of Perspective Transformation: The Impact of Parent Education on the Parenting Styles of Court-Ordered Participants

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The University of Southern Mississippi

THROUGH THE LENS OF PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION:
THE IMPACT OF PARENT EDUCATION ON THE PARENTING
STYLES OF COURT-ORDERED PARTICIPANTS

by

Mariann Baucum Taylor

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2013

ABSTRACT

THROUGH THE LENS OF PERSPECTIVE TRANSFORMATION: THE IMPACT OF PARENT EDUCATION ON THE PARENTING STYLES OF COURT-ORDERED PARTICIPANTS

by Mariann Baucum Taylor

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Parenting is one of the most widespread developmental tasks of adulthood. Simply put, most adults are or eventually will be parents. Even though parenting is commonplace, it is nonetheless a complex and sometimes overwhelming process. Support for parents can be found in the form of parent education, a topic which has been extensively researched over the last several decades. This research consistently upholds the efficacy of parent education (Heath & Palm, 2009; Marienau & Segal, 2006; Miller & Sambell, 2002); however, there is far less research related to parent education for court-ordered parents. This study sought to fill that gap by analyzing the experiences of participants in court-ordered parent education with the ultimate goal of identifying a framework which promotes learning that is transformative.

A basic qualitative design, which consisted of a before-training interview, training, an after-training interview, and a follow-up interview, was used in this research. Participants included eleven parents who had been court-ordered to attend parent education classes through the Department of Human Services. Through the data collection and data analysis process, the researcher was able to assess the outcome and the experience of the parent education class for the participants. She contends that most of the participants experienced a transformation of the parenting practices which

characterize *responsiveness* and *demandingness*, the essential elements of parenting style. The researcher therefore concludes that these participants experienced a transformation of parenting style. She further contends that the transformative experience began with a disorienting dilemma and was fostered through critical self-reflection and rational discourse.

This study has implications for adult education theory, practice and policy. For example, this study suggests that transformative learning can occur in a mandated setting providing that the incentive is powerful enough. Additionally, this study indicates that transformative learning can be lasting in non-life threatening situations, such as the potential loss of custody of one's children.

The researcher recommends that this program be replicated with other court-ordered audiences and taught by other facilitators to determine if it is relevant in alternative settings. It is also recommended that this theoretical framework be applied in other types of adult education programs that promote major life-style changes (e.g. family-life education, substance abuse, weight loss, etc.)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| ABSTRACT..... | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS..... | iv |
| CHAPTER | |
| I. INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| Transformative Learning Theory | |
| Purpose of the Study | |
| The Research Questions | |
| Definition of Terms | |
| Delimitations | |
| Limitations | |
| Assumptions | |
| Justification of the Study | |
| II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE | 14 |
| The Activity of Parenting and its Intersection with Adult | |
| Development and Adult Education | |
| The Framework of Transformative Learning Theory | |
| Conclusion | |
| III. METHODOLOGY..... | 69 |
| IV. RESULTS..... | 79 |
| Introduction | |
| Findings | |
| Conclusion | |
| V. DISCUSSION..... | 112 |
| Interpretation | |
| Implications | |
| Recommendations | |
| Conclusions | |

| | |
|-----------------|-----|
| APPENDIXES..... | 135 |
| REFERENCES..... | 145 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Parenting, considered by some to be one of the most difficult tasks of adulthood, is a complicated process filled with a seemingly endless list of decisions related to countless situations that define parent-child interactions (Heath, 2006). The specific parental behaviors that guide these interactions combine to form a comprehensive approach to parenting. This overall pattern of child-rearing practices appears to have greater impact on child outcome than any individualized behavior connected to isolated events (Darling, 1999). In order to conceptualize broad patterns of parental behavior, researchers often cite the work of Diana Baumrind (1966) who produced a typology of parenting styles.

Using the facets of parental responsiveness (warmth) and parental demandingness (control) as critical elements, Baumrind (1966) identified three parenting styles –authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Each of these styles represents a unique combination of responsiveness and demandingness that reveal the essence of a parent’s values and behaviors (Darling, 1999). Parenting style and child outcome have been the focus of numerous studies over the last several decades. This research consistently suggests that the authoritative style of parenting is the ideal approach to rearing children (Dominguez & Carton, 1997; Gunty & Buri, 2008; King, Kraemer, Bernard, & Vidourek, 2007; Steinberg, 2001; Watson, Little, & Biderman, 1992). It appears that the most optimal situation is one in which there is congruent authoritative parenting within the family; however, there is evidence to suggest that there are benefits to children when there is at least one parent who is authoritative (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & De Lisi, 2007; McKinney & Renk, 2008; Simons & Conger, 2007).

Baumrind clarified that the three prototypes identified in her 1966 longitudinal study were based on data obtained primarily from “healthy” families (1995, p. *xvii*); therefore, the underlying assumption is that parents who abuse or neglect their children have adopted a style that is clearly outside the normal range. These pathological parenting styles have less than optimal outcomes, including mal-adaptive behavior, for children. Children who have been the victims of either abuse or neglect typically have lower scores on cognitive measures and overall school performance than their non-maltreated peers (Lowenthal, 1996). Difficulties in psychological adjustment, ranging from extreme anxiety to apathy to extreme aggression, are frequently identified in maltreated children (Lowenthal, 1996).

Adjustment difficulties are exacerbated when different types of maltreatment coexist (Higgins & McCabe, 2000). In 2010 approximately 695,000 children suffered maltreatment (National Children’s Alliance, 2013), and many of these victims endure multi-type maltreatment (Higgins & McCabe, 2000). The numbers are staggering and so are the long-term effects (which last throughout adulthood for many victims) (Higgins & McCabe, 2000) and the far-reaching implications.

In keeping with Baumrind’s (1966) theory of parenting styles and their respective outcomes, experts in a variety of professional fields have noted that both successful and unsuccessful parenting have far-reaching ramifications in the political, educational, social, and economic domains (Miller & Sambell, 2002). Therefore, parenting is now being viewed by some as an enterprise that is so significant and ubiquitous that it is even considered *public* resulting in this once intensely private activity now being closely scrutinized by both parents and professionals (Miller &

Sambell, 2002). Parenting, which literally affects everyone, is often improved by parent education.

Although the efficacy of parent education is well-documented in the literature (Heath & Palm, 2006; Marienau & Segal, 2006; Miller & Sambell, 2002), there appears to be far less information concerning either the efficacy of parent education administered in a court-ordered setting or the experiences of the participants in that setting. From an adult education perspective, it is imperative that parent education, whether voluntary or court-ordered, be examined through the lens of adult learning and adult development with the overarching idea that adults are lifelong learners (Taylor, 2006). Court-ordered parent education is about more, however, than gaining knowledge and learning new skills. Because of its basic purpose, it has to be about change, specifically changes in the attitudes and behaviors of its participants. Therefore, the parent education program that was used in this study is based on adult education principles, specifically those that are grounded in transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000) and critical reflection.

Transformative Learning Theory

The theoretical framework that undergirded this study is transformative learning. The process of learning in adulthood may be explained through transformative learning theory, which is rooted primarily in constructivism but also draws from the humanistic approach. Constructivism asserts that individuals learn, or *construct* knowledge, based on culturally-embedded prior experiences and subsequent interpretations. The humanistic approach proposes that individuals learn in order to fulfill a goal of personal development culminating in self-actualization (Merriam & Brockett, 2007).

Jack Mezirow introduced his concept of transformative learning in 1978 (Mezirow, 1978); in his psychocritical approach, he views transformation from an

individual perspective which is aptly named perspective transformation (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Mezirow, 1978). Paramount in perspective transformation are “meaning-making” drawn from the constructivist paradigm and “individual growth and development” articulated in the humanistic approach (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p. 47; Mezirow, 1978). More specifically, perspective transformation provides an explanation for the meaning that adults attach to their experiences.

Mezirow (2000) further clarified transformations by outlining the phases that occur during the process which are:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new experience. (2000, p. 22)

Expanding upon Mezirow’s ideas, Laurent A. Daloz (1999) approached transformative learning from a psychodevelopmental perspective (Merriam et al., 2007). While Mezirow views transformative learning as a rational, logical undertaking, Daloz, who like Mezirow values cognitive growth, sees transformation as a more intuitive

process (Merriam et al., 2007). Teachers and facilitators serve as mentors who guide their students on a journey of self-awareness made possible through dialogue/discourse (Daloz, 1999). By telling their stories, students are able to reflect upon their experiences and make sense of them. When mentors and students engage in reciprocal storytelling, development is promoted and transformation can occur (Daloz, 1999).

The application of transformative learning theory was used to determine if involvement with the Department of Human Services (DHS), particularly as it relates to the custody of their children, qualifies as a disorienting dilemma for the court-ordered participants involved in this study. Mezirow (1991) proposes that a disorienting dilemma is a crisis that typically causes the learner to engage in self-examination and reflection with the ultimate anticipated outcome being empowerment and autonomy. Psychologists, particularly those who are proponents of Festinger's (1957) theory, might refer to a disorienting dilemma as cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance or mental inconsistency is the catalyst for change in attitude-change theory just as a disorienting dilemma is in transformative learning theory.

Daloz (1999) contends that the process of self-reflection is enhanced through a storied approach. Zemke and Zemke (1981) noted adults will become involved in learning activities before, after, or even in the midst of a life-altering situation. When adults are assured that change is inescapable, they will engage themselves in learning experiences designed to help them cope with the inevitable transition.

In this qualitative study, the researcher sought to determine if a transformation of parenting style occurs within the context of a court-ordered parenting class, predicated upon a disorienting dilemma and subsequent self-reflection. Interview questions were

designed to uncover evidence of a disorienting dilemma. Guided class discussions and journal postings focused on the fostering of self-reflection.

Purpose of the Study

Evidence suggests that parents court ordered to participate in parent education have either been abusing or neglecting their children and are therefore using a style of parenting that is outside the normal typology (Casanueva, Martin, Runyan, Barth, & Bradley, 2007; Dinkmeyer, White, & Bosley, 1999; Murphy & Bryant, 2002; Rodriguez, 2010; Russa & Rodriguez, 2010). Research further points to a seemingly obvious conclusion: these toxic parenting styles produce less than ideal child outcomes (Iwaniec, Larkin, & McSherry, 2007; Lowenthal, 1996; Watson et al., 1992). The purpose of this study was to identify and compare the parenting styles of court-ordered participants assessed before and after completion of a parent education class, and to identify factors which might lead to transformative learning in a court-ordered parent education class.

The Research Questions

The specific research questions addressed in this study were:

1. How has parent/child communication/support style changed after parent education?
2. How has the structuring of household policy (e.g. – family meetings; monitoring) changed after parent education?
3. How has the consistency of discipline and the discipline techniques used by participants changed after parent education?
4. How has parenting style changed after parent education for participants who were court-ordered to attend a six-week parenting class? What role did a disorienting dilemma and critical reflection play in the process?

Definition of Terms

Constant Comparative Method of Data Analysis – Glaser and Strauss (1967) are credited with the development of the constant comparative method of data analysis specifically with grounded theory research. Since that time qualitative researchers have used this method with other types of qualitative research. Merriam is one of those researchers and she defines the constant comparative method as follows, “Continually comparing one unit of data with another in order to derive conceptual elements of the theory” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 8).

Critical Reflection – Taylor (1998, p. 9) refers to critical reflection as “questioning the integrity of assumptions and beliefs based on prior experiences. It often occurs in response to an awareness of a contradiction among our thoughts, feelings, and actions”. Mezirow suggests that critical reflection is the process through which we “change our minds, both literally and figuratively” (Mezirow, 1995, p. 46).

Family Life Education – “Family life education focuses on healthy family functioning within a family systems perspective and provides a primarily preventive approach. The skills and knowledge needed for healthy functioning are widely known: strong communication skills, knowledge of typical human development, good decision-making skills, positive self-esteem, and healthy interpersonal relationships. The goal of family life education is to teach and foster this knowledge and these skills to enable individuals and families to function optimally” (National Council on Family Relations (NCFR), 2011, para. 1).

Family of Origin – the family in which one grew up.

Family of Procreation – the family that is formed when a couple has their first child.

Multi-type maltreatment – “Multi-type maltreatment refers to the experience of more than one form of child maltreatment (sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological maltreatment, neglect and witnessing family violence)” (Higgins & McCabe, 2000, p. 6).

Parenting Education – “Parenting education is a process that involves the expansion of insights, understanding, and attitudes and the acquisition of knowledge and skills about the development of both parents and of their children and the relationship between them” (National Parenting Education Network (NPE), 2011).

Parents – “Parents are those who are so defined legally and those who have made a long term commitment to a child to assume responsibility for that child’s well-being and development. This responsibility includes providing for the child’s physiological and emotional needs, forming a loving emotional relationship, guiding a child’s understanding of the world and culture, and designing an appropriate environment” (National Parenting Education Network (NPE), 2011).

Storytelling – Daloz poses the following questions: “How are our students moving? What do they want for themselves? How do they tell their own stories?” (1999, p. 23). He proposes that when adults are allowed to “tell their own stories,” to relate their experiences, they are actually able to make meaning of those experiences. This process of critical self-reflection brought about by storytelling can “transform our vision of the possible and provide us with a map for the journey ahead” (Daloz, 1999, p. 23).

Transformative Learning Theory – “Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind sets)” (Mezirow, 2000, p.7).

Delimitations

Delimitations of the study include the following:

1. The participants in this study were limited to those parents court-ordered to parenting education through the Department of Human Services. Therefore, results may not be applicable to larger populations, including parents who voluntarily attend parenting education classes.

2. The participants in this study were limited to those attending parenting education with the researcher. Therefore, results may not have been applicable to larger populations who attend court-ordered parenting education in other venues.

Limitations

Limitations of the study included the following:

1. Participating in court-ordered parenting classes may have effects that the participants have not realized at the time of the interview and observations.

2. The researcher's experience as a facilitator of court-ordered parenting classes and other programs may have affected her perspective and observations.

Assumptions

1. The curriculum that was used in the parenting education program fosters development and transformation through critical self-reflection.

2. The facilitator is a trained parent educator and knowledgeable of adult education principles and the proposed curriculum.

3. Interviews were conducted in a comfortable environment, which aided the researcher in establishing rapport with the participants so that trust could be built and honest responses are possible.

Justification of the Study

This study was justified because it could have implications for theory development and practice in both adult education and parent education; the potential was also present for contributions to the research literature on parenting style and mandatory education in adulthood. Parenting is a complex and sometimes overwhelming activity and one that is engaged in at some point by most adults (Heath, 2006; Rubenstein, 2011). There is substantial evidence to suggest that parenting can be improved through parent education (Heath & Palm, 2006; Marienau & Segal, 2006; Miller & Sambell, 2002). According to Auerbach (1968), parents can learn and they want to learn especially if it is something that interests them. Marienau and Segal (2006) agree and note that parents learn best when they are motivated. Intrinsic motivation and an inherent interest are more likely to be characteristics of a voluntary activity; however, not all parent education is voluntary. Therefore, the obvious question and one that should be asked is whether or not parents can and do learn in a non-voluntary situation.

Since parent education is a component of adult education, this same question could be applied to all adult learners. Some leaders in the field of adult education believe that adults are more likely to learn when learning is voluntary (Knowles, 1970; Rachel, 2002), however, there are others who point to the preponderance of mandated trainings in the workplace as an argument against the assumption that adults have to be internally motivated in order to learn (Merriam et al., 2007).

Court-ordered parent education is often prescribed when a family becomes involved with DHS. One of the main objectives of court-ordered parent education is to effect changes in the beliefs, attitudes, and child-rearing practices of its participants, many of whom have been accused of either abusing or neglecting their children. The

outcome of mandated parenting education is paramount to the well-being of the children whose parents have been court-ordered to participate. The stakes are high in this arena and although there has been a substantial amount of research conducted on voluntary parent education (Heath & Palm, 2006; Marienau & Segal, 2006; Miller & Sambell, 2002), there is far less information about the efficacy of court-ordered parent education and the experience of those who participate in it.

Even though there is an abundance of information in the literature about transformative learning (Ettling, 2006; Courtenay, Merriam, Reeves, & Baumgartner, 2000; Merriam, 2004; Taylor, 1998), this researcher was unable to locate any studies focusing exclusively on court-ordered parenting education where transformative learning was used as the theoretical framework. Mezirow (1991) contends that a true perspective transformation is irreversible. Evidence suggests that Mezirow's (1991) supposition is true, at least when the transformation was precipitated by a life-threatening event, (Courtenay et al., 2000); however, further research is needed to determine if the transformation is irreversible when the disorienting dilemma is non-life-threatening. The disorienting dilemma in this study was the participants' involvement with DHS and the potential possibility of limited or lost parental custody. Although non-life-threatening, this situation might have qualified as a personal crisis or disorienting dilemma and subsequently may have led to a lasting transformation.

Parenting style is another construct that has been extensively discussed in the literature (Baumrind, 1966; Dominguez & Carton, 1997; Gunty & Buri, 2008; Rodriguez, 2010; Steinburg, 2001). However, this researcher was unable to find any studies of court-ordered parent education where parenting style was used a measure of parental effectiveness. This study, grounded in transformative learning theory, focused

on the outcome and the experience of mandated parent education for its participants, specifically related to parenting style. Therefore, this research adds to the literature on mandatory adult education, transformative learning theory, parent education, and parenting style. The findings from this research informs the practice of family-life education through the development of court-ordered parent education programs based on transformative learning theory, with an emphasis on methods that promote critical reflection (e.g. – class debate/role play and journaling/personal narratives). The researcher also wrote a curriculum, specifically designed for court-ordered parent education, based on the findings of this research. The researcher believes that the goals for this study made it a justifiable venture.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to gain a better understanding of the research problem, the following components were examined in the literature review: 1) The activity of parenting and how it intersects with adult development; 2) Implications of parenting, specifically related to parenting style; 3) Adult learning and parent education as a component of adult education; and 4) The framework of transformative learning theory.

The literature review begins by examining parenting as a complex activity with ramifications not only for each individual who is parented, but also for society as a whole. In order to fully explore the issue of parenting and its effects on society, the review investigated society's expectations for parents, expectations that are generated from a wide array of professional domains. This segment of the review concluded with an analysis of the intersection of parenting and adult development with an emphasis on Erikson's generative stage of development and the concept of *scaffolding*, which is described in Vygotsky's (1934) work on proximal development.

Secondly, the review examined the implications of parenting specifically as it relates to parenting style. Much of this segment of the review was devoted to Baumrind's (1966) work on parenting style and its correlation to child outcome. Her definition and description of parenting style are examined along with her thoughts on parenting style as a predictor of child well-being. This component explored other versions of Baumrind's (1966) model and concluded with a review of studies focusing on parenting style and subsequent child outcome, including pathological parenting style and its correlation to mal-adaptive behavior in children. The final section of this

component examined the research that has been conducted on differential parenting styles within a family and the subsequent outcome for children.

The third component of the literature review examined how the principles of adult learning and adult education can be applied to parent education to enhance the experience for adult participants. The review further documented the historical background of parent education as a form of adult education, with highlights of the parent education movement within adult education. This component concluded with an analysis of studies focusing on the efficacy of parent education, including the somewhat limited research that has been conducted on court-ordered parent education.

The fourth and final segment of the literature review examined the theoretical framework of transformative learning theory. Mezirow's (2000) perspective on transformative learning was analyzed and his thoughts on meaning schemes, meaning perspectives, critical reflection and rational discourse were explored. The review examined techniques for fostering transformative learning and continued with a summary of the numerous studies which have been guided by transformative learning theory. Jack Mezirow is the name most often associated with transformative learning and an analysis of his work takes up most of this review; however, other researchers have contributed to the discussion of transformative learning and this review included an overview of their perspectives. This segment of the review concluded with a description of the correlation between transformative learning theory and attitude theory.

The Activity of Parenting and Its Intersection with Adult Development and Adult Learning

Parenting is a challenging activity punctuated with situations and decisions that seem endless and that are directly related to the well-being of children (Darling, 1999;

Heath, 2006; Marienau & Segal, 2006). This complex activity is also commonplace in that almost all adults are or will at some time in their lives be parents. Kegan (1994) noted that parenting can be considered as a part of the “curriculum of modern life” (p. 5). Numerous experts in the fields of child development, psychology, and family studies are astounded that in spite of the magnitude and scope of this enormous task, there is still no clear cut definition of parenting (Taylor, 2006). Heath (2006) proposed that a theory of parenting is needed, one which would address the following questions:

1. Is there a process that parents use in making these countless decisions?
2. Parenting is not often described as including a decision making process? So, what does parenting involve?
3. What is expected of parents?
4. When and how do parents fulfill those expectations?
5. What attributes do they need to do so? (p. 750)

Heath (2006) suggested that the parental role has been neglected for a number of reasons, including the assumption that all women automatically know how to be mothers. Added to that belief is the fact that most research has focused on the developing child with the parent viewed simply as a conduit of that development. Heath (2006) proposed that having a theory of parenting would accomplish several goals including: 1) outlining the process in order to facilitate the work of family professionals; 2) providing an additional perspective of the parent/child interaction because of the focus on the parenting process; and 3) supplying information about the attributes needed by parents in order to fulfill their role.

The ramifications of parenting are being recognized as far-reaching with implications in a variety of domains (Miller & Sambell, 2002); therefore, expectations

for parents are high and those expectations come from a multitude of sources (Heath, 2006). Parents are expected to expend colossal resources, including time, energy, and emotion, raising their children to become contributing members of society (Campbell, 1992; Heath, 2006). Since the once private activity of parenting has increasingly fallen under public scrutiny, a variety of professional fields have weighed in on their particular expectations for parents (Heath, 2006; Miller & Sambell, 2002). For example, evidence suggests that educators expect parents to serve as teachers to their children while mental health professionals expect parents to build their child's self-esteem (Heath, 2006). Further, Kegan (1994) described successful parents as those who are expected to "be the leaders of the family: to take charge, to assume responsibility, to institute a vision and induct family members into it, to look out for the development of the children, to take stands, and to embody some theory, ideology, or overall set of values by which the family operates" (p. 78).

Heath (2006) reviewed a number of sources and categorized parental expectations as follows:

Nurturer – The parent is to provide for the physiological needs of the child (Bornstein; Bradley; Hardy; Small as cited in Heath, 2006, p. 751)

Protector – The parent is to keep the child safe (Bornstein; Bradley; van der Pas as cited in Heath, 2006, p. 751)

Lover in a filial sense – The parent is to develop an 'intense irrational affection' for the child (Bronfenbrenner; Riera; Simpson as cited in Heath, 2006, p. 751)

Guide and teacher – The parent is to explain to the child how the world works (Bornstein; Simpson; Smith, Cudaback, Goddard, & Myers- Walls as cited in Heath, 2006, p. 751)

Designer –The parent designs the environment in which the child is born and grows. Part of this role involves being the advocate for the child (Simpson as cited in Heath, 2006, p. 752)

And ensuring that the environment is the best possible for the child (Bornstein; Bradley; Honig; Ronig as cited in Heath, 2006, p. 752)

Spiritual model – The parent is expected to encourage the child's exploration of ideas and beliefs beyond the material, including the expression and the appreciation of the beautiful. (Boulding; Fowler; Rutter as cited in Heath, 2006, p. 752)

As parents go about fulfilling these myriad expectations, it is important to remember that they are engaged in their own development as adults. So how then does parenting fit into the framework of adult development? In response to her proposed categorization of parental expectations, Heath (2006) pondered how parents, in the midst of their own development, are supposed to fulfill these expectations. According to Unell and Wyckoff (2007), the process of parenting children affects people so profoundly that it changes the way they think of themselves as individuals and adults. In their work on the family life cycle, Carter and McGoldrick (1999) note that adding a child to the family includes both the good and the bad for the long haul and changes life forever.

Erikson's developmental theory provides a frame of reference to examine the parenting experience (Crain, 2005; Heath, 2006). His psychosocial development model focuses on eight stages of development in which each stage represents an issue that must be resolved before one can move on to the next stage (Erikson, 1982). Of particular interest in the field of parenting is the stage of *generativity versus self-absorption and stagnation* with its focus on the next generation (Erikson, 1982). Producing children is

not enough to achieve generativity; parents must also provide protection and guidance to their children (Erikson, 1982). In order to settle the conflict between generativity and self-absorption/stagnation, parents must be willing to set aside their own needs and conquer the lure of self-indulgence (Crain, 2005). Individuals who are able to successfully resolve this conflict consequently develop the capacity to care for their offspring (Crain, 2005).

One of the components of the generative stage focuses on parental nurturing and the interaction between parent and child which is referred to as mutuality. This interaction denotes a mutually beneficial relationship in which the partners' dependence upon each other allows for the development of their respective strengths (Heath, 2006). Even though there is a mutuality that exists in the parent/child relationship, the parent is, in fact, the lead partner. Bowlby (1988), who is known for his attachment theory, referenced the parent as lead partner when he cited the example of newborns who must rely upon their parents (the more competent partner) to find the nipple even though they are born with the sucking instinct.

Vygotsky (1934), in his work on proximal development, also discussed parents as lead partners in their relationship with their children. He defined the *zone of proximal development* as being the difference between a child's actual developmental level and his performance level when collaborating with an adult (Vygotsky, 1934). The child learns through imitation and collaboration, and is eventually able to independently do those things which he could previously only do with help. This *scaffolding* process works somewhat like a temporary *scaffold* that is removed once it is no longer needed (Crain, 2005). In other words, the adult who is more competent than the child offers

ample assistance in the beginning and then decreases that help as the child masters the activity (Crain, 2005).

Researchers seem to agree that as lead partner parents need to safeguard their children (the less developed partner) in an environment where they are nonetheless encouraged to explore and learn (Heath, 2006). Maccoby (2002) commented on this partnership:

When children are young, parents have much more influence on children than children do on parents, in view of parents' control of children's daily lives and the fact that parents are already fully formed persons with mature, established patterns of thought and action, while childhood is a time of rapid learning and great plasticity. (p. 36)

Parents, who are themselves developing adults, are expected as lead partners to guide the interactions with their children (Heath, 2006).

Implications of Parenting, Specifically Related to Parenting Styles

Parenting has far-reaching ramifications for society as a whole; those societal implications may vary depending upon whether the parenting was deemed successful or unsuccessful and may have impacts in the political, social, educational, and economic domains (Miller & Sambell, 2002). From an individual perspective, Bowlby (1988) asserted that the rewards can be abundant for those who parent successfully. For those, however, who "have children but fail to rear them to be healthy, happy, and self-reliant the penalties in anxiety, frustration, friction, and perhaps shame or guilt, may be high" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 1). Child outcome, then, is highly significant whether it is gauged from a broad, societal perspective or from the individual perspective of each parent.

For the past several decades, a plethora of research has been conducted on child-rearing practices and their subsequent impact on child outcome. Baumrind's (1966) typology of parenting styles is often used as the theoretical foundation in these studies. Baumrind proposed that the three primary parenting styles - authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative – are composed of a combination of responsiveness (warmth) and demandingness (control) that define parents' attitude and behavior toward their children. Other research would argue that parenting style is, or perhaps should be depending upon one's perspective, actually a combination of three dimensions: responsiveness, demandingness, and autonomy granting.

Greenspan (2006) classified Baumrind's typology as a "two-factor model" made up of warmth and control (p. 5). He noted that Baumrind's recommended parenting style, authoritative, is a combination of high warmth and high control. Greenspan (2006) proposed the use of a three-factor model which would add "tolerance" to the mix (p. 5). He further stated that Baumrind's model does not include any reference to "parental detachment or restraint," synonymous, perhaps, with autonomy granting (Greenspan, 2006, p. 7). Within Greenspan's (2006) proposed model, the preferred parenting style would be "harmonious" (high warmth, moderate control, high tolerance), a style which he conceded Baumrind considered to be an anomaly (p. 11). Greenspan's (2006) primary objection to Baumrind's model was that it did not recognize that even the most capable parents are challenged on a regular basis as to when to intercede and when to ignore.

In a different take on Baumrind's model, Rodriguez, Donovanick, and Crowley (2009) noted that autonomy granting is in fact part of Baumrind's original conceptual

model; however, warmth and control are the only dimensions that are typically measured and therefore seem to be the most well-known components of parenting style.

Baumrind (1966) provided descriptions of each parenting style and the potential outcomes of each of those styles. She described the authoritarian parent as one who controls and evaluates a child's behavior according to a strict set of guidelines; these guidelines were often motivated by theology and were established in respect to a higher authority. Baumrind (1966) noted that in an earlier era parents' discipline was aimed at making sure that their children were doing the will of God. These parents, who typify low responsiveness and high demandingness, use punitive measures to deal with any violation of the standard of conduct.

Conversely, the permissive parent creates an unstructured environment where children are allowed to regulate their own behavior. Permissive parents, who are characterized by high responsiveness and low demandingness, often consult with the child about household policy and make few demands related to the child's responsibilities or behavior (Baumrind, 1966).

Baumrind (1966) described the authoritative parent as one who balances kindness and firmness in a style characterized by high responsiveness and high demandingness. In an effort to create a home environment grounded in reason and fairness, the authoritative parent recognizes the value of both the self-will of their child and the power they hold as parents.

As further explanation of her parental prototypes, Baumrind (1966) analyzed several studies related to child behavior and disciplinary techniques. From her analysis, she suggested that punishment that is "punitive, hostile, disaffiliated, self-righteous, and nonempathic" is closely associated with "cognitive and emotional disturbance in the

child, including hostile withdrawal, hostile acting out, dependency, personality problems, nervousness, and reduced schoolroom efficiency” (pp. 895-896). However, mild punishment that is administered by a loving, respected parent may not be at all harmful to the child and in some instances may actually be beneficial (Baumrind, 1966).

Baumrind (1966) also discovered that parents with higher demands actually had children who were the least hostile and delinquent. The research indicates that parents who demand a certain level of orderly, responsible behavior also seem to produce an environment that is conducive to the child’s well-being. Baumrind (1966) suggested that within this positive home environment the child considers the demands to be reasonable and is less likely to be rebellious. Additionally, when a parent exercises authoritative control children may protest and test the boundaries, but in the end they are satisfied with the relationship that they have with their parents and will not rebel (Baumrind, 1966).

Research implies that parenting style can be a predictor of child well-being in a variety of domains related to development and competence (Darling, 1999). Baumrind (1966) proposed that authoritarian parents produce children who may be anxious, withdrawn, and who have poor reactions to frustration. The practices of permissive parents may manifest themselves in children with poor emotional regulation who exhibit rebellious or defiant behaviors when challenged. Children raised by authoritative parents tend to be self-confident with well-developed emotional regulation (Baumrind, 1966).

In her seminal work on parental control and child behavior, Baumrind (1966) proposed that parenting style is a predictor of child outcome. Research over the last several decades has substantiated that idea, with the overwhelming consensus being that

the authoritative parenting style is simply the most beneficial for children. Adding credence to this argument is the work of King et al. (2007) who suggested that the children of authoritative parents tend to be the “most socially adjusted, competent, self-assured, and confident” (p. 607).

It appears that the authoritative parenting style has implications that reach far beyond childhood. Smith’s (2006) research on first-year college students indicated that a correlation exists between authoritative parenting and favorable adjustment to college. Other studies have pointed to additional favorable outcomes, including optimism and self-actualization. Gunty and Buri (2008) noted that positive parenting variables (including authoritative parenting) were associated with a high presence of optimism. Dominguez and Carton (1997) found a similar correlation between authoritative parenting and self-actualization. Further, in research on undergraduate college students conducted by Watson et al. (1992), findings indicated that an authoritative parenting style is associated with less narcissistic maladjustment.

Conversely, children who are reared by parents using other parenting styles have a tendency to exhibit behavior that is maladaptive (King et al., 2007), including increased rates of child psychopathology (Rodriguez et al., 2009). Negative parental behaviors such as neglect, rejection, and hostility have also been associated with delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2009).

Research conducted on undergraduates by Watson et al. (1992) indicated a close association between permissive parenting and immature grandiosity among offspring whereas authoritarian parenting was closely correlated with inadequate idealization in offspring. Russa and Rodriguez (2010) suggested a possible correlation between physical punishment, often the discipline of choice of authoritarian parents, and physical

abuse. It was noted that some researchers believe that physical punishment and physical abuse exist on a continuum and only differ in degree of severity (Russa & Rodriguez, 2010). Additionally, Rodriguez (2010) found a link between parent-child physical aggression, dysfunctional parenting style (one that is more authoritarian) and the potential for child abuse.

Baumrind (1966) noted that the child who is reared with either authoritarian control or permissive control may be inhibited from engaging in the type of vigorous interaction with people which leads to autonomy and assertiveness. Baumrind (1966) further clarified this type of environment when she said,

Demands which cannot be met or no demands, suppression of conflict or sidestepping of conflict, refusal to help or too much help, unrealistically high or low standards, all may curb or underestimate the child so that he fails to achieve the knowledge and experience which could realistically reduce his dependence upon the outside world. (p. 904)

Research perhaps leaves little doubt that the most beneficial approach to parenting is the authoritative style (Rodriguez, 2010). Steinberg (2001) concurs:

We can stop asking what type of parenting most positively affects adolescent development. We know the answer to this question. The challenges ahead involve finding ways to educate adults with regard to how to be authoritative, and help those who are not authoritative to change. (p. 13)

Differential Parenting Styles for Mothers and Fathers

Although there has been a vast amount of research conducted on parenting style and its subsequent relation to child outcome, there has been far less consideration of parents with differential styles. Simons and Conger (2007) reported that many of the

previous studies focusing on the parenting styles of both parents were methodologically flawed either because families with differing styles were simply excluded or the parenting scores of the mother and father were just averaged. Therefore, they designed a study in which differing parenting styles within a family were actually compared and then child outcome was examined in relation to these differing styles. Participants were classified into one of 16 possible family parenting styles, based on the typology developed by Maccoby and Martin (1983). The results, both from child reports and observer ratings, indicated that the most common family style is one in which both parents actually exhibit the same style of parenting. Consistent with previous research on parenting style (Baumrind, 1966; Dominguez & Carton, 1997; Steinberg, 2001; Watson et al., 1992), Simons and Conger (2007) concluded that the most optimal family typology is one in which there are two authoritative parents. There is evidence to suggest, however, that in the absence of the most ideal parental typology (two authoritative parents), children still benefit from the presence of at least one authoritative parent (McKinney & Renk, 2008; Simons & Conger, 2007).

Even though the Simons and Conger (2007) study indicated that the most common family typology is one in which parents have the same parenting style, mothers and fathers often exhibit different parenting styles. Fathers are more often associated with the authoritarian style and mothers are more likely to be classified as authoritative (Conrade & Ho, 2001; McKinney & Renk, 2008; Russell et al., 1998). It has been suggested that these differences can be attributed to gender socialization. Women are socialized to fill the traditional role of the mother, that of a nurturing caregiver, while men may be taught that the father performs the role of provider and disciplinarian.

Therefore, mothers may adopt a style of parenting that is warmer and more affectionate and fathers may choose a style that is more goal-oriented (McKinney & Renk, 2008).

Gender socialization may offer some explanation as to why parents may parent their sons and daughters differently (McKinney & Renk, 2008). Boys are more likely to be parented in an authoritarian style while parents tend to use a more authoritative approach when parenting their daughters (Russell et al., 1998). Past research, focusing on the perspectives of adolescents, indicates that male adolescents experienced more permissive parenting than female adolescents. This finding may imply that parents feel that sons are more adept at taking care of themselves (McKinney & Renk, 2008). This research further suggests that adolescents found family relations to be more positive when mothers rather than fathers were perceived as permissive and fathers rather than mothers were observed as authoritarian (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & De Lisi, 2007). Overall, however, adolescents perceived the most positive family typology as being one with congruent authoritative parenting (McKinney & Renk, 2008). These studies also suggest that there are benefits for late adolescents in having at least one authoritative parent (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & De Lisi, 2007; McKinney & Renk, 2008). Even though there is far less information related to differential parenting styles within a family, the literature that is available supports the abundant research that has been conducted on individual parenting style (Baumrind, 1966; Dominguez & Carton, 1997; Steinberg, 2001; Watson et al., 1992). The overall conclusion from both lines of research is that congruent authoritative parenting is the most beneficial for children, but there are benefits from having even one authoritative parent (McGillicuddy-De Lisi & De Lisi, 2007; McKinney & Renk, 2008; Simons & Conger, 2007).

Adult Learning and Parent Education as a Component of Adult Education

Parent education has long been acknowledged as a component of adult education with a similar focus as well as related issues and movements (Auerbach, 1968; Shivers, 2008). Gruenberg (1936) may have said it best when he stated that

The significance of parent education as a vital part of adult education lies not so much in our discovery that parents are people as in the recent general recognition of the fact that most people are parents. No plan of education for adults can be complete that does not take into account this important aspect of adult life and interest. (p. 192)

Parents have been concerned about child rearing practices since the beginning of civilization (Auerbach, 1968). Parent education, in its broadest perspective, has existed for an equal amount of time, with child-rearing practices being handed down from one generation to the next. According to Auerbach (1968), there has been parenting information documented in the literature for centuries, but the first organized, goal-specific parent education began in nineteenth-century America.

One of the first organized efforts began in 1888 when a group of New York City mothers came together to form the Child Study Association of America. In an effort to become better parents themselves, these mothers affected the child-rearing practices of parents in succeeding generations through the work that was continued by the Association in later decades. The Association continued to disseminate information that would aid parents in the fostering of their children's physical, mental, emotional, and social development. As new information became available in fields ranging from child development to education to social work, the Association used it in the design and implementation of its programs (Auerbach, 1968).

Predating the work of the Association was the publication of parenting books and magazines in the 1820s which were used to guide parent discussion groups and study organizations for mothers (Ireland, 1992; Shivers, 2008). In the next 100 years, parent education grew both formally and informally with a number of national, state, and local groups emerging, all of whom had an interest in learning opportunities for parents (Brown, 1948; Ireland, 1992). Chief among these agencies were the National Council of Family Relations, the National Committee on Parent Education, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, the American Home Economics Association, and the Cooperative Extension Service.

In the postwar years, historians note that there was a broadening of scope among the agencies and within the parent education movement. For example, in the 1930s the primary focus in parent education was the parent-child relationship. By 1940, the emphasis had shifted to the study of the family as a whole. Brown (1948) stated that there were a number of reasons for this shift; primary among those was the growing idea that the family was the trump card as the world went about the business of establishing peace and freedom in the postwar years. Other concerns which had a part in shaping the focus were the fear that the family unit was disintegrating as evidenced by increased juvenile delinquency and divorce (Brown, 1948).

Ireland (1992) noted that in the 1960s and 1970s professional interest in parent education increased with a specific focus on developing interventions for disadvantaged children as they entered the school years. It was also during the 1960s that Auerbach (1968) promoted her idea of group education for parents with guided group discussions as the fundamental element. Auerbach suggested nine assumptions which

she felt should guide and inform the practice of parent group education. These nine assumptions mirror those proposed by Cantor in *The Teaching-Learning Process*, a publication which relates to general learning. Auerbach's (1968) assumptions for parent education are as follows:

Assumption 1. Parents can learn.

Assumption 2. Parents want to learn.

Assumption 3. Parents learn best when they are interested in learning.

Assumption 4. Learning is most significant when the subject matter is closely related to the parent's own immediate experiences.

Assumption 5. Parents can learn best when they are free to create their own response to a situation.

Assumption 6. Parent group education is as much an emotional experience as it is an intellectual flow.

Assumption 7. Parents can learn from one another.

Assumption 8. Parent group education provides the basis for a remaking of experience.

Assumption 9. Each parent learns in his own way. (pp. 23-28)

As further documentation of the close correlation between parent education and adult education, there are striking similarities between Auerbach's assumptions of parent education and Knowles's andragogical assumptions of adult education. Malcolm Knowles, one of the most recognized names in adult education, proposed "the best known concept in adult education" (St. Clair, 2002, p. 3) over forty years ago. It is perhaps safe to say that anyone with an even passing knowledge of adult education has heard of Knowles and his six assumptions of adult learning which he classified as

“andragogy.” Although the term “andragogy” is synonymous with Malcolm Knowles, the term was actually coined in Europe and later used by Knowles to express “the art and science of helping adults learn” (Knowles, 1970, p. 38).

Following are the four original assumptions that Knowles first published in 1968:

1. As a person matures his self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directing human being.
2. He accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
3. His readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social role.
4. His time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness (Knowles, 1970, p. 30).

He later added the following two assumptions:

5. Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.
6. The most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like) (Knowles, 1990, pp. 57-63).

A close correlation exists between Auerbach’s (1968) 4th assumption, which states that the most significant learning occurs when it is related to parents’ “immediate experience,” and Knowles’ (1970) statement that the “immediacy of application” of

knowledge is critical for adults (p. 39). In addition, Auerbach proposed that parents learn best when they are interested in learning. Similarly, Knowles, in one of his later assumptions, stated that adults are more likely to experience significant learning when they are intrinsically motivated to learn. In other words, they are more likely to learn when they are interested and when they want to learn. Even though Auerbach (1968) and Knowles (1990) seem to agree on the importance of intrinsic motivation, this particular assumption has been a point of contention in the ongoing deliberation concerning the usefulness of andragogy as a framework of adult education.

Although andragogy has been like a common thread in the effort to define adult education (Merriam et al., 2007), it has also sparked spirited debates with both detractors and proponents (Houde, 2006). Initial controversies arose over whether or not to classify andragogy as an actual theory (Elias, 1979). Brookfield (1986) expanded the debate by questioning whether andragogy could provide a best practices framework for adult education, noting that the only cogent assumption is the one dealing with experience. Even though Brookfield appears to be a proponent of the experience assumption, others have questioned its usefulness. For example, Merriam, Mott, and Lee (1996) noted that the experience that adults have accumulated is not necessarily positive nor does it always contribute to adult learning.

Of particular importance to the proposed study is Knowles' (1990) fifth assumption which states that adults are most likely to be motivated to learn from within. In other words, adults have to *want* to learn. Therefore, one might argue that for adult learning to fall within the realm of adult education it must be voluntary. In accordance with this view, Rachal (2002) stated that andragogy is premised, in part, on the belief that the learning experience requires voluntary participation. However, there are

numerous situations in which adults are *required* to participate in learning which range from continuing education workshops to mandated classes (Merriam et al., 2007).

Andragogy is widely accepted as the most well-known concept to inform the practice of adult education. Continuing education workshops and mandated classes are filled with adults. From this paradoxical situation emerge two questions: 1) is required education for adults still within the domain of adult education? And 2) can adults actually learn in a non-voluntary setting? Merriam et al. (2007) noted that the prevalence of mandated training could be used as an argument against Knowles' assumption that the motivation to learn for adults is intrinsic. It is further stated that although andragogy is still considered a best practices framework, it is not a "one size fits all" concept, but rather "one piece of the rich mosaic of adult learning" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 92). In accordance with this view, St. Clair (2002) noted that andragogy does not clearly define what falls under the umbrella of adult education and what does not.

Throughout the last thirty years, parent involvement in parent education has continued to increase, while parent education itself has continued to broaden its scope. It has been noted that parent education programs are being developed and offered by a number of different groups including, community groups and associations, human service and social service agencies, schools, businesses, hospitals, and even parents themselves (Ireland, 1992). Marienau and Segal (2006) have suggested that in order to create learning environments that are conducive to learning, helping professionals must allow principles of adult learning to guide their practice. These principles of adult learning should inform the practice of all types of adult education, including parent education.

Based on the literature of adult education and adult learning, parents enrolled in

parent education must first be viewed as adults who have the potential to be lifelong learners. When parenting education is viewed through this 'lens,' the experience of participating parents can be used to foster growth and development and to improve the efficacy of their parenting (Taylor, 2006). Marienau and Segal (2006) suggest that parents, as adult learners, can learn from their experiences provided the environment is supportive and the parents have some motivation to learn. Although adult educators have long been interested in the motivational orientation of adult learners, research in this area is limited; however, it is known that adult learning is precipitated by many different motivating factors, which are often complicated and likely to change (Merriam et al., 2007). Despite the fact that motivational orientation is somewhat of an enigma in the field, there is research which suggests that upwards of 90% of adults are engaged in some type of learning, which includes not only formal and non-formal learning, but also informal learning (Merriam et al., 2007). So although the underlying motivations for participation may be equivocal, the majority of adults continue to learn throughout their lifetime.

Marienau and Segal (2006) note that experts in both adult learning and parent education emphasize that reflection is the absolute critical element in the ability to learn from past experiences. Freire (1970) suggested the same thing when he stated that the fundamental component of problem posing, problem solving, and transformation itself is reflection. Critical reflection for parents involves looking at past and present experiences to determine how they may have shaped assumptions and beliefs which manifest themselves in parental behaviors (Marienau & Segal, 2006).

Professionals engaged in parent education must create an environment that is conducive to learning, particularly as it relates to the experiences of its participants.

Keeton, Sheckley, and Griggs (2002) suggest adhering to the following principles when designing parent education:

Principle 4: A rich body of experience is essential for optimum learning. Those who engage in direct experience of an object of study will normally learn more accurately and penetratingly about it than those who do not experience it directly.

Principle 5: Experience yields explicit (narrative) knowledge only if actively reflected upon. Such reflection often occurs best in interaction with peers, instructors, or other active questioners. Reflecting upon one's ways of reflection can yield a double benefit by enhancing a learner's power to learn. (p. 56)

Adult education has long recognized the benefit of narrative and shared texts - composed of both an individual's story and those of other participants. Kolb's model of experiential learning can be used by facilitators who direct learners to "(a) talk about events that have gotten her or his attention sufficiently to (b) wonder about them (i.e., to reflect on aspects of one's mental models) to then (c) make some generalizations about one's experience (e.g., recognize patterns) and (d) arrive at something different to try out" (Marienau & Segal, 2006, p. 780).

Reflective of the thinking of Marienau and Segal (2006), the National Parenting Education Network (NPEN) provides the following core principles that guide its work on both child and adult development. According to McDermott (2006), those principles include:

A belief that parents can meet the needs of their children most effectively in the context of a respectful, responsive, and supportive relationship.

We also believe parents bring strength to their role as well as unique histories, goals, values, and beliefs that we need to understand.

A belief that parenting is a lifelong dynamic process where adults can learn and develop along with their children.

We also believe that parenting is influenced by the social, economic, and psychological context of families, communities, and cultures.

A belief that parenting education can be an effective resource for a strength-based approach to serving families, and finally,

A belief that parenting educators:

- 1) are individuals whose background includes preparation in the following areas: child development, adult development and learning, family relationships, and parenting education; and interpersonal and group facilitation;
- 2) continually expand their knowledge base of issues and topics relevant to children and families;
- 3) work toward developing multiple perspectives to address the diversity of families, build networks, share resources and advocate to affect change on behalf of families they serve. (p. 742)

The efficacy of parent education is well-documented in the literature (Heath & Palm, 2006; Marienau & Segal, 2006; Miller & Sambell, 2002). Studies have shown that parent education can be beneficial to pregnant and parenting adolescents (Mann, Pearl, & Behle, 2004); to foster parents (King et al., 2007); to those interested in parenting in a more authoritative style (King et al., 2007; McVittie & Best, 2009); to African American parents interested in adapting a more authoritative style of parenting (Farooq & Fleming, 2005); and to those interested in learning about child growth and development and positive discipline techniques (Campbell, 1992). Research has also indicated that parents participating in a parent education class were more likely to

encourage language and intellectual development in their children than parents who did not attend parent education (Chang, Park, & Kim, 2009).

Additionally, the researcher found one study (Chislett & Kennett, 2007) that aimed to evaluate the effects of a program designed to increase the resourcefulness and competency of parents who may be experiencing multiple stressors. According to Chislett and Kennet (2007) parents often feel more “stressed out” when they lack the essential skills and knowledge necessary to handle the multitude of issues associated with rearing children. Essentially, their own feelings of inadequacy and incompetence contribute to what is often an already high level of stress. Unfortunately, high levels of parental stress and other risk factors increase the likelihood of maladaptive parenting and are sometimes manifested in either child abuse or child neglect (Seng & Prinz, 2008).

Parents who are court-ordered to attend parenting classes are typically involved with social service agencies (e.g., DHS) due to accusations of neglect or abuse or both. According to Casanueva et al. (2007), 3.3 million reports of alleged maltreatment of almost six million children were made to Child Protective Services (CPS) in 2005. There were 906,000 substantiated cases of child maltreatment in the United States in 2003 (Seng & Prinz, 2008).

Child abuse can be categorized as physical, sexual, or emotional (Lowenthal, 1996). Physical abuse is defined as “a nonaccidental, nonsexual, and physical injury to a child that occurs as the result of behaviors of a caretaker” (Lowenthal, 1996, p. 21). Sexual abuse is defined as “a variety of actions involving contact and noncontact maltreatment. Examples are molestation with genital contact, fondling, intercourse, oral or anal sex, and object intrusion. Noncontact abuse includes coercing the child to watch

pornographic films or pictures, to observe sexual intercourse, to perform sexual activities, and to witness sexual exhibitionism” (Lowenthal, 1996, p. 21). Emotional abuse includes “any behavior by an adult that is designed to control a child through the use of humiliation, fear, continuous criticism, and shame” (Lowenthal, 1996, p. 21) or any behavior that “conveys to children that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or only of value in meeting another’s needs” (Iwaniec et al., 2007, p. 203). Research indicates that emotional maltreatment, more elusive than other types of abuse and thus under-reported, is particularly harmful. In fact, psychologically uninvolved parenting may actually be the most harmful type of maltreatment of all the types that are reported (Iwaniec et al., 2007, p. 204).

According to Lowenthal (1996), “child neglect happens when the caretaker does not provide adequate supervision, medical care and education, or exposes the child to dangerous and unhealthy environments” (p. 21). Children who are victims of child abuse or neglect “show higher rates of attachment difficulties, cognitive impairment, developmental delays, emotion dysregulation, poor school performance, delinquent behavior, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, suicidal behavior, self-harm, and alcohol and drug abuse” (Seng & Prinz, 2008, p. 165).

Once parents are involved with CPS or the Department of Human Services (DHS) it is likely that they will be referred to some type of parent education. Yet there is not a substantial amount of information in the literature concerning parent education administered in a court-ordered setting or the experience of the participants in that setting (Casanueva et al., 2007; Murphy & Bryant, 2002).

In an effort to gather information for and gain insight into the proposed study, the researcher conducted a pilot study with three parents who had completed parent

education at a Families First Resource Center, an agency that provides family-life education classes.

The criteria used to select participants were as follows: 1) Completion of a six-week court-ordered parent education class at the Families First Resource Center of Laurel, MS (since closed) and 2) Custodial-parent status resumed. All participants had been referred to DHS for various types of child abuse or neglect. Three females, two African-Americans and one Caucasian, were selected and agreed to participate. All of the participants had successfully completed the class and are currently parenting their children on a full-time basis. In an effort to obtain variety, the researcher chose one parent who has young children (ages 3-6) and two parents who have teenagers and pre-teens. In order to assess the retention of material and the permanency of any change in style, the parents who were selected had completed the class at different times; two parents completed the class a few weeks prior to the interview while the other parent had completed her class several months prior to the interview.

Two of the interviews were held at the Center around the conference table and one was held in the participant's home. These venues were selected by the participants. The researcher explained the informed consent form, asked if they had any questions and then asked them to sign it. All of the participants seemed comfortable with the setting and with the interview being tape recorded. The interview protocol for the pilot study is found in Appendix H.

In the pilot study, the goal was to determine if parents court-ordered to attend a parenting class experienced a change in parenting style, examined through the lens of transformative learning. Through this research, the researcher found several instances that indicated a confirmation of a transformed parenting style. In the Families First

Resource Center's parenting classes, the goal was to provide parents with skills that will enable them to parent their children in a more authoritative style. Authoritative parenting is characterized by two dimensions: high warmth and high demandingness. All three participants described relationships with their children that were characterized by high warmth, indicated by their emphasis on showing children love and listening to them. For example, as "J" said, "if you're a good parent, then you gonna be there for them and you gonna tell em that you love em, no matter what." These same sentiments were echoed by "A" who stated that the most important goal of parenting is "to just love your children and to just respect them". In her response to the way in which her parenting style had changed since the class, "S" concurred noting that "I give them more love than anything by showing them affection, by telling them more, and letting them know that I am here for them and really mean that."

Another characteristic of high warmth is an effective communication pattern, indicated by verbal give and take between parent and child. Communication was a recurring theme with all three participants. When the researcher asked "S" how her overall approach to parenting had changed, she noted that it was "communication listening cause that's one thing that I did not." "J" had a similar response when she was asked about the most important lesson that she learned about her children. She commented that "all of em's different – you have to listen to them that I used to didn't do."

In an effort to determine if parents were also exhibiting high demandingness, they were asked about their discipline. Allowing children to make reasonable and age-appropriate choices and then learning from the consequences of those choices typify authoritative parenting. There was some evidence that participants were holding their

children accountable for their choices. For example, “A” mentioned as part of her response to the question about the most important goal of parenting that parents should “let em have free will to make mistakes and do things so they can learn from em because if you don’t never make a mistake, you’ll never learn anything.” “A” also mentioned using time-out, one of the positive discipline techniques discussed in the class; “S” stated that she had recently removed privileges, another of the techniques discussed in class. The researcher found the comments that “J” made about her discipline techniques to be somewhat surprising. Although her methods were not physical, (instructors at the Families First Resource Center do not advocate physical punishment), they were not techniques discussed in class. This study seems to provide some evidence that court-ordered participants are more likely to communicate freely about “high warmth” with their children. Considering their association with DHS and their court-ordered status, it would seem reasonable that their comments about “high demandingness,” particularly regarding discipline, would be more guarded.

Although there were numerous confirmations of a changed parenting style, there were disconfirmations as well. One participant, “A,” acknowledged that her husband, in fear of DHS, no longer “wants to spank em or anything like that.” From this comment, one has to question whether their hesitation to use physical punishment is based on fear of reprisals, rather than an actual switch to a more authoritative style. In another instance, “J,” when asked how she handled a recent situation in which she had to tell her children “no,” noted that “she want to know why and I just walk away. I say I don’t have to explain myself because I am the mama.” This “because I said so” style is clearly authoritarian (controlling); authoritative parents encourage verbal give and take and explain reasons to their children.

This study was driven by transformative learning theory, a theory that posits that true transformation occurs because of a disorienting dilemma and subsequent self-reflection. One of the objectives of this study was to see if there was any evidence of self-reflection in participants' comments. Two of the participants noted an initial reaction of anger at being told that they must attend parenting classes; "S" noted that she was "furious." Both participants stated, however, that after beginning the class and ultimately finishing it, they were glad they did it and would encourage others to attend. Their thoughts about parenting classes seemed to have clearly changed from their initial court order. There was also some evidence of self-reflection and change. For example, "J" made the following comment about parenting classes: "it's mostly for yourself. Then you can find out what kind of person you are." "S" commented that prior to the class, "I wasn't aware of my voice," and a realization that she didn't want to see her daughter's trauma when she said "it hurt me so bad . . . I didn't want to see it."

All three participants felt that there had been a change in parenting style as a result of the class. Clearly, it must be acknowledged that because these participants were court-ordered, there might be a tendency for them to give socially-acceptable answers; however, there appear to be numerous concrete examples, particularly related to high warmth, that indicate a change in style for all three participants. Evidence also suggests that the participants engaged in some measure of self-reflection, an essential component of transformative learning and in this particular study, learning that was manifested in a transformed parenting style.

The Framework of Transformative Learning Theory

As the term implies, transformative learning is about transformation, or change. Although other researchers, namely Boyd and Daloz, have contributed to the

concept of transformative learning, its “primary spokesperson” is Jack Mezirow (Taylor, 1998, p. vii). He introduced his concept of transformative learning in 1978 (Taylor, 1998); He viewed transformation from an individual perspective in his psychocritical approach aptly named perspective transformation (Merriam et al., 2007). More specifically, perspective transformation provides an explanation for the meaning that adults attach to their experiences.

Within this structural framework of meaning are found both meaning schemes and meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). Meaning schemes, composed of smaller, more tangible elements like knowledge and beliefs, frequently change. Meaning perspectives, on the other hand, are more broad in scope, representing a person’s “world view or personal paradigm” (Taylor, 1998, p. 6). Meaning perspectives are generally developed through socialization and over time they become an intrinsic part of the psyche; therefore, meaning perspectives rarely change (Mezirow, 1991).

Acting as filters, meaning perspectives help adults make sense of, or provide meaning to, their experiences. Mezirow (1991) proposed that meaning perspectives define expectations by carefully determining not only what we learn, but also how we learn. Within each meaning perspective are found a number of meaning schemes. Mezirow (1991) stated that meaning schemes are the tangible expressions of one’s accepted position and conjecture (meaning perspective) and the interpretation of that general assumption into more specific beliefs that guide behavior. Mezirow (1991) used ethnocentrism, the belief that one’s own group is superior to others, as an example of a meaning perspective. Within that particular perspective would be found certain racial or sexual stereotypes (acting as meaning schemes) which would guide the individual’s action to perhaps shun someone because of their race or sex (Mezirow, 1991).

Mezirow (1991) went on to explain that meaning perspectives provide us with a gauge to determine or evaluate “right and wrong, bad and good, beautiful and ugly, true and false, appropriate and inappropriate” (p. 44). Meaning perspectives, which are often acquired in childhood, may be deeply embedded, particularly if they have been consistently reinforced; however, Taylor (2008) contends that “because there are no enduring truths, and change is continuous, we cannot always be assured of what we know or believe” (p. 5). Thinking adults should, therefore, adapt a more analytical view in an effort to better understand the world around them (Taylor, 2008).

Accordingly, when adults encounter a contradictory experience, one in which current meaning schemes are inadequate to explain it, they either reject the experience or transform their meaning perspective (Taylor, 1998). This shift in meaning perspective is at the core of perspective transformation, a process that Mezirow (2000) proposed begins with a disorienting dilemma, defined as a life crisis or major life transition such as the death of a loved one or a serious illness (Merriam et al., 2007). Mezirow (2000) stated that a transformation can be sudden and dramatic, even epic, which manifests itself as change in meaning perspective, or more incremental where slow and steady changes in meaning schemes result in an eventual change in meaning perspective.

Although Mezirow (1995) outlined ten phases of transformative learning, at the core of the process are three major themes: experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse. The transformative process begins with the actual experience; however, the experience alone is not enough to set the process in motion (Merriam et al., 2007). Only through critical reflection can the experience become transformative. Through critical reflection, the adult learner questions assumptions and beliefs that have been used to interpret the meaning of past experiences. This questioning process often occurs in

response to a contradiction, which is based on distorted assumptions among thoughts, feelings, and actions. Through the reflective process, adults are able to “change our minds, literally and figuratively” (Mezirow, 1995, p. 46). Experience and critical reflection are put into action through rational discourse, the crucial element in promoting and developing transformation (Mezirow, 1995). Mezirow (2000) defined discourse as “that specialized use of dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief” (p. 10). Talking with others, either in one-to-one relationships, in small groups, or in educational settings, initiates a clearer understanding of the experience, (Merriam et al., 2007), which ultimately leads to a transformed meaning scheme and meaning perspective (Taylor, 1998).

Mezirow (2000) further described the transformative learning process by examining the work of Habermas and the epistemology of his communicative theory. Habermas proposed that there are two primary domains of learning: 1) instrumental and 2) communicative. Mezirow (2000) described instrumental learning as the knowledge to master and shape one’s environment or other people through learning to solve problems and thus improving performance. Simply put, instrumental learning has been described as learning how to do things. According to Mezirow (2000), communicative learning is comprised of the knowledge and understanding involved in communicating with others, which often includes their feelings, objectives and values. Mezirow (2000) believed that both domains are involved in most learning, with instrumental learning following hypothetical-deductive logic and communicative learning following metaphorical-adductive logic. Validating a belief in instrumental learning usually involves empirical testing. Communicative learning is less amenable to empirical testing and is therefore validated through rational discourse (Mezirow, 2000).

Related to the Habermasian concept of communicative theory, there are ideal conditions for discourse which include: complete information, lack of self-deception, empathy, objective evaluation of arguments, and so on (Merriam et al., 2007). Mezirow (2000) acknowledged that these conditions are the ideal and are never completely achieved in day-to-day practice. Even so, he contends that fostering discourse has long been of primary importance to adult educators (Mezirow, 2000).

Perspective transformation is closely tied to adult development in that it provides an explanation for the evolution and expansion of personal paradigms in adulthood (Taylor, 1998). In fact, according to Mezirow (1991) a perspective transformation is crucial to ongoing adult development. Mezirow (1991) contended that “Anything that moves the individual towards a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable (open to other points of view), and integrated meaning perspective, the validity of which has been established through rational discourse, aids an adult’s development” (p. 7). Since Mezirow (1995) sees perspective transformation and adult development as being closely correlated, it is no surprise that he suggested that fostering transformative learning is crucial to promoting adult development.

Fostering Transformative Learning

Mezirow (1991) stated that the essential component for fostering transformative learning is the establishment of ideal conditions, as set forth by Habermas, for rational discourse. He noted that these conditions are not only the ideal for rational discourse, but also for adult learning (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow (1991) further correlated transformative learning with adult learning in his discussion of andragogy, which he defined as the “professional perspective of adult educators” (p. 199). To substantiate this point, Mezirow emphasized the 1981 study by Suanmali, whose targeted population

was 174 members of the Commission of Professors of Adult Education. These adult educators agreed almost unanimously that as practitioners of andragogy they must also adhere to the goals set forth in Mezirow's 1981 book. These goals, which were designed to guide the practice of adult education, are also closely related to transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991). Therefore, by adhering to the principles of adult learning educators are also fostering transformative learning.

In his comprehensive 1997 critical review of transformative learning, Taylor noted findings from several researchers that offered insight into the teaching of adults. Confirming what had been indicated previously in the literature, Taylor's analysis included studies that suggest that : "(a) effective teachers are empathetic, caring (Ludwig, 1994), authentic, sincere, and demonstrate a high degree of integrity (Pierce, 1986); (b) ideal learning conditions promote a sense of safety, openness, and trust (Ludwig, 1994; Matusicky, 1982; Pierce, 1986); and (c) effective instructional methods that support a learner-centered approach (Matusicky, 1992) and promote student autonomy, participation, reflection, and collaboration (Ludwig, 1994; Pierce, 1986)" (Taylor, 1997, p. 40). Further, one of the more rigorous studies (Pierce, 1986) indicated that students who had encountered the greatest change in perspective were those with facilitators who had promoted self-awareness among their participants. This finding serves to confirm Mezirow's (2000) stance that thoughtful transformations are based on self-awareness.

Ten years after his 1997 review, Taylor published an updated critique of transformative learning theory. He noted that the most significant change from the first review to the second one was an increase in the practice of fostering transformative learning in certain settings. These venues included both higher education classrooms and

workplace settings. In an effort to accommodate these and other diverse groups and individuals found in adult classrooms, facilitators have used an array of teaching methods designed to foster transformative learning.

For example, Brookfield (1995) suggested the use of critical incidents, collaborative problem solving, and autobiographies. Jarvis found that romantic novels were effective in stimulating questions about romantic relationships and the power within those relationships with a group of women in an Access Higher Education Program (Taylor, 2007). Journaling was also found to be a powerful tool in helping students to find their voice (Taylor, 2007). These types of activities reinforce the critical elements of transformative learning, namely: 1) an awareness of the meaning perspective, 2) critical reflection, and 3) rational discourse. Taylor (2007) agreed, noting that engaging students in a learning experience that motivates them to reflect upon their experience is one of the most effective techniques for fostering transformative learning. Taylor (2007) also found that learners benefit from experiences that are unambiguous and hands-on. As an example, he discovered studies where medical students were required to visit funeral homes, hospices, and anatomy laboratories. This experience allowed the students to tap into their own emotions which led to an empathic understanding of death and dying that might not have been possible with a less direct approach.

Cranton (2000) proposed that disparate psychological types respond differently to certain learning strategies. Her work on transformative learning was inspired by Jung's theoretical model of psychological types (Cranton, 2000). Jung (1921) defined four functions of living categorized as either judgmental/rational or perceptive/irrational. Cranton (2000) stated that educators should remember that individuals' psychological

predispositions affect the way that they learn and are crucial in the development and implementation of effective strategies aimed at fostering transformative learning. For example, case studies, debates, and critical questioning seem to work well with individuals who prefer the thinking function, with these activities allowing them to discover underlying beliefs and assumptions. On the other hand, those participants who favor the feeling function could find debates and critical analysis too confrontational. These learners might prefer working in *harmonious groups* where a single frame of reference is examined. Experiential strategies, like field trips, simulations, and role playing, can be helpful to students who prefer the sensing function. As a follow-up to these experiences, the facilitator can tap into the thinking and feeling functions through the use of discussion, journal writing, or position papers. Participants who tend to learn intuitively favor activities that allow them to use their imagination or engage in flights of fancy such as brainstorming, metaphors, or imaging. Considering that most classes are composed of a wide range of psychological types, Cranton (2000) suggested that educators use a diversified range of teaching strategies with each class.

Although Mezirow (1991) acknowledged that fostering transformative learning brings up crucial ethical questions, he contends that most issues, if handled properly, are honorable. For example, he pondered whether it is unethical for an educator to expedite transformative learning when the learner may not fully comprehend that transformation may be the outcome (Mezirow, 1991). Since Mezirow (1991) believes in the fundamental link between adult development and transformative learning, he consequently contended that there are no legitimate ethical questions concerning the triggering or fostering of the process of transformation. Mezirow (1991) explained that

although educators must be receptive of their student's learning goals, they are not ethically bound to limit the student to those particular expectations.

Other researchers have weighed in on the topic of ethics. In keeping with Mezirow's (1991) idea that perspective transformations cannot be evoked on demand by either the facilitator or the learner, Tisdell (2003) noted that she always leaves the decision up to students as to whether or not they want to engage in the critical process. More specifically, she noted that she never asks her students to do anything that she is unwilling to do; she gives students the option to observe rather than participate in experiential activities, and she explains that participants never have to do anything that they consider too personal (Tisdell, Hanley, & Taylor, 2000). Ettlting (2006) suggested that adult educators who foster transformative learning must do so with "attention and integrity" and further, must develop a "personal ethical creed" by first educating themselves (Ettlting, 2006, p. 65). She contended that through intellectual, emotional, and spiritual self-development an adult educator can acquire the requisite competencies to effectively and ethically practice transformative learning (Ettlting, 2006).

Studies Examining Transformative Learning

Transformative learning theory has been the focus of numerous discussions over the past several decades. Its applicability has been tested in numerous studies and reported in books and periodicals, with an abundance of literature available for review. In Taylor's 2007 critical review of transformative learning, he noted that the focus of recent research has been on the factors that are associated with a transformative experience. Researchers have been particularly interested in *fleshing out* the construct of perspective transformation.

For example, studies have been conducted to determine if a true perspective transformation is irreversible, which is what Mezirow (1991) emphatically contended. Courtenay et al. (2000) conducted a follow-up study two years after their initial research on a group of HIV-positive adults. It was determined that the perspective transformation experienced at their initial diagnosis had held. The researchers contended that their study further confirmed Mezirow's idea that perspective transformations are permanent (Courtenay et al., 2000). Considering that an HIV diagnosis is a life-threatening event, the researchers questioned the staying power of a perspective transformation that is precipitated by a non-life threatening event. Therefore, they suggested that more research is needed to confirm the primary components of an irreversible perspective transformation.

Taylor (2008) also noted that there have been new insights into the importance of critical reflection in transformative learning. Merriam (2004), for example, argued that in order for a person to engage in the critical reflection and rational discourse that is essential for transformative learning, one must already be functioning at a high level of cognitive development; however, she goes on to say that without doubt we know that adults with lower levels of cognitive functioning still experience transformative learning. Merriam (2004) cited Freire's work with illiterate peasants as a case in point. She concluded her discussion by suggesting that perhaps Mezirow should expand his theory to make room for other "ways of knowing," specifically to include "affective and intuitive dimensions on an equal footing with cognitive and rational components" (Merriam, 2004, p. 68).

Concerns about the role of cognitive development in transformative learning have been further articulated in the neurobiological approach. Taylor (2001) cited

scientific breakthroughs, namely positron emission tomography (PET) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), as being a key factor in understanding how the brain functions. Of particular importance in the new neurobiological perspective of transformative learning is the relationship of memory and emotion to the cognitive processes of the brain (Gazzaniga, 1998; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Pinker, 1997; Taylor, 2001). Taylor (2001) even argued that emotions are crucial in the development of rationality. Another interesting scientific finding suggests that habits, attitudes, and preferences are stored and emerge from implicit (or long-term) memory. Although these memories are outside an individual's conscious awareness, they nevertheless shape behavior and are crucial to our very identity (Taylor, 2001, p. 218). Grabove (1997) agreed with Taylor and contends that emotions and reason work together in transformative learning. She described the process as one where the learner moves in and out of the "cognitive and the intuitive, of the rational and the imaginative, of the subjective and the objective, of the personal and the social" (Grabove, 1997, p. 95).

Transformative learning theory has been examined in venues ranging from Learning in Retirement Programs (Erickson, 2007) to student teaching abroad (Moseley, Reeder, & Armstrong, 2008) to parent education (Marienau & Segal, 2006). Of particular significance to this study is the examination of transformative learning within the context of parent education.

Ireland (1992) was the first to examine the use of critical self-reflection as a tool for learning in parent education programs. Ireland's criticism of the predominant behavioral and information-based approaches to parent education was that these programs failed to engage parents in a critical assessment of their assumptions concerning parenting practices. Therefore, through his dissertation research under the

tutelage of Jack Mezirow, he developed a research-based handbook designed for use in parent education programs. The purpose of this handbook was to encourage critical reflection related to flawed assumptions about parenting (Ireland, 1992). In addition to suggesting that his handbook be used in follow-up studies with more diverse populations, Ireland also recommended the use of other qualitative research tools when conducting studies on parent education.

Adding to the discussion of critical reflection and transformative learning, First and Way (1995) used a phenomenological approach to analyze the experiences of eight female parent education participants. Seven of the eight women reported having had a major change in their lives, which they attributed to the parent education class. The transformative experience was different for each of the women, but they all had become more empathetic towards their children and had become better communicators. In addition, all of the women reported lower levels of anger, particularly towards their children. The participants had learned new ways of dealing with their children and were less likely to lash out at them. Consequently, the women felt that their personal power and control had increased in their own lives. Since most of the women had a low socioeconomic status and several of them were minorities, feelings of oppression were not uncommon. So the acquisition of some measure of power and control was perhaps transformative for these women on several levels. In order to make participation in parent education a more meaningful experience, First and Way (1995) proposed that parent educators incorporate critical thinking skills and transformative learning into their programs.

Marienau and Segal (2006) also recognized the importance of critical reflection in the learning process. They used principles from adult learning and development to

portray parents as “continuous learners,” with a rich reservoir of experiences. By critically reflecting upon their experiences, parents can improve existing parenting skills and learn new ones. These authors posed the following three questions related to the ability of parents to learn:

Can parents learn from experiences?

Can parents self-author their expectations, values, and behaviors to be more effective?

Can parents grow and develop beyond their current capabilities? (Marienau & Segal, 2006, p. 769).

The authors’ response is a qualified yes, given that the environment is supportive and that there is some motivation to learn on the part of the parent. Experts in the fields of adult learning and parent education contend, however, that critical reflection is fundamental to learning and meaning making. This type of reflection, which involves intense questioning of existing assumptions and beliefs, is often most effective while interacting with peers or instructors (Marienau & Segal, 2006).

Critical reflection as a part of transformative learning was key in Shivers’ (2008) examination of low parental involvement in Title 1-funded schools, particularly as it relates to barriers to participation. She also explored the perceptions that parents had concerning their ability to help their children with their schoolwork. Fundamental to her research was the implementation of the VIP program, a parent education program designed to transform parents’ perceptions of their roles in their children’s education. The researcher felt that there was evidence of transformation not only in her participants, but in her as well. Shivers (2008) recommended that parent educators adhere to adult

learning principles as they design their programs, and she suggested the application of transformative learning in other settings, especially with marginalized populations.

Other Perspectives

Although Mezirow's perspective is the most well-known, other researchers, including Daloz and Boyd, have contributed to the discussion of transformative learning. While Mezirow's approach relies on rationality and critical reflection, Daloz and Boyd look at the transformative process as being more "holistic and intuitive" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 136; Taylor, 2008). Daloz, who focused on adults in the pursuit of higher education, sees teachers as mentors who both challenge and support their students. According to Daloz (1999), mentors are trusted guides on the journey of life, trusted because they have a rich reservoir of life experiences. Mentors not only impart the wisdom that they have accumulated from their own journey, they do so in a compassionate manner. For Daloz, the defining characteristic of a mentor is one who cares, not only about what they teach, but to whom they teach (Daloz, 1999).

In Daloz's (1999) view, the most important goal of transformative learning is personal development. Teachers in their role as mentor can promote this development through the sharing of experiences designed to reexamine perceptions of self and the world (Daloz, 1999). In fact the very idea of mentors as guides requires a close look at the students' journey which is made real through their "story" (Daloz, 1999). Both Daloz and Mezirow value the importance of discourse, but for Daloz dialogue is about the telling of one's story. Mutual story-telling, on the part of both the student and the teacher, can enhance development and provide a vision for the future (Daloz, 1999). Daloz suggested that teachers/mentors ask themselves the following questions as they guide their students on their journey of transformation: "What changes do I want to see

in my students? What kind of responsibility do I accept for them? How do my students see me, and what do they want from me? How do I respond to their hopes, their fear?" (Daloz, 1999, p. 19).

Boyd (1991), whose psychoanalytic approach is grounded in depth psychology, sees transformation as a process of individuation. In Boyd's view a greater understanding of the psyche allows one to achieve self-actualization and to gain empowerment and confidence (Boyd, 1991; Merriam et al., 2007; Taylor, 2008). Like Mezirow (1991) and Daloz (1999), Boyd (1991) sees the importance of dialogue in the transformative process; however, from Boyd's perspective, the dialogue is more intrapersonal, in essence occurring between the ego and other structures of the psyche, including the Shadow, Anima and Animus. This inner dialogue paves the way for the individual to overcome fixations and complexes (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

Mezirow (1991), Daloz (1999), and Boyd (1991) all view transformative learning from an individual perspective, with the individual as the unit of analysis. Although context and social change are given little consideration in these perspectives, these concepts are the focus of the social-emancipatory view. The most well-known sociocultural approach comes from Paulo Freire, known for his work with Brazilian peasant farmers. The context for this work emerged from poverty and injustice, with an overarching goal of social transformation (Merriam et al., 2007; Taylor, 2008).

Freire's ideas about education and conscientization have greatly contributed to the underpinnings of transformative learning. In regards to education, Freire distinguished between 'banking education' and 'problem posing.' In teacher-centered banking education, the teacher deposits information into the student, who simply serves

as a receptacle for that information. Dialogue is not encouraged and students are oppressed into domestication. Conversely, in problem-posing education, dialogue is essential and liberation of students is the goal. Further, the student/teacher relationship shifts into a more horizontal position, with the student and teacher serving as coinvestigators in the classroom (Freire, 1970).

Conscientization is the process, sparked through dialogue, in which individuals not only become aware of the oppressive forces in their life, but also become a part of social change. Dialogue raises awareness and allows progression through the levels of conscientization culminating in critical consciousness. Like Mezirow, Freire placed great emphasis on critical reflection which develops through problem posing and dialogue (Freire, 1970).

In addition to these well-established perspectives of transformative learning, there are four additional approaches found in the literature. The most recent is the *neurobiological* view, a “brain-based” theory, made possible because of recent scientific breakthroughs and technical innovations. Specifically, technology has provided further insights into exactly how the brain works, especially concerning the connection between cognitive processes and emotions and memory (Gazzaniga, 1998; Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Pinker, 1997; Taylor, 2001). The *cultural-spiritual* view is, as the name implies, grounded in spirituality and is culturally relevant (Tisdell, 2003). Teachers are considered collaborators, and reminiscent of Daloz, storytelling is the preferred method of dialogue. The communal sharing of old stories and the revision of new ones is seen as the means to foster transformative learning.

People of African descent, primarily black women, are at the center of the *race-centric* approach, with race being the primary unit of analysis (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred,

2006). This view of transformative learning is culturally defined and adversarial (Taylor, 2008). Three primary concepts frame this perspective: 1) promoting inclusion, 2) promoting empowerment, and 3) negotiating effectively between and across cultures (Johnson-Bailey & Alfred, 2006; Taylor, 2008). The *planetary* view sees the connection between all things from the universe to the individual (Taylor, 2008). This perspective sees the individual from a social-political dimension as well as an ecological and planetary one (O'Sullivan, 1999; Taylor, 2008).

Within these varied perspectives are key differences, ranging from the anticipated goal of transformative learning to the role of culture in transformations. Researchers consider this assortment of perspectives to be exciting because potentially it could offer a more heterogeneous translation of transformative learning and consequently have important ramifications for practice (Taylor, 2008).

Correlation to Attitude Theory

A thorough examination of transformative learning theory reveals some similarities to attitude-change ideologies which have been formulated and debated within the field of psychology. Two well-known theories of attitude change include Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory and Bem's (1967) self-perception theory. Festinger (1957) proposed that individuals embellish their opinions of decisions once they have made them. This premise is at the core of Festinger's (1957) theory which proposes that individuals will endeavor to avoid the unpleasantness of mental disparities. For example, once an individual makes a decision in the presence of several appealing choices, cognitive dissonance will occur because of the inconsistency between the negative traits of the selected alternative and the positive traits of the non-selected alternative. Therefore, by amplifying the assessment of the selected alternative the

individual reduces the inconsistency (cognitive dissonance) that is experienced (Rosenfeld, Kennedy, & Giacalone, 1986).

Bem (1967) suggested that his theory of self-perception is an “alternate interpretation” of Festinger’s cognitive dissonance theory (p. 183). He argued that individuals change their attitudes because of their ability to rationalize and respond differentially to their behavior and not because of an attempt to reduce cognitive dissonance (Bem, 1967; Shaffer, 1975). Although cognitive dissonance theory has been tested in three different categories (forced-compliance studies; free-choice studies; and exposure-to-information studies), the most often cited research comes from the forced-compliance paradigm (Bem, 1967).

In forced-compliance experiments, subjects are persuaded to behave in a manner that is contradictory to their personal attitude. From a self-perception perspective, attitudes are less likely to change due to external cues (forced-compliance) if the initial attitude is deemed important. In other words, the more important the initial attitude, the more that attitude is secured or “anchored” and the less likely it is to change (Shaffer, 1975, p. 280). Proponents of cognitive dissonance theory would conjecture different effects from initial attitude importance on attitude change. They would argue that the more important the initial attitude the greater the dissonance and the accompanying pressure to reduce that dissonance (Shaffer, 1975). Therefore, from this perspective, the more important the initial attitude the more likely it would be to change after counterattitudinal behavior. The data obtained from Shaffer’s 1975 study were consistent with Bem’s self-perception theory that more important attitudes are “anchored” and therefore, less likely to change. His subjects showed considerably less attitude change when the

initial attitudes were deemed important as compared to those with moderately important attitudes (Shaffer, 1975).

One of the more obvious correlations between transformative learning theory and attitude change theory is the comparison of cognitive dissonance and a disorienting dilemma. Mezirow (2000) suggested that the process of transformative learning begins with a disorienting dilemma, defined as a powerful personal crisis. As a result of this trigger event, an individual may question long-held beliefs which no longer seem adequate to explain their current experience. This process of examination often paves the way for a restructuring of beliefs and a shift in perspective. Similarly, Festinger (1957) proposed that individuals will change their attitudes in order to reduce the unpleasantness of cognitive dissonance. Individuals may encounter this mental inconsistency when there is a disparity between their behavior and their attitude (Shaffer, 1975). Proponents of transformative learning theory might say that the perspective of these individuals is no longer adequate or accurate to explain their experience. Although the terms disorienting dilemma and cognitive dissonance originated in two different academic disciplines, their meaning is similar in that they are both about precipitating change in the individual.

An additional correlation exists between meaning schemes and meaning perspectives used to describe transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) and Bem's self-perception theory and its application to forced-compliance experiments (Bem, 1967). Mezirow (1991) contended that meaning schemes are composed of concrete elements like knowledge and beliefs which may routinely change. On the other hand, meaning perspectives are upper-level schemata or personal paradigms which are often deeply-ingrained through long-term socialization and therefore, seldom change.

Similarly, Bem (1967) contended that in forced-compliance experiments the more important the initial attitude the less likely it is to change due to external cues. These initial important attitudes, comparable to meaning perspectives, are secured or “anchored” in the psyche making them less amenable to change. The fundamental correlation between transformative learning theory and attitude change theory is evident, particularly in relation to the process of personal change manifested in a transformed perspective or attitude.

Conclusion

A review of the literature clearly indicates that parenting is one of the most challenging tasks of adulthood (Darling, 1999; Heath, 2006; Marienau & Segal, 2006). Since about 90% of adults will at some point in their lives parent a child, parenting is also one of the most universal activities of adulthood (Rubenstein, 2011). It is imperative that professionals keep in mind that the adults who are parenting today’s children are in the midst of their own development as adults.

The complex activity of parenting has implications for every individual child who is parented and therefore for society as a whole. Over the last several decades, a profusion of research has been conducted on child-rearing practices and their subsequent impact on child outcome. Diana Baumrind’s (1966) typology of parenting styles is often used to conceptualize broad patterns of parental behavior. Of Baumrind’s three parental prototypes, research has consistently upheld the belief that the authoritative style, which combines kindness and firmness, is simply the most beneficial for children (Steinberg, 2001).

Parenting, a process with high stakes, can be improved through parent

education. Parent education, long recognized as a component of adult education, can itself be enhanced when professionals create environments that reflect the principles of adult learning (Marienau & Segal, 2006). Even though numerous studies have indicated that parent education administered in a voluntary setting can be beneficial to participants, much less research has been conducted on the experience of participants who have been court-ordered to parent education.

Parents who are mandated to attend parent education have generally been accused of either neglecting or abusing their children. All parent education seeks to improve the parenting skills of its participants; in no other setting is this improvement more critical than in parent education that is court-ordered. In fact, one of the major objectives of parent education is to transform the beliefs, attitudes, and child-rearing practices of its participants. Therefore, this study, which focused on the parenting styles of participants court-ordered to parent education, used the adult education theory of transformative learning as its framework.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to identify changes in the parenting style of court-ordered participants after completion of parent education. The specific research questions that were addressed in this study are:

1. How has parent/child communication/support style changed after parent education?
2. How has the structuring of household policy (e.g. – family meetings; monitoring) changed after parent education?
3. How has the consistency of discipline and discipline techniques changed after parent education?
4. How has parenting style changed for parents who were court-ordered to attend a six-week parent education class with the researcher? What role did a disorienting dilemma and subsequent critical reflection play in the process?

The first three research questions are designed to assess the balance of responsiveness and demandingness, the two critical elements of parenting that define parenting style, (Darling, 1999) exhibited by the class participants. Question 4 is designed to analyze the actual transformation, as defined by transformational learning theory, of parenting style that may have occurred during or after parent education. The second part of question 4 is designed to analyze whether participants' experience qualified as a disorienting dilemma and what role critical reflection played in the process. Mezirow (1991) stated that critical reflection is paramount to transformational learning (Taylor, 1998). Mezirow (1991) proposed that critical reflection is the most

crucial component of adult learning and absolutely critical in changing long-standing frames of reference (Taylor, 1998).

In order to answer the preceding research questions, a basic qualitative design was used. This study was aimed at capturing the participants' assessment of their experience with and the subsequent implications of involvement with DHS, mandatory parent education, and the critical reflection process. The research was conducted from the perspective of phenomenology, one of five dominant modes of inquiry in qualitative research and one that is based on the essence of experience (Merriam, 2009). Some experts have argued that all qualitative research, with its emphasis on understanding the meaning of experience, is phenomenological and in a sense it is (Merriam, 2009). The researcher, whose goal was to gain an understanding of the *experience* of court-ordered parent education for its participants, felt that phenomenology was the most suitable type of qualitative research for this study.

Phenomenology is an appropriate and effective approach when dealing with "affective, emotional and often intense human experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 26). Certainly, court-ordered parent education would qualify as one of those types of experiences. First and Way (1995) commented on the phenomenological approach to research in their study on parent education. Through the use of intensive interviews and storytelling with participants in a parent education program, the researchers were able to capture the "human experience in a way that cannot be measured using quantitative methods" (First & Way, 1995, p. 105).

Selection Criteria for Sample

Participants were ten parents under court-order and referred by DHS to the researcher for a six-week parent education class. One additional parent, who was

accompanying her sister, asked to join the class so the researcher included her in the study for comparative purposes. Because Jones County DHS mandated classes tend to be small, the researcher did not get a large sample size, an issue that is usually not problematic for qualitative research, but one that can be challenging for quantitative research. Hill (2010) addressed the differences in qualitative and quantitative methods, noting that “qualitative researchers investigate few cases and many factors” while “quantitative researchers work with a few variables and many cases.” Due to a small sample size, purposive sampling (Johnson & Christensen, 2008), a sampling method in which the researcher selects appropriate participants and one that is often used in qualitative research, was appropriate for this study.

Data Collection and Storage

After receiving permission from The University of Southern Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix I), the data collection process began. Prior to the before-training interview which was held in a private office at the Jones County DHS, the informed consent process was explained to all participants. The researcher was diligent in explaining in detail the description of the study as well as the potential benefits and risks. As part of the informed consent process, the researcher discussed the format of the training program, which included a weekly class meeting for a period of six weeks. Each class session lasted approximately two hours and was held at the same time each week throughout the six-week period. The class was conducted in the conference room of the Jones County DHS and was facilitated by the researcher. Each week a different topic related to parenting was the focus of the class discussion and the homework assignments (See Appendix G).

As part of their homework, the participants were asked to reflect on the weekly

topic in their journal postings and in their interactions with their children, and then to discuss those experiences during the following class session. Participants were assured that the researcher would make every effort to protect their identity and their confidentiality. Once the informed consent process had been thoroughly explained, all participants were asked to sign a cover letter thereby giving permission for the collected data to be used for the described research purposes.

The qualitative design for this study was: 1) before-training interview; training; 2) after-training interview; and 3) follow-up interview (Appendix B, C, and D respectively). The after-training interview was held within two days following the completion of the parent education class. The follow-up interview was held approximately three months after completion of the parent education class. The inclusion of the follow-up interview was designed to provide evidence of the existence of a perspective transformation, specifically as it relates to a transformed parenting style. The interviews were audio recorded using two digital recorders and then transcribed. The interviews ranged in time from 20 minutes to 45 minutes and were held in a conference room at the Jones County, MS DHS office building. The conference room was private and had a sense of familiarity because the class was held in this room.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, the researcher used other qualitative methods including field notes, naturalistic observations and participant journals. The researcher took field notes, based on participants' stories, following each parent education class. Following the suggestions that Merriam made in her 2009 book, the field notes from this study were highly descriptive and included detailed characteristics of the setting, the people, and the activities; direct quotes from

participants; and observer's comments, related to the observer's feelings, hunches, interpretations, and so on (Merriam, 2009).

The researcher gave each participant a composition notebook to be used as a journal. Participants were asked to record their thoughts in this journal on a weekly basis. In addition to the journal, the researcher gave each participant a journal protocol (Appendix E) with questions designed to promote self-reflection, a critical step in transformative learning (Mezirow, 1995). Although the assigned questions corresponded to the class discussion for that week, they were primarily intended to elicit responses based on participants' personal experiences with that topic and ultimately to serve as a catalyst for self-reflection.

Since naturalistic observations are considered the "gold standard in the assessment of parenting" (Hawes & Dadds, 2006, p. 555), the researcher had planned to observe all participants interacting in a prescribed activity with their children (Appendix F); however, this part of the research design proved to be problematic. Several of the children were living in foster homes and one of them was in a mental health care facility. Some of the children were living out of the county and lack of transportation was an issue with some of the participants. One parent had her visitation rights temporarily suspended and another parent was a long-haul trucker, meaning that he was out of town for several days or even weeks at the time. Producing a schedule that accommodated all parties was complicated, and unfortunately, sometimes it was impossible. Nevertheless, the researcher was able to conduct parent/child observations with six of the eleven participants. The Jones County Department of Human Services facility, which has visitation rooms with observational mirrors, was the site of the observations. Approval to use this facility and to conduct observations of parent/child interactions at the beginning

of parent education and then again at the conclusion of parent education had been given to the researcher by the DHS Area Supervisor prior to the study. In order to ensure confidentiality, the researcher used pseudonyms for the participants. In addition, a separate file containing transcriptions, journals and all other relevant materials was established for each participant.

To strengthen both internal validity and reliability, triangulation was used. Multiple data sources, one type of triangulation, were implemented in this study. Triangulation using multiple sources of data requires comparisons of data observed at different times or in different venues, or collected from participants with different perspectives or even an interview sequel with the same participants (Merriam, 2009). In keeping with the multiple data source method, the semi-structured interviews were supplemented with field notes, naturalistic observations and participants' journals.

Member checks, another strategy for ensuring internal validity, were employed in this study (Merriam, 2009; Hill, 2010). This strategy, also called respondent validation, is a way for researchers to solicit feedback on their findings from the respondents themselves. Even though the researcher may have used different words to fit their interpretation, the respondent should certainly be able to recognize their own experience in the researcher's interpretation (Merriam, 2009). This method was used by the researcher during the interview itself by repeating back to the participant what she understood them to have said. Follow-up phone calls were also made to the participants once the transcriptions were completed as an additional interpretive check.

Pilot Study

In order to inform the methodology for the proposed research, a pilot study was conducted which is discussed at length in Chapter II. The researcher refined parts of the

research plan based on information gained through the preliminary study. For example, participants in the initial research project made contradictory statements regarding self-reported changes in parenting style. While scarce, the comments cannot be ignored. Therefore, in light of the overarching goal of the proposed class, the researcher incorporated additional techniques designed to facilitate transformative learning. Participants were asked to keep a journal and to actively participate in guided class discussions, two techniques which are advocated in adult education literature (Cranton, 2000; Taylor, 2007).

Further, the researcher revised the interview protocol in an effort to substantiate the presence of a disorienting dilemma. Mezirow (1991) proposed that a disorienting dilemma is a necessary component, the trigger point in fact, in the process of transformative learning. Disorienting dilemmas occur in various forms, including death, illness, the “empty nest,” retirement, and even being passed over for a promotion (Mezirow, 1991). In this study, the researcher sought to determine if the participant’s involvement with DHS (and potential loss of custody of their children) qualifies as a disorienting dilemma based on responses to interview questions. These questions have been carefully worded to tease out the essence of a disorienting dilemma, including participant’s initial reaction, their thought process and the feelings that they experienced as a result of this event.

As a result of the pilot study, the researcher also determined that court-ordered parents can be difficult to find after classes have been completed. Although all three individuals who were asked did agree to participate in the pilot study, it was a fairly difficult task to find potential participants. Phones were disconnected or were unanswered. Therefore, the researcher created an incentive plan to keep potential

research participants around for the duration of the project (Taylor, 2010). The researcher gave the participants her cell phone number so that they could notify her if their phone number was changed. In addition to a parenting certificate, each participant also received a \$50.00 gift certificate to Wal-Mart at the conclusion of the final interview.

Data Analysis

According to Cresswell (2007), phenomenology is about “understanding the essence of the experiences” with the analysis occurring by “studying a process, action, or interaction involving many individuals” (p. 78). In a phenomenological study, the researcher analyzes data by looking for common themes or “significant statements” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 78) in an effort to find the “essence” of the experience.

Typical of qualitative research, the researcher served as the primary instrument for both data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). As such, the researcher had to be aware of personal biases and the effect that those biases might have on data collection and interpretation. This examination process is called *epoche*, which is a Greek word meaning “to refrain from judgment” (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). Through *epoche*, the researcher must temporarily set aside, or *bracket*, any assumptions or prejudices related to the experience. As part of *epoche*, the researcher had to remind herself throughout the interview process that her role was no longer that of a teacher, but rather that of a researcher. This “switching of roles” was difficult for the researcher; that said, she feels that the *epoche* process allowed her to use the interview to gather information and not to teach.

In addition to *epoche*, the researcher used other strategies prevalent in phenomenological research including *reduction* and *horizontalization*. *Reduction* is the

process whereby the researcher continually returns to the essence of the experience to deduce the intrinsic meaning (Merriam, 2009). *Horizontilization* is a method in which all data are examined and given equal weight, so that every perception is awarded equal value. Eventually, as the data are read and reread, themes or clusters begin to emerge, leading to consolidation, reduction and interpretation (Merriam, 2009, p. 176). This complex process is basically about “making meaning,” with the ultimate goal being to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009).

The researcher began the process of analyzing the data with the reading and rereading of almost 200 pages of transcribed interviews. Guided strategically by the processes of *reduction* and *horizontilization*, the researcher then coded the data into categories, selected specific phrases from the text, and began to flesh out a conceptual framework. In order to manage the large amount of data produced by this study, the researcher used colored pens for coding to differentiate emerging themes. She also wrote notes pertaining to specific categories in the margin and highlighted phrases within the texts. The researcher was then able to create broader themes which she felt summarized the findings of the study.

It is important to note that in qualitative research data collection and data analysis work together, in that initial data analysis guides future research (Jacelon & O’Dell, 2005). Therefore, the researcher transcribed the first series of interviews prior to the second round of interviews so that issues could be clarified. The same procedure was repeated for the third round of interviews. At the conclusion of the third set of interviews, the researcher felt that data saturation had been reached since no new themes were emerging.

The same process was used to code and categorize the participants’ journals, the

field notes, and the naturalistic observations. In order to organize and compare all of the data, the researcher used the constant-comparative analysis method. In this process, the researcher compares all sources of data in an effort to uncover inconsistencies or to discover affirmations so that interpretations are accurate (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

The analysis of data revealed four dominant themes which included the following:

1) Managing children's behavior, 2) Parenting Style – Family of Origin and Family of Procreation, 3) Reflections, and 4) Stress.

This study was designed to identify and compare the parenting styles of court-ordered participants after parent education. The methodology was used to answer the research questions; the answers to those questions may have implications for theory development and practice in parent education and adult education, specifically related to mandatory learning in adulthood.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How has parent/child communication/support style changed after parent education?
2. How has the structuring of household policy (e.g. – family meetings; monitoring) changed after parent education?
3. How has the consistency of discipline and the discipline techniques used by participants changed after parent education?
4. How has parenting style changed after parent education for participants who were court-ordered to attend a six-week parenting class? What role did a disorienting dilemma and critical reflection play in the process?

In order to answer these questions a basic qualitative design was used in this study and the findings are reported in this chapter. The methods of inquiry for this phenomenological approach were semi-structured interviews, participant journals, field notes, and naturalistic observations. The researcher used these various sources of data to determine if participation in a six-week court-ordered parent education program encouraged a transformation in parenting style.

Findings

The research participants

With the exception of one parent, the eleven participants were all court-ordered to attend parent education classes and were referred to the researcher by case workers at the Jones County, MS DHS. Originally there were thirteen parents enrolled in the class,

but two dropped out before the completion of the six-week series. The class was demographically diverse, consisting of a mix of gender, race, age, and number and age of children. In an effort to protect their identity, the researcher assigned pseudonyms to the following descriptions and attempted to exclude any information that would make the participants recognizable.

Barbara is an engaged, Caucasian female who is in her early 20s and who had just given birth to her first child eight weeks prior to the parent education class. At the time of her baby's delivery, it was discovered that she had marijuana in her system and she was consequently referred to DHS. She and the baby live with her fiancé, who is the baby's father. At the time of the final interview, Barbara's case had been closed and she and her fiancé were expecting to be married soon.

Tom is a 26-year-old Caucasian male who is engaged to Barbara. He was referred to parent education classes, along with Barbara, because they are a cohabiting couple and he is the baby's father. At the time of the final interview, their case had been closed.

Betty is a single African American female who is thirty-nine years old and the mother of three children who are eighteen, sixteen, and thirteen. She was referred to the class because DHS had placed her sixteen-year-old son into a mental health care facility. Her eighteen-year-old son is in a job training program and her thirteen-year-old daughter lives with relatives. At the time of the final interview, Betty's son had been discharged from the mental health care facility and had been placed in a foster home.

Beverly is a thirty-year-old divorced Caucasian female who is the mother of three children who are fifteen, ten, and seven. She was referred to DHS when her fifteen-year-old daughter, who had existing truancy problems, ran away from home with

an older man. Once she was located, the daughter was placed into a foster home. By the time the class ended, she had been returned home and now lives with her mother and her two younger siblings.

Nancy is a divorced Caucasian female who is in her mid-30s and is the mother of three children who are nineteen, seventeen, and seven. She is Beverly's sister and accompanied her to class. After the first class session, she asked if she could participate. Although Nancy was not court-ordered to attend, the researcher thought it might add an interesting dynamic to the study to include her. Nancy was having severe communication problems with her teenagers, both of whom were living elsewhere. Communication was such an issue that she and the seventeen-year-old daughter were no longer on speaking terms. By the time of the final interview, Nancy and her daughter had reconciled.

Ellen is a single African American female who is thirty-five years old and the mother of four children who are nineteen, fourteen, nine and seven. At the time of her referral to DHS, her children were removed from her home. A family member made accusations that Ellen's live-in boyfriend, who was the father of her two youngest children, had molested the fourteen-year-old child. Once he was out of the home, all four children were returned to their mother.

Evelyn is a single African American female who is in her early 30s. She is the mother of three children who are twelve, eleven, and six. She was referred to DHS when her youngest child was removed from her custody because she had no place to live. The child was placed in the custody of relatives. The oldest child has been permanently placed with another family member and the eleven-year-old is living in a mental health

care facility. At the time of the final interview, Evelyn had found a home and was working with an attorney to regain custody of her daughter.

Frank is a single African American male who is in his late 30s. He is the father of five children who are sixteen, thirteen, twelve, eleven, and ten. Frank was referred to DHS when his oldest son, who lived with him, was temporarily removed from his custody. In a court hearing with the child's mother, the judge discovered that Frank lived with his girlfriend and that he was a long-haul trucker, an occupation which frequently required him to be away from home at night. Since he was living with a woman to whom he wasn't married, the judge removed the child from Frank's custody and placed him in a foster home. Frank's other children live with their mothers. By the time of the final interview, Frank had moved in with his mother and his son was returned to his custody.

Mary is a twenty-five-year-old Caucasian female who is single and the mother of one child, a five-year-old son. Mary's neighbor called law enforcement officers when she saw Mary's son playing by the street. Mary said that she was nearby monitoring her son and was therefore outraged when a police officer showed up at her house. Mary became involved in a verbal dispute with the officer and was arrested for disorderly conduct. A referral was made to DHS because of the arrest. By the time of the final interview, Mary's case was closed and her son was once again in her custody.

Natalie is a thirty-year-old married Caucasian female who is the mother of three living children who are ten, nine, and five. Natalie's oldest child is deceased. She was referred to DHS because of drug use. Her children had been placed with her parents and were still there at the time the class ended.

Susan is a thirty-one-year-old Caucasian female who is the mother of four children who are thirteen, twelve, nine, and eight. Someone reported her to DHS because of the living conditions in her home. Her children were removed from her custody because of neglect and were placed in the custody of a family friend. At the time of the final interview, the children remained in the custody of her friend.

Major Themes Related To the Research Questions

After extensive data collection and analysis, the researcher identified the following four major themes that she thought reflected the findings from this research: 1) Managing children's behavior, 2) Parenting style – Family of Origin and Family of Procreation, 3) Reflections, and 4) Stress. As the researcher read and re-read the data, certain topics emerged that seemed relevant to most of the participants and also appeared to be connected to their involvement with DHS. In the before-training interview, most of the participants discussed ongoing problems with their children's behavior. They identified issues which included: 1) Lack of parental skills; 2) Lack of parental control; 3) Lack of knowledge related to child and adolescent development; 4) Poor communication; and 5) Ineffective discipline.

As an example, Mary made the following comments in her before-training interview, "I became a mother at a young age so I didn't know what to expect so I may not be the best mother. I may not know everything that I should or shouldn't do. I kind of learn as I go, but I don't know with certain situations – I guess I could learn to handle them because sometimes I don't know what to do." In a reference to her teenage daughter, Beverly said, "She does run over me. I'd like to learn to be more, I don't know, to stand up for myself." Nancy also found her teenage daughters to be a challenge and she remarked, "Well instead of fighting with em, I just let em go. I don't argue with

em or um, most of the time, it's just mean stuff like that so I just pretty much ignore em.”

Understandably these parenting issues seemed to lead to feelings of frustration and contributed to high stress levels. During the before-training interview, eight of the nine female participants reported moderate to high levels of stress. Nancy even stated, “I stay stressed.” These high stress levels adversely affected their quality of life and their parenting.

In addition to issues related to stress, the researcher discovered numerous issues related to parenting style. Six of the eleven participants described their parents as authoritarian while two of the participants were raised in a permissive home. One participant described her parents as “inconsistent,” and two classified their parents as “authoritative.” Those raised by authoritarian parents used words like “harsh,” “mean,” “controlling,” and “critical.” Conversely, those raised in permissive homes described their childhood as “laid back” and their parents as “lenient” and “pushovers.” The parenting style of their Family of Origin appears to have strongly influenced the participants, leading some of them to replicate their parents’ style and others to reject it by parenting their children in the extreme opposite of their parents. The researcher contends that the parenting styles that the participants had adopted in their Family of Procreation impacted the parental issues that they identified as being problematic

Because self-reflection was a goal of this class, the researcher encouraged the participants to engage in the process through their journal postings and through the class discussions. It was not surprising then that *Reflections* emerged as a major theme of this research. The researcher discovered that the self-reflection process was a new endeavor for several of the participants, and one that appeared to be critical in the transformative

learning process. *Reflections* and the three other major themes of this research are discussed at length in the section below.

Managing children's behavior – As is often the case in parent education, behavior management was a primary focus in the training program used in this research. The researcher has long included discussions of communication, self-esteem, monitoring and discipline in her parent education classes. These domains are often representative of a parent's parenting style, particularly as it relates to respondingness and demandingness. Because the transformation of parenting style was at the heart of this research, it was imperative that these topics be included in the class itinerary. Interview questions, along with the journal protocol, were designed to elicit responses related to these topics. Almost all of the participants reported changes in communication with their children. In fact, the only two participants who did not report favorable changes in communication were Barbara and Tom, who are the parents of an eight-week-old infant. Having no past communication issues to use as a reference, they spoke instead of their hopes for a communication style that is effective and grounded in love and trust. Tom said, "To begin with, I'll just let him know that he can come to me with anything." Barbara echoed Tom's sentiments when she was asked to describe her anticipated future communication style with her son. She said, "I think it will be good, just because I'm gonna be one of those open moms to where if he tells me something he can trust me." Barbara restated the desire for good communication in her journal posting when asked how she hoped that her son would describe her, "that he could come to me about anything whether it's good or bad."

Although it was encouraging to the researcher that Barbara and Tom seem to understand the importance of good communication between parent and child, their

comments are not as relevant to this research as those made by the parents who had actually experienced a positive change in their communication. Nine of the eleven participants expressed that they had learned and were actually using techniques for better communication like active listening, sitting down at the child's eye level, taking the time to talk to each child every day, and using "I messages." Natalie said, "I learned so much, you know just how to even talk to your kids, the little things, like you said the little things make big differences, and it really does, even the way you speak and the way you use your voice." She went on to say that she had "tried getting on his eye level and instead of yelling and screaming, I did the little whispering and it got his attention better than me raising my voice." Natalie also tried the "I message" technique. She explained that she used the technique over the week-end to explain to her son why he could not go to the neighbor's house, and she reported that she was pleased that it had worked. Beverly was another parent who experienced improved communication because of "I messages" along with active listening. She shared these comments in the final interview, "like the 'I's' you know I've tried to do that more. Before I would just demand that they do something and I listen to 'em more."

Several of the parents commented that the communication techniques that they learned in class had led to a deeper understanding of their children and their needs and ultimately improved their relationship. In her final interview, Ellen said, "They come talk to me about this and that. I used to be like whatever you know. I don't be wanting to hear it, but now since I took the parenting class, I be open-minded about what they done said, and they come talk to me, they be like Mama. I be like okay let's sit down and we talk about it. We sit down and we talk about it." She went on to say, "Sit there and talk

to them and actually listen to what they have to say. You can understand ‘em more better.”

When asked what she thought was the most important thing that she had learned about parenting Mary commented, “I think that communication is one of the biggest things cause like now “Kevin,” you know he’ll talk to me about everything. Like he may think it’s the end of the world with his little problems. It’s so cute that he’ll talk to me about it now and I hope that continues.”

In her final interview with the researcher, Nancy reported that she and her seventeen-year-old daughter had reconciled. In the past when she and her daughter were angry with each other, they simply stopped talking. This “silent treatment” would go on for days or even weeks. Nancy credited the communication techniques that she learned in class with the reconciliation; she said, “me and her were able to be there all night by ourselves and we actually talked about everything and uh, we’re just getting along so much better. We’ve been getting along good ever since.”

As part of the inquiry into a transformation of communication style, the researcher was interested in seeing if parents had changed the way that they offered support or encouragement to their children. In the parent education class, this topic was embedded in the discussion on self-esteem building. The researcher emphasized that effective communication with children, especially active listening, is itself a self-esteem builder. Therefore, the domains of effective communication and support/encouragement were intertwined. In fact, when Beverly was asked how she had approached self-esteem building with her children after the class, she responded, “Like the listening, I sit down more with them and you know, like my ten-year-old really likes playing football so we played football, just little things.”

The participants did, however, have some specific things to say about self-esteem. In the initial interview, some of the participants did not know how to define self-esteem and several of them indicated that they had never thought about the process of building it in their children. Natalie commented, "I never thought about it honestly. It's not that I didn't love my children. I just never thought of it being an issue. You know I tell 'em I love 'em. They know I love 'em. I just never thought nothing further about it." She commented that because of the class she was approaching interactions with her children differently. She cited an example where she encouraged her son who was trying to learn how to throw a football. Natalie said that she told him, "even if you didn't get it right this time, keep trying and eventually you will." In summing up this example, she said, "that's the little things that I never really did before, you know."

Ellen said that she was encouraging her children more than she did before the class. She cited an example where her fourteen-year-old daughter was having difficulty with her homework. Ellen worked with her until the child understood the concept and then told her, "Y'all are smart cookies. Can't nobody ever tell y'all, y'all ain't smart cookies. We proud of you. We're always proud of you."

Susan stated that the topic of self-esteem had the most significant effect on her parenting. She wrote the following in her journal: "I have learned that you gotta be patience with your children at all times and tell them that you love them every day." Frank said that because of the class he was taking opportunities to connect with his daughter, who he described as a "loner," by showing an interest in one of her favorite pastimes, listening to music. He said, "I walk the yard with her and I asked her what she listening to and how she liked it, why do she like that particular artist and you know just talking to her like that you know."

When asked how he built self-esteem in his children, Frank responded, “Talk about how good we look. I know it’s a sin, but I feel good about me. I tell ‘em all the time, I’m in love with me some me. I am.” Frank’s self-confidence was not shared by all the participants. Three of the parents shared with the researcher that the class had actually been a self-esteem booster for them.

In her initial interview, Ellen had commented that “self-esteem is like keeping yourself lifted up no matter what obstacle may be thrown in your way, what somebody may say about you or whatever, just keep on smiling, and I’m saying this, but I should be more following it.” During her final interview, Ellen said that the class had helped her feel better about herself. When she was asked about the most important lesson that she had learned about herself, she responded, “the self-esteem that I have for myself. Now I have more self-esteem for myself than I had before.”

Natalie had a similar comment to the same question that was asked of Ellen. She stated, “you may not even know this but you, you know I have bad self-esteem and it kind of, you taught me that my self-esteem can reflect on how my children feel about themselves and how even in turn, their behavior can be, the self-esteem, I don’t have any, but I’m trying.” Betty was another participant who commented on her own self-esteem when she said that the class “helped her self-esteem.”

The researcher was also interested in examining the process of establishing household policy. Within this domain, the researcher specifically explored issues like whether or not parents let children do things for themselves, whether or not children were allowed to make decisions, whether or not explanations were given when a child’s was told no, and how they went about connecting as a family.

In the first session of the parenting series, the researcher asked the participants if they were in a situation where an infant was struggling to reach a toy that was within reach whether they would hand the toy to the infant or allow the child to make the struggle to reach it on its own. The researcher first heard this question posed in a master's level child development class. The professor said that the baby should be allowed to struggle to the desired objective in order to begin the process of building self-confidence and the accompanying sense of competency. Since that time, the researcher has used that question as one of the opening questions in her parent education class. Over the years, very few parents have said that they would allow the baby to struggle.

In this class, Barbara, the twenty-one-year-old mother of an infant, was the only one who said that she would allow her baby to get the toy himself. She seemed to fully understand the concept behind this scenario and made frequent comments throughout the class. The researcher frequently referred back to this question as the class discussion would turn to the importance of allowing children to learn to do things for themselves. Several of the participants expressed the difficulty they experienced in standing back and watching the slow process of letting their children do something for themselves when it was so much easier and faster for them to do it for their children. Natalie commented during one of the class discussions, "I never thought of self-esteem being tied to doing things for kids that they could do for themselves."

Nine of the eleven parents, however, were making changes in this area. Ellen cited the example of her fourteen-year-old learning to cook. When she asked her daughter if she needed help, she said, "No, Mama. I got it by myself." Her mother replied, "Well, I'm gonna step back and let you handle it yourself, but if you need me, I'm here."

In her final interview, Mary discussed a situation where another young mother was talking about her son. Mary said, “Her little boy, you know his dad does everything for him. He’s six and he can’t even dress himself, because he thinks he’s helping him. I used to do that with “Kevin,” but now “Kevin” picks his own clothes out, you know I may have to help him sometimes, but you know I’m letting him do stuff on his own, know that he can. You know he’s growing up and I don’t want him to think that I don’t think that he can do anything on his own.”

Building independence in children not only includes encouraging them to do things for themselves, but also allowing them to make age-appropriate decisions. Mary’s story of “Kevin” being permitted to select his own clothing is an example of this process. Some of the parents had expanded the individual decision-making process to include family discussions or family meetings. Susan said that she considered family meetings to be important, elaborating that they “sit down at like a table or in the living room and set and talk like a family.” She stated that she felt that even the youngest child should be allowed to contribute to the conversation and should be allowed to make some of their own decisions; however, she clarified that they should be encouraged to “make some of ‘em, not most of ‘em.” Some participants included their children when decisions were made about family activities. For example, Ellen stated that she and her children loved family movie night and decided as a family what movie they would see.

The majority of the parents seemed to be making progress in building independence in their children. One of the journal questions asked them to discuss a time when they wanted to intervene with their children, but stood back and let them do it themselves. The participants were helping their children establish independence in a variety of settings including the following: tying shoes, cooking, and washing their own

clothes. Beverly cited the example of her seven-year-old learning to read and allowing him the time to sound out the words himself until “he got it.” Frank’s example concerned his daughter’s hair. He explained, “My daughter is going natural with her hair and I saw her picking it out. I was going to do it, but she needs to know how to comb an afro herself.”

In another component of household policy, all of the participants stated that they explained to their children why they were not allowed to do something. In other words, there was an explanation behind the word “no.” Six of the participants explained that they had been providing an explanation to their children prior to the class. Tom and Barbara, whose only child is an infant, had no experience with having to say “no,” but plan to offer explanations when their child is older. Barbara stated that she wants her son to understand her reasoning so that he won’t think that she’s saying “no” just to be mean. Natalie stated that prior to the class, she did not offer an explanation when telling her children “no.” She explained, “I said no and that’s because I said so. I was one of them moms, but you told us that they do need explanations and that’s another thing that I have been doing.”

The participants shared various stories that involved their process of connecting as a family. Ellen’s family loves family movie night when, “all of us get in there and we sit right there and watch, eat the popcorn and watch the movies.” Nancy and Mary enjoyed the bonding time that they experienced when they sat down with their children after school and helped with homework. Mary was enjoying her son’s new-found interest in reading. She explained, “he wants stories read to him all the time now, used to be every once in a while, but now for some reason he wants, can you read a book to me?”

Sometimes family connections resulted simply from small everyday occurrences rather than planned family times. Frank mentioned a time when his daughter came up to him and hugged him tightly. After enjoying it for a moment, it occurred to him that she might want something. She explained that she wanted to borrow his ear phones. He laughed and said, "My ear phones, that's why I'm getting all this attention? Go get my ear phones and let me go. Times like that you know I feel really connected to them." In her final interview, Beverly mentioned a recent time when her fifteen-year-old and her ten-year-old were actually giggling and getting along in the back seat of the car. According to their mother, this little moment was rare with these two. Although the participants cited very different examples of their process of connection, the majority of them acknowledged that the communication techniques learned in class had positively affected that connection.

Discipline was one of the focal points of the parent education class and a topic that was discussed at length by the participants. Nine of the eleven reported a change in their discipline practices after the parent education program. The researcher's primary objective related to discipline is to encourage participants to use effective, positive discipline techniques and to discourage the use of physical punishment. The class itinerary is planned so that participants have the opportunity to learn and use the other skills in behavioral management as a preventative measure so that discipline is actually needed less often. On those occasions, when the child does need to be disciplined, parents are equipped with positive techniques that actually teach rather than punish.

Over the years of teaching parent education classes, the researcher has observed a resistance to the elimination of physical punishment; this class was no different. Tom, for example, said that even though his only child was an infant who was currently in no

need of discipline, that he did plan to raise him as he had been raised. In his second interview he said, “I mean I was raised, we got spankings, and we got whoopings. If it calls for that I do plan on doing that so I was raised by the Bible you know ‘spare the rod and spoil the child’ so I don’t want him out of hand or nothing like that.” However, Barbara, Tom’s fiancée, expressed some hesitation about physical punishment when she commented, “I don’t know about the whole spanking thing.” In the final interview, the researcher asked Tom if he had talked to Barbara about discipline and he said that they had. He was no longer so adamant about physical punishment and indicated that they would use logical consequences as a part of their discipline plan.

By the time of the after-training interview, several of the participants no longer used spankings as a form of discipline. Ellen had a unique discipline plan which she called the “strike three” rule. The children were told what they had done wrong the first time, which was followed by a warning. In the initial interview, when the researcher asked her what happened next, she said that she either removed privileges or spanked them. By the final interview, she had stopped spanking them and was removing privileges or using logical consequences. Mary had also stopped spanking by the second interview. She explained, “I used to spank “Kevin,” but it didn’t work. It was over in five minutes and he forgot all about it. I’ve learned that I can take stuff away from him now and talk to him and make him understand why I’m doing what I’m doing.”

By the second interview, nine of the participants were using logical consequences as their discipline of choice. This technique was discussed in class and involves the child making a choice in a particular situation which typically either leads to a consequence or a reward. Nancy said that she liked the choices “that you were talking about because I’m bad about saying turn the TV off if it’s too loud. Now I give

him the choice of either turning it down or turning it off.” When asked about discipline techniques that she was using since the class, Beverly said that she liked “giving ‘em choices, the option, I think that works better.” Frank was willing to try the logical consequences, but only with his daughters. In an apparent reference to physical punishment, Frank said, “I’ll touch the boys, but I ain’t fixin to touch my little girls. The choices would probably work well with them.”

As part of her new discipline strategy, Susan said in her final interview that she would “sit down and talk to ‘em about what they’ve done bad, like if they hit their brothers or if they hit their sister, you got to sit down and talk to ‘em and tell ‘em you can’t do that.” When the researcher asked her what she would have done before the class, she replied, “I would have got on to ‘em, send ‘em to their room and tell ‘em don’t come out until you learnt what you done.”

The researcher believes that the findings from the first theme, *managing children’s behavior*, support the fact that the parent education class fostered transformative learning in nine of the eleven participants. Although the researcher believes that the most profound change occurred in the area of communication/support style, she believes that there is sufficient evidence to support the existence of transformative learning in some participants in the other two domains, household policy and discipline techniques. The components of behavioral management are all connected in that one component both affects and is affected by all other components. It seems reasonable to assume then that if, communication for example is transformed or changed, all other components are to some extent changed as well. When they are examined individually, each component is a characteristic of parenting style. Therefore a

change in any of the components could provide supporting evidence of a transformed parenting style.

Parenting style-Family of Origin and Family of Procreation- Throughout the parent education class, the researcher discussed parenting style and its relation to child outcome. Extensive class discussions focused on the specific attributes which characterize each parenting style and which attributes are associated with child outcome of each style. Each of the behavioral management components, including communication and discipline, were deliberated in relation to the differing parenting styles. In essence, parenting style was the focus of each class discussion. The researcher sought to ensure that the participants had a thorough understanding of parenting style so that they could accurately identify their own style.

Eight of the participants identified themselves as being permissive. After listening to the descriptions of their parenting, the researcher would agree with that assessment. That determination also makes sense in light of their DHS referrals. When permissiveness becomes extreme it can manifest as neglect and that is the underlying cause of several of their DHS referrals.

In describing their permissive parenting, they admitted that they did not follow through on discipline and that their children, who were often times out of control, “ran over them.” Ellen who was learning to be more authoritative said in her second interview, “I was permissive. I let ‘em, like they say, I let ‘em get away with murder.” Ellen stated that she was “learning to stand behind my words because if I don’t, they’ll run all over me.”

Betty experienced similar problems with her sixteen-year-old son. In her initial interview she said, “I always give in to him.” In her frustration, she usually wound up

yelling at him which she admitted “did no good.” By the final interview, she was learning to assertively, yet calmly talk to her son. She related an incident where she wanted her son to clean his room, “I talked to him and he listen, and then he was going out the room and I looked at it and the room was clean.” The researcher had an opportunity to observe Betty and her son at the conclusion of the class. She appeared to be using the authoritative techniques that were discussed in class. Betty, who is very soft-spoken, seemed to have found her voice, literally and figuratively. She was polite, yet firm with her son and he reciprocated by acting in a manner that the researcher would describe as respectful.

Beverly, whose daughter had been truant from school and was a runaway, said in describing her parenting style that she had “let ‘em run all over me.” By the final interview when asked how her idea of parenting had changed since the class, she said, “maybe not so much to be their best friend as to be their Mama first.” Nancy parented her children in a style that was very similar to her sister Beverly’s style. She admitted in her final interview that “I was letting them run over me,” but she said that the class had helped her to be more “in the middle” (or authoritative).

In her final interview, Mary said that her parenting style had changed after the class and that she was learning to be more authoritative. She explained, “after taking the class, looking back I think I was more on the laid back. I kind of let him get away with everything, but now I think I’ve moved more towards the strict, but not too strict, maybe more towards the middle.” The researcher had the opportunity to observe Mary with her child and would concur that she had become more authoritative. Although they worked together in choosing and executing their task, it was clear that she was the one with the most power.

Frank could not actually pinpoint one particular style that described his parenting, noting that “I’m all up and down that thing” (the continuum of parenting style). However, he did express that his parenting style had changed when he said, “Actually, it done changed. My parenting style have changed because I’m not so stressed, I’m more patient. I’m more willing to listen to you before I even say anything. So I’m not too quick to just jump off and say, no, no. I listen better.” Natalie, who was inconsistent with her discipline and had trouble following through with consequences, has hopes of becoming more authoritative. She explained, “I have expectations of becoming more democratic. My nature is to be permissive. I have a soft spot for my children and they know how to get to that soft spot in my heart, but I am learning how to move towards the middle.”

During the final interview the researcher asked the participants if their children would say that they had changed since the parenting class. Nine of the eleven participants indicated that their children had noticed a change in them. Beverly, Nancy, and Betty reported that their children had noticed their increased assertiveness. Betty responded, “they beginning to learn that when I say something I means it. They are not in charge; I am.”

Six of the eleven participants reported that their children found them to be more fun now. Ellen stated that her children said, “Mama you more fun now. They say you used to walk around here all grouchy and sad and now you’re more fun.” Natalie reported that her son had told his aunt, “My Mama, I just love how she is now.” Frank said that his children had noticed that he was “changing, yeah, changing. They would say now, like I said my little girl she talks to me a whole lot more than what she did.” When the researcher asked Mary if her child would say that she had changed since the

class she responded, “I would hope so, I mean I try to be more into what he’s doing, like in school. You know before, I’d just be like well, how’s your day, but now I just want to know everything.”

These descriptions describe the parenting styles of the participants exhibited in their Family of Procreation. Parenting style and child outcome is closely correlated; therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that the parenting styles of the participants were influenced by the parenting styles of their parents. It seems appropriate then to discuss the findings related to the parenting styles of the participants’ Family of Origin (FOO).

Although some of the participants described their parents as authoritative, there were others who said that their parents were at the extremes, some with very strict parents and others with very permissive parents. Ellen, who was raised by her mother and grandmother, described them as “very strict.” In a class discussion she said, “Mama wouldn’t let me do anything until I was about fifteen, then I got pregnant. I spent two stints in juvi. I don’t want to be like my Mama.” In an effort to be different from her mother, Ellen had adopted a permissive style of parenting with her children. Betty had a similar story. In her journal she wrote, “I would say my father was authoritarian because he never let us girls have boyfriends. Well not me. Could not go nowhere. I thought he was just mean as hell.” In a later posting she wrote, “I never raise my kids like my parents because my father was so strict and mean with it. I hated him growing up as a child.” So in an effort to not raise her kids like her father, she, too, became permissive.

Although Ellen and Betty made an effort to use a totally different style of parenting from their FOO, Beverly and Nancy seemed to have adopted the same style that their parents used with them. Beverly described her parents as lenient. When the researcher asked her for an example, she said, “I have a cousin that I’m really close with.

We were, I was ten and she was eleven, well say like twelve or thirteen and they would let us use the car and we could go anywhere.” After clarifying that they were actually allowed to drive at that age, the researcher asked if she would let her children do the same thing and she responded, “no.” Although perhaps not as lenient as their parents, Beverly and Nancy who were raised in the same household had both adopted a permissive style with their own children.

During a class discussion, Natalie said that she “was raised with much inconsistency” and therefore has “trouble being consistent with my own children.” Mary said that she was raised in an authoritative home; however, she felt that she did not have any one to talk to and thus turned to her journal to express her thoughts and feelings. She made the following entry in her journal, “The one thing that I would never do that my mother did is not tell “Kevin” how much I love him. Growing up I never heard “I love you.” So I make sure to tell him every day, many times that I love him.”

When the researcher asked Tom to describe his parents’ parenting style, he said, “My mother – controlling and I didn’t know my father.” Tom also made the following posting in his journal, “I grew up with only one parent, that being my mother and she was very strict, I think because she was playing the role of ‘dad’ too. Even though she was very strict she was always loving and still is. There were times though when she took punishment to the extreme and that is something that I as a parent won’t do.” In one of the class discussions, Tom said that he had planned to be more lenient than his mother, perhaps even permissive. He explained though that since he had the class his thoughts had changed, “Well to begin with, I thought that I was gonna be more lenient because I grew up, my mother was strict. She was a single mother and everything so I was always growing up, I was like I’m gonna let my kid do this and do that and I won’t

be like this, but sitting in the class, you give us some examples of how you can turn out if you're so permissive and everything so I think I went more from that to right in the middle you know."

The researcher believes that the meaning perspectives of the participants regarding parenting had been shaped by their FOO. These perspectives were long-lasting and had profound effects on their Family of Procreation. Ten of the eleven participants expressed that they had had a change in parenting style as a result of the parent education class. However, the researcher felt that there was sufficient evidence to support the fact that the parent education class fostered transformation in only nine of the participants. Further, the researcher believes that the extent of the transformation varied from participant to participant.

Barbara, whose only child was an infant, said that she had learned some things in the class, but had no change of parenting style because she "already planned to be a democratic parent." Although Evelyn claimed that her parenting style had changed, the researcher could not find sufficient evidence of that either through her three – four word answers in the interviews, her journal, or the observation with her child. In the participants who did experience a transformation of perspective in regards to parenting, the process began with a disorienting dilemma that for most featured DHS intervention.

Reflections – In an effort to determine if the participants had experienced a disorienting dilemma, the researcher asked them to describe in detail their experience with DHS, including their feelings and thought processes; these same questions were asked in all three interviews. They described their feelings as "sad," "upset," "nervous," "stressed" and "angry." Beverly, for example, expressed those angry, hurt feelings when she said in the initial interview, "I was really mad, that, well I was hurt and mad both. I

was hurt because I thought maybe I had failed her as Mama and you know that it was something that I did for her not to want to come home and then I was mad because she would put me through, wondering where she would be, if she was safe.”

Frank was also angry and described those feelings in the initial interview, “Ohhhh man, I mean I could have went on a war path you know what I’m saying. I was mad you know. I was mad!” Natalie was angry and expressed that in her initial interview, “I was really, really angry. I was mad.”

When Barbara was reported to DHS immediately following the birth of her son, she described her feelings, “I cried and cried my eyes out. I was so ashamed. I didn’t know what to do.” Those feelings of confusion were shared by Mary who said in her initial interview, “It scared me and I was upset because you know usually when DHS gets involved. I don’t know my first thought was they’re gonna take my son away from me and I didn’t want that to happen. It was an eye-opener. I was scared.” In her initial interview, Ellen was beginning to process her feelings about the man who was the father of her two youngest children and who had also been accused of molesting her fourteen-year-old daughter. She responded, “We had been together for twelve years and when I was, when my fourteen-year-old, she was a baby when me and him met, she wasn’t even walking yet so I mean it shook me up pretty bad.”

For most of the participants in this study their disorienting dilemma came in the form of DHS involvement. However, two of the participants had a different experience. Even though all the other participants described having negative, traumatic feelings, Betty’s description did not coincide with those of the other participants. Her feeling was one of relief after years of dealing with her son’s mental health issues. She described her involvement with DHS, “To me, it kind of helped me with the situation that I had to go

through with him.” The researcher believes that Betty’s disorienting dilemma had been building for years due to the frustration she experienced over the steady deterioration of her son’s mental health and behavior. By the time DHS got involved, the researcher believes that Betty was ready for an intervention and realized that her situation needed to change.

Nancy was the only participant who was not court-ordered to attend the parent education class; she asked to participate. The researcher believes that Nancy’s disorienting dilemma came in the form of an intervention, the class itself. After sitting through one session, Nancy realized that she needed and wanted to change the situation with her children. In the opinion of the researcher, Nancy through self-reflection, discussion, and action, experienced one of the deepest transformations of all the participants.

In an effort to foster transformative learning, the researcher provided opportunities for self-reflection through guided class discussions, journal postings, and individual interviews. When the researcher asked the participants to describe how much time they had spent thinking about the involvement with DHS and their specific situation, several of them said, “daily” or “every day.” Several of the participants specifically mentioned the journals and the class discussion as being an essential part of their thought process. Mary, who was often quiet in class, commented on how much she had enjoyed the journal. She commented, “I like to write. I like having the journal. I can express myself on paper better than I can in words. I’m not a good talker, but I like to write my thoughts down. I really like that part. I’ve always been able to write better because I’m a shy person. I like looking back and seeing what I thought then and what I think now.”

Tom also mentioned the journal as being part of his self-reflection process, “some stuff you know I learned about myself just thinking about stuff you know and how I want to be as a parent.” Barbara said she enjoyed keeping the journal because “I love writing.” Betty, who seemed to write in her journal every day, commented that she was “constantly writing in my journal.” Betty also said that she learned from the other class participants during the class discussions. Barbara stated that her favorite part of the class was “just hearing everybody’s opinions about everything.” Natalie felt that the discussion was an integral part of the learning process, “you can’t learn nothing unless you get into the conversation.”

In her final interview, it was evident that Mary had engaged in self-reflection and had ultimately changed her thought process and her behavior. She said, “there’ve been many nights where I just cried, thinking I should have spent more time with him and instead of, you know it was always easy cause I did live with my mom and it was easy for her to do stuff for “Kevin” instead of me, but now I take more time with him, try little things you know his homework and everything like that. I try to help him, instead of well, let Mam Maw and my little brother. That’s our time.”

Natalie also expressed a changed thought process in her final interview, “Cause you know at the time I wouldn’t have ever said this, but good things have come out of it. I don’t like how it happened, but good things have come out of it and you know so we learn from our mistakes.” Beverly who said that she had thought about her situation “everyday” indicated that her feelings had evolved when she made this comment about her daughter, “She just made a mistake, something we just have to learn from and move on.”

Barbara, who had marijuana in her system at the time of her son's birth, wrestled with her own feelings of guilt "cause I was the one that done it." In the final interview, it appeared that she had processed the situation and was prepared to move on, "I was scared at the time cause I love my son. I would die if anything happened to him. I wish I wouldn't have done it and I know to talk to people now instead of some, some friends telling me to do that to relieve stress and I know to talk to people now." Tom, Barbara's fiancé, had expressed that he felt "nervous and unsure" when DHS first got involved with them. Having processed his feelings and thoughts with Barbara, he said in his final interview, "I mean we've talked about it as a couple and we never want to experience this again, never."

In an effort to capture the full experience of the participants, the researcher asked them to share their initial and subsequent thoughts about the parent education class. Although some of the participants said that they "didn't mind" taking it and one even said that she "thought she would enjoy it," other participants had initial reactions that the researcher expected and understood. Barbara said in her initial interview that she was "good with taking the class," but that she was "just trying not to let people find out." By the time of her final interview she admitted that she had been "ashamed kinda to go into it because of what it was for and everything." Ellen had similar feelings and admitted in the initial interview that she "felt kind of embarrassed."

When asked about her initial reaction to the class, Natalie expressed an opinion that the researcher expected and had heard many times before. She responded, "Umm, honestly, it was that you couldn't teach me nothing that I didn't already know. I really thought that." Frank's reaction was similar to Natalie's. In his initial interview when asked about his thoughts when he was initially told he had to take parenting classes, he

said, “Well (laughing), I felt like it was a waste of my time cause like I say, I been a father for what, going on sixteen years.” The researcher detected some underlying animosity in Frank’s comments and asked him if he resented taking the class. He replied, “Yes, of course. It’s like an insult to me.”

Mary also had a common reaction, stating that she did not know what to expect. She said hesitantly in her initial interview, “Well I was okaaay with it, but I don’t know, it was just, when you say parenting classes I wasn’t really sure what to expect out of it, if somebody was going to tell me how to raise my kid or tell me what I should or shouldn’t do.”

By the time of the subsequent interviews, it appeared that most of those initial reactions had changed. Several of the participants expressed their appreciation for the class and stated that they not only enjoyed it, but also learned from it. Some even said that they would take it again. Barbara said, “I love it. I wish I could take it every week after this.” Frank, who appeared to have been so upfront about his initial negative reaction to the class, actually had a similar reaction, “I mean you know at first, I was like man this is a waste of my time, but you know, I have learned something. I feel like it was good, you know what I’m saying? I wouldn’t mind doing it again just because I might could learn something else that I didn’t know. I thought I knew it all, but you’re constantly learning. I learned a lot you know what I’m saying, being here.”

Natalie, who initially said that she did not think that the researcher could teach her anything, commented in her final interview, “I learned so much. I have learned more from this six-week class than I have learned from going to classes for nine months. I truly have.” Ellen, who was initially embarrassed about the class said in her final interview that she was no longer embarrassed because “I’m learning. I love the class.”

Mary who was initially not sure what to expect from the class, said, "I'm glad I had to take this class. I'm not glad of how I had to take it, but I'm glad I had it. Parenting class wasn't really anything I'd ever really heard of so I didn't understand it, I didn't know what to expect, but it was helpful. I liked it."

When asked what she would tell a friend about the class, Beverly said that she would "recommend that she come. I think it would do a lot of people good." Nancy also said that she would recommend the class to a friend. In her final interview, she also revealed her thoughts when Beverly first told her that she had to attend parenting classes. She commented, "I thought oh no. That's just not something that I would do. I even told her that and I thought well she needs me so I started thinking about it and decided to come with her, and then wound up taking the class myself. It really did help. It's worked out."

Based on comments and journal postings, the researcher believes that the participants gradually began to view the class from a positive perspective, seeing it not only as a "class," but also as a support group. It appears that the participants began to feel comfortable discussing issues with other parents. The camaraderie that was established through open discussion seemed to lead to a feeling of relief amongst some of the participants when they realized that other parents were dealing with similar frustrating issues. Thus, the class seemed to morph into a type of support system for the participants.

Almost all of the participants in this study were court-ordered to attend parent education classes; they came because it was required. Several of them admitted that their initial reason for attending was to get their children back. Some claimed to hope to learn something in the process. The researcher believes that there is sufficient evidence to

support the presence of a disorienting dilemma in all of the participants. Due to the presence of a disorienting dilemma and subsequent self-reflection and guided class discussion, the researcher believes that nine of the eleven participants experienced a transformation of parenting style.

Additional Findings – The researcher sought to answer four research questions in this study. The findings from this research have been discussed earlier in Chapter IV. The researcher discovered other findings that are likely connected to the research questions, but were not specifically identified in the questions. Those findings will be discussed in this section.

In addition to behavioral management techniques and parenting style, the researcher devoted one lesson to stress management. The researcher included this topic in her parent education class after becoming aware of the multiple stressors that her clients often experience. Within this class she identified several positive techniques for stress management and then discussed its relation to parenting. She challenged the participants to include one stress management technique during the next week and to be prepared to discuss their experience at the next class meeting.

Though important, stress management was not the focus of this class and therefore was discussed much less than other topics. However, it became evident to the researcher during both the second and final interviews that this topic was of paramount importance to the female participants in the class. The two male participants reported fairly low levels of stress in the initial interview and did not seem to have the level of interest of the female participants. Most of the female participants reported moderate to high levels of stress and appeared eager to learn and adopt techniques that would lower their stress.

In the final interview which was held three months after the parent education class ended, all nine of the female participants reported that they were still including stress management techniques in their daily routine. They also reported that their stress levels were lower than their initial reports. The participants reported the use of a variety of stress management techniques including deep breathing, walking, listening to music, writing in their journals, and taking bubble baths.

When Mary was asked how she was managing her stress, she stated, “I guess I knew about the breathing, but you know I’d heard about it, but I never even tried it. Umm and then just taking five minutes out and I have a journal that I write in at home.” Susan liked to “sit there and listen, turn your radio on, listen to some music and read a book.” Several of the participants had started walking, including Ellen who worked a night shift. She used her breaks at work to walk, “fifteen minutes the first break and fifteen minutes the second break.” Most of the participants seemed to enjoy a few minutes of alone time. Barbara reported that she loved “having that thirty minute little myself time.” The most popular stress management technique, however, was taking a long bath. Nancy said that she had become accustomed to her “long baths” which she “loved.” Beverly said that she enjoyed “lighting a candle and having a long bath – perfection.”

Conclusion

The researcher sought to answer the four research questions listed at the beginning of Chapter IV. Data sources included participant interviews held prior to the class, immediately following the class and then three months after the conclusion of the class; participant journals; field notes; and naturalistic observations. After analyzing the

data, the researcher outlined her findings in this chapter. The researcher believes that there is sufficient evidence to support that eight of the eleven participants experienced a transformation in communication/support style and the administering of household policy. Additionally, the researcher believes that there is sufficient evidence to support that nine of the eleven participants experienced a transformation in discipline style and parenting style. The researcher also believes that there is sufficient evidence to support that all eleven participants experienced a disorienting dilemma which ultimately led to a transformation of parenting style in nine of the eleven participants. The findings from this research are further discussed in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Interpretation

In this study, the researcher set out to examine the effects of a court-ordered parent education class on the parenting styles of its participants, using transformative learning theory as the theoretical framework. The findings from this study were described in Chapter IV and will be further discussed in this chapter.

When the researcher conducted the data analysis, she discovered four major themes which were identified in Chapter IV and include the following: 1) Managing children's behavior, 2) Parenting Style – Family of Origin and Family of Procreation, 3) Reflections, and 4) Stress. The first theme, managing children's behavior, is an umbrella term that encompasses several topics associated with parenting that include communication, household policy and discipline. These issues are related to a parent's *responsiveness* and *demandingness*, the two critical elements that define parenting style. These topics were discussed at length in the parent education class. Through the use of several different techniques designed to foster transformative learning, the participants were able to engage in reflection and discourse on these subjects as well as on other issues.

This process of self-reflection brought to light the other prevalent themes, including parenting style – Family of Origin (FOO) and Family of Procreation (FOP), stress, and the reflection process itself. This study affirmed Mezirow's (2000) position that critical reflection is an essential component in the transformative process. Several of the participants mentioned that the class activities encouraged them to reflect and to ultimately think deeply about things that "they had never thought of before." Through

the class discussions and the journal postings, they were able to recognize relevant similarities between their FOO and their FOP. The researcher believes that this awareness resulted in a deeper understanding of their relationship with their parents and sparked a desire to establish optimal parenting practices with their own children.

The participants were also able to assess their level of stress and its connection to their parenting. This topic generated a tremendous amount of interest among the female participants who seemed to recognize not only that their stress level was affecting their parenting, but also that there was a need to learn and practice positive stress management techniques. The emergent themes from this research, which include FOO issues and stress management, are further discussed in this chapter in the section on implications to theory.

The researcher thinks that there is sufficient evidence to indicate that most of the participants experienced transformative learning in their behavioral management techniques and consequently experienced a transformed parenting style, which was fostered through critical reflection and discourse. The process by which that transformative learning took place within the context of a court-ordered parent education class is discussed below.

The researcher contends that this study offers substantial evidence to support Auerbach's (1968) first assumption about parent education that "parents can learn" (pp. 23-28). That assumption is upheld because the majority of the parents in this study did learn from the parent education class. Auerbach (1968) also made the assumptions that "parents want to learn" and that "parents learn best when they are interested in what they are learning" (pp. 23-28). One might conclude that the intrinsic motivation behind these assumptions is characteristic of parents who are in a voluntary learning environment.

The participants in this study did not attend the parent education class voluntarily; rather, they were court-ordered to attend. Therefore, it would seem that Auerbach's assumptions might be problematic for those attending mandated parent education classes. Yet, the results from this study indicate that the participants *did* learn despite the fact that initially they did not "want to learn" nor were they "interested in learning" (Auerbach, 1968, pp. 23-28). They were in the class simply because it was a requirement of the courts and was linked to the custody of their children. Some of the participants admitted that they had reluctantly agreed to attend the class simply to "get their children back." Nevertheless, despite their initial lack of enthusiasm and their questionable motivation, the researcher believes that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that nine of the eleven participants experienced significant learning, so significant in fact that it might be called transformative.

Just as Auerbach (1968) thought that parents learn best when they want to learn and when they are interested, Knowles (1970) believed that adults learn best when they are intrinsically motivated. Voluntary learning has long been a tenet of adult education with many experts believing that this component is absolutely fundamental to the discipline (Knowles, 1990; Rachal, 2002). However, there are those who suggest that the proliferation of mandated trainings and continuing education requirements might be used as an argument against Knowles's (1990) assumption about intrinsic motivation (Merriam et al., 2007). The findings from this study support the latter position. With little if any interest in the parent education class and with no real desire to learn, the participants in this study *did* learn. Based on the findings from this study, the researcher believes that adults can learn, even in a mandatory setting. However, the researcher also contends that paramount to the success of any type of adult education, whether voluntary

or mandated, is the establishment and implementation of an environment based on adult learning principles. The researcher also believes that the presence of a powerful incentive, such as regaining the custody of one's children or maintaining employment, is necessary for learning to take place in a mandated setting.

Following the lead of other investigators (Keeton et al., 2002; Marienau & Segal, 2006; Pierce, 1986), the researcher sought to create an environment in the parent education class based on adult learning principles. The researcher believes that in no other setting are these principles more important than in one that is court-ordered. The results from this study indicate that parents who are court-ordered come into the classroom with emotional baggage including a variety of emotions such as anger, uncertainty, confusion, resentment and distrust. They may be apathetic or even resistant to the very idea of learning. Therefore, if facilitators have any hope of establishing an environment where learning can actually take place, they must first create an atmosphere that is supportive, respectful, and one in which the experiences of each participant are acknowledged.

These adult learning principles guided the implementation of the parent education class in the current study. Based on comments of the participants, the researcher believes that the establishment of these principles helped to create an environment where learning could occur. Several of the participants made comments that were specifically correlated to adult learning principles. For example, Natalie said, "I really truly have learned so much. You get involved with us. You don't just talk. That's my problem with a lot of these programs. Some of the places, they'll just preach to you." Mary concurred, "this class has been really helpful, me as stubborn as I am, I mean for me to like it, and you're a great teacher, too. I tell everybody I really love her

because you don't put anybody down and tell 'em what they're doing wrong. You just teach." The researcher believes that without the application of adult learning principles it is unlikely that transformative learning would have occurred in this court-ordered setting.

Similar to the findings reported from First and Way (1995) and Shivers (2008), the results from this study suggest that the learning that occurred within the class was transformative in that meaning perspectives had either changed or were in the process of changing for several of the participants. Furthermore, this research indicates that the outcome of parent education can include more than just the acquisition of new skills. It may help parents to be more self-aware, to critically reflect on their role as parents and ultimately to change their thinking on what it actually means to be a parent.

In the final interview, the researcher asked the participants to discuss the most important lesson that they had learned about themselves. Several of them mentioned an awareness of their own self-esteem and the effect that it had on their children. One participant mentioned that she realized that she had been a "door mat" for her kids; another said that she had recognized that her communication with her children suffered because as she said, "I'm not a good listener." The researcher contends that the newly-achieved self-awareness of the participants was manifested in a change or transformation in perspective and attitude. This finding corresponds to Pierce's (1986) study on the important role of the facilitator in promoting self-awareness and Mezirow's (2000) belief that mindful transformations are based on self-awareness.

In an effort to foster self-awareness and transformative learning, the researcher used a variety of methods discussed in the adult education literature. Like other investigators (Cranton, 2000; Taylor, 2007), she used critical questioning, discussions,

and journaling. The researcher concludes that these techniques, which are designed to promote self-awareness, critical reflection, and discourse, were effective in this study. Several of the participants mentioned the journal and the class discussions as being important in their thought processes and reflections.

The activity of fostering transformative learning might raise some ethical questions, such as, “is it ethical to actually promote a change in perspective in adults?” Mezirow (1991) thought that adult development and transformative learning are intertwined and therefore, the promotion of this type of learning in adults poses no ethical dilemmas. In concurrence with Mezirow’s (1991) thinking, the researcher does not believe that there are any ethical dilemmas in fostering transformative learning in court-ordered parents. Their beliefs, attitudes and practices have oftentimes resulted in neglect or abuse of their children and therefore, should be changed. However, in line with adult learning principles the fostering process should be done with sensitivity and respect. Like Tisdell et al. (2000), the researcher never asked the participants to engage in any activity that they considered too personal or too uncomfortable. The level of engagement was left up to the participants.

Mezirow (2000) proposed that transformative learning occurs in a ten-step process. Through data collection and data analysis, the researcher was able to evaluate the transformative process in the participants. The researcher believes that all of the participants experienced a disorienting dilemma, the first step in Mezirow’s process. These life crises take many forms, including serious illness, a death in the family, the “empty nest syndrome,” returning to college, etc. In this study, the disorienting dilemma for ten of the eleven participants was involvement with DHS and the potential loss of custody of their children. The class discussions, the journal entries, and the critical

questioning provide substantial evidence to support the belief that the participants experienced their involvement with DHS as a personal crisis or disorienting dilemma. The researcher believes that the class itself was the disorienting dilemma for the eleventh participant who realized that she was in a life crisis with her children. Just as Mezirow (2000) proposed, the disorienting dilemma was the catalyst for transformation in the participants in this study.

When the researcher asked the participants about their feelings and thought processes related to the disorienting dilemma, without exception they said that they felt “scared, angry, guilty, and/or ashamed.” Mezirow’s (2000) second step in the process of transformation is “self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame” which is followed by “a critical assessment of assumptions” (p. 22). The researcher believes that her role of facilitator included the fostering of self-awareness through critical reflection. The participants had the opportunity to engage in self-reflection through the class discussions, the journal postings, and the critical questioning. The researcher believes that there is sufficient evidence to support the presence of critical self-reflection and a newly-acquired self-awareness in ten of the eleven participants.

Evelyn, the eleventh participant, was probably the most dependable member of the class. She never missed a session and was never tardy, and she called the researcher if she had any questions about the week’s assignment and always had those assignments ready for the next class. Although the researcher believes that Evelyn learned new skills in the class, she does not believe that her learning was transformative. The researcher also believes that Evelyn *did* experience a disorienting dilemma. However, Mezirow (1981) was emphatic that the experience of a disorienting dilemma alone is not enough to be transformative. The process is put into motion through critical reflection, which in

Mezirow's opinion requires a certain amount of cognitive development. Over the years, Mezirow has been criticized for his over emphasis on cognition. A number of researchers, including Sharan Merriam, have encouraged him to include intuitive "ways of knowing" into his theory. Even so, Merriam (2004) contends that a certain amount of cognitive development is necessary in order to engage in critical reflection. In keeping with this line of thinking, it is the researcher's opinion that Evelyn lacked the intelligence to engage in critical reflection which is a necessary step in the process of transformative learning.

The participants were given ample opportunities to engage in guided class discussions and critical questions were posed by the facilitator. The researcher believes that the participants achieved a high level of comfort with each other and appeared to freely discuss their successes and frustrations with parenting. According to comments in the class, this camaraderie led to a collective recognition that others have had similar experiences. This willingness to engage in rational discourse moved the participants to step four in the process, "recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22).

The researcher believes that throughout the six-week parenting series, the participants were successfully working through steps five through eight (Mezirow, 2000) which included the following: exploring new roles and actions, planning a course of action, acquiring knowledge and skills, and trying new roles. Each week the researcher examined a new topic related to parenting, engaged the class in a deliberation on that topic, provided multiple handouts and booklets related to the topic and then focused all homework (journal postings, reading assignments and specific interactions with their children) on the weekly topic.

The following week, the researcher collected the homework assignments and encouraged the participants to discuss their experiences during the past week related to the featured topic. Some of the participants still had custody of their children and therefore saw them every day. Most of the participants who did not have custody had regular and frequent visitation with their children. Midway through the class, all of the participants had regained visitation rights. Those who did not have custody during the six-weeks that the class was held were able to try out their new role and test their new skills during visitations with their children. The researcher believes that journal postings and class discussions indicated that most of the participants were successfully processing steps five through eight.

Barbara, the young mother of an infant, indicated that her parenting style had not changed during the class. She informed the researcher that she had always planned to parent in an authoritative style. Thus, the researcher does not believe that Barbara explored any new roles or actions, with the exception of stress management techniques. The researcher contends that Barbara *did* have a disorienting dilemma and subsequently made the decision to never use drugs again. Barbara claimed that she used marijuana to deal with the stress associated with a death in her family. Throughout the six-week parent education class, Barbara frequently mentioned her continued use of the stress management techniques that were discussed in class. At the final interview, three months after the conclusion of the class, she stated that she was still using the techniques learned in class and that they were now a part of her daily routine. The researcher believes that perhaps because Barbara was a new mother who had no frame of reference from which to recognize the need to explore new roles, she therefore did not engage in

the process. The researcher believes that like Evelyn, Barbara learned new skills, but her learning was not transformative.

The researcher believes that the participants were beginning to work through steps nine and ten which are, building self-confidence in one's new role and reintegration into life. The researcher noticed a level of self-assuredness in the majority of the participants in the final interview, held three months following the class that was not present in the second interview, which was held at the conclusion of the class. The participants reported improved relationships with their children which seemed to be an affirmation to them that their new skills were working. This affirmation in turn likely fueled their self-confidence. The participants seemed to be feeling positive and excited about the future. The researcher took this to mean that they were gaining self-confidence and beginning to reintegrate into their life with new skills and a transformed parenting style.

The researcher believes that there is compelling evidence to support the findings that transformative learning did occur in almost all of the participants. This transformative learning was set in motion by a disorienting dilemma, which was followed by a process of self-reflection and rational discourse culminating in a transformed parenting style. The researcher would be remiss, however, if she did not acknowledge that there could be alternative explanations for the findings. Since the participants in this study were court ordered, they could have been inclined to give socially acceptable responses. They may have been guarded or even dishonest in their comments in order to appear more favorable to the researcher. Several of them had temporarily lost custody of their children and the successful completion of the parent education class was a necessary component in the plan to regain custody. Therefore, the

participants may have had an ulterior motive for being present for the class and for being seen in a positive light (e.g. “saying all the right things”).

Additionally, the researcher also served as the instructor in this study and had, therefore, developed a relationship with participants as their teacher. There was a level of comfort and bonding that occurred as a result of this student/teacher relationship. Consequently, the participants may have been inclined to give favorable responses not only for their benefit, but also to please the researcher. Due to the student/teacher relationship, the researcher may have viewed the participants’ responses more favorably than they were intended. Because the researcher was the primary instrument for both data collection and analysis, the relationship that she had with the participants as their teacher may have affected her interpretation of the findings.

Furthermore, Nancy, the only participant who was not court-ordered to attend the class, seemed to have experienced one of the deepest transformations. This finding would concur with professionals in the field of adult education who believe that adults learn best through voluntary (although at times reluctant) participation (Knowles, 1990; Rachal, 2002). Even though the researcher felt that these alternative explanations were worth exploring, she still contends that most of the participants in this study experienced a transformation of parenting style, precipitated by a disorienting dilemma and fostered by subsequent self-reflection and rational discourse.

Implications

This study has implications for adult education theory, practice, and policy.

To theory - This study responds to Mezirow’s (2004) requests for research that adds to the discussion of transformative learning theory. Specifically, the researcher believes that this study furthers the research of Ireland (1992), First and Way (1995) and

Shivers (2008) which suggested that transformative learning theory can be efficiently applied to parent education. The findings from this research also indicate that transformative learning theory is effective when applied to all types of parent education, including parent education that is court-ordered.

Transformative learning theory seemed to be the appropriate theoretical framework for a class that was designed to initiate change – a change in the parenting beliefs and practices of its participants. The researcher did not expect, however, that the changes that were about to take place would encompass more than parenting practices. Through the process of self-awareness and critical reflection, the participants began to question long-held beliefs and ultimately began to think differently about their lives in general. When the participants began to experience positive changes in one area of their life, other areas including their parenting, were also affected. For example, all of the female participants reported positive changes in the way that they managed their stress.

The researcher was somewhat surprised at the level of interest that was generated by the lesson on stress management. The female participants seemed to be experiencing high levels of stress and were eager to learn effective techniques to manage their stress. Most of the women were single working mothers with several children and limited economic resources. Given that these women were living with multiple stressors and oftentimes an inadequate support system, it is understandable that their stress was at a high level. Excessive stress can lead to frustration and anger. Unfortunately, parents sometimes take out their negative emotions on their children. Researchers like Seng and Prinz (2008) have noted that high levels of parental stress can lead to maladaptive parenting, including neglect and abuse.

Maladaptive parenting practices sometimes become family patterns and are handed down from one generation to another. These patterns can affect every area of life, including how stress is managed, how family members communicate, how discipline and household policy are administered, etc. It has been said that parents are role models for their children in all aspects of life including parenting. In other words, everyone learns to parent from their own parents. When someone grows up in a dysfunctional family, it is obvious that this role model phenomenon can be problematic. In a discussion of the importance of acknowledging the experience that adults have accrued, Merriam et al. (1996) reported that that accumulated experience is not necessarily positive.

In addition to stress management, another topic of relevance to the participants was their FOO. In an attempt to overcome the extreme parenting of their own parents, several of the participants had also become extreme, except in the opposite direction. Others had continued the family patterns that they had learned in their FOO. These extremes of being either too permissive or too authoritarian were not ideal so the goal of the class was to move them to a more authoritative style of parenting (Baumrind, 1966). In order to accomplish this objective, very basic assumptions had to be questioned and reexamined. Several areas of parenting were discussed including communication, self-esteem, discipline, and child development. In order for parents to have a better understanding of children's behavior, the instructor discussed stages of child development. One participant had an "aha" moment when the instructor told the class that two year-olds learn by exploring and using their five senses. She had been taught that toddlers who touch household objects are "just being bad" and should therefore be

punished. For her, this idea was one of those long-held assumptions that she began to challenge once she learned a different explanation.

Throughout the six-week class, the participants began to question entrenched assumptions that had been passed down in their FOO. They began to see the correlation between parenting style and child outcome. Several of them said that they had a better understanding of themselves and their significant other through the examination of their respective FOO. They became aware of their own self-esteem and the impact of their own feelings of self-worth on their children. When they became more cognizant of the stages of child development and when they became proactive practitioners of positive stress management, they became more patient and more compassionate toward their children. Similar to the findings of First and Way (1995), the researcher discovered that as they worked towards an improved self-image and effective stress management, they reported that they were happier and that their children thought they were more fun, and in some cases, also more in control. Communication improved and eventually so did their relationship.

Mezirow (1991) contends that a true perspective transformation is irreversible. Courtenay, Merriam, Reeves, and Baumgartner (2000), whose study of HIV-positive individuals confirmed Mezirow's assertion, questioned whether the transformation would have the same staying power in the presence of a non-life threatening disorienting dilemma. This research suggests that perhaps it does. The disorienting dilemmas in this study were non-life threatening. Yet, it appeared that the perspectives of the participants remained transformed and that they were still experiencing personal growth. During the final interviews, held three months after the conclusion of the parent education class, the researcher noticed that the participants were more self-assured and even more emphatic

about the changes that they were making in their parenting and in their lives in general. One of the participants reported that she had found a new and more desirable place to live. Another participant had recently found a “dream job,” one that she enjoyed and that paid well. Several of the participants reported that “things were good,” and “finally falling into place.”

This court-ordered parent education class appeared to have changed more in its participants than just their parenting. The researcher believes that transformative learning theory is appropriate and effective when applied to court-ordered parent education. With this theoretical foundation, participants have the opportunity to experience real transformation, not only in parenting, but in other areas of their lives as well.

To practice – There are high stakes involved in court-ordered parent education. Most of the parents who are required to attend these classes have been accused of either abusing or neglecting their children (Casanueva et al., 2007; Dinkmeyer et al., 1999; Murphy & Bryant, 2002; Rodriguez, 2010; Russa & Rodriguez, 2010). These maladaptive parenting practices have often been learned in their own dysfunctional FOO. These assumptions and practices are often deeply ingrained and are therefore not necessarily amenable to change. Curriculums that just offer behavioral tips and various parenting techniques are simply not effective or appropriate for court-ordered parents. A curriculum is needed whose goal is to first uncover the deep-seated beliefs that are driving maladaptive parenting practices, and then to foster the transformation of those practices into a style that is both authoritative and functional.

The researcher thinks that this curriculum should be based on transformative learning theory and should engage the participants in critical reflection and rational

discourse (Mezirow, 2000). This process encourages the parents to examine and question their long-held assumptions and then to discuss their thoughts with others. The researcher believes that the techniques that were used in this study including guided class discussions, journaling, and critical questioning, are effective. The literature is full of other innovative techniques that can also be used to foster transformative learning. For example, Cranton (2000) suggested the use of role play and class debates and Brookfield (1995) emphasized the use of autobiographies and collaborative problem solving exercises. The researcher believes that facilitators should make use of several different techniques in order to accommodate the differential personalities and learning styles that are likely to be in the class.

The researcher contends that the inclusion of Baumrind's (1966) typology of parenting style was critical in the fostering of transformative learning in the participants in this study. This classification provided a clear description of child outcome in relation to specific parenting styles. Most of the participants reported that the lesson on parenting style was their favorite. The participants seemed to connect to this topic and to find relevance to their Family of Origin and their Family of Procreation. The researcher contends that Family of Origin issues should be addressed and parenting style seems to be an effective way in which to do that. Evidence from this study also suggests that it is essential that a curriculum designed for court-ordered parents include a lesson on stress management.

The researcher thinks that practitioners who implement a curriculum based on transformative learning theory with the inclusion of Baumrind's (1966) typology will have the tools to foster real change. The researcher also believes that practitioners should have a thorough understanding of adult learning principles. The researcher

believes that it is essential for practitioners to first understand the way that adults learn and then establish and implement policies that are conducive to that learning.

Furthermore, since the researcher is suggesting that practitioners use a curriculum based on transformative learning theory, it is obviously essential that they have a thorough understanding of the theory and ways to foster it (Mezirow, 1978, 1981, 1991, 1995, 1997, 2000, 2004).

In order to deepen understanding, the researcher also recommends that practitioners become familiar with attitude theory and its correlation to transformative learning theory. Attitude theory, from the field of psychology, has similarities to transformative learning theory, particularly in relation to disorienting dilemmas. Festinger (1957) believed that an individual will change their attitude in order to eliminate the unpleasantness of cognitive dissonance, experienced when there is a disparity between attitude and behavior. In a certain situation, the psychologist might call the experience a state of cognitive dissonance while the adult educator might say that they had experienced a disorienting dilemma. At any rate, they would both be talking about a situation capable of precipitating change in the individual.

From a slightly broader perspective, the researcher believes that transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000) could be effectively applied to other types of family-life education, including marriage education and relationship training. The researcher has taught family-life education classes for many years and has observed some of the same types of dysfunctional patterns in other relationships that sometimes exist between parents and their children. In order for individuals to establish healthy functional relationships, changes similar to those experienced in the parent education class have to be instituted. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that transformative learning

theory (Mezirow, 2000) could be successfully used in all types of family-life education, including but not limited to parent education.

From a much broader perspective, the researcher also contends that transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000) is an appropriate theoretical framework for any type of educational setting where life-change is the objective. At its core, transformative learning theory is about real and lasting change. As such, it seems logical that this type of framework would be appropriate and effective when applied to any number of educational programs focusing on change, including substance abuse, weight loss, toxic relationships, etc.

To policy - Policy makers should consider the establishment of some type of certification or training process for those who teach court-ordered parent education. Over the years, the researcher has known individuals with varying degrees of expertise who teach court-ordered parent education. Some of these facilitators have no training or educational background that would qualify them to teach in this arena. Most of them simply buy an “out of the box” curriculum and proceed to teach. Some of these curriculums are video-based and the researcher has been told that some facilitators pop in a tape, tell the parents to watch, ask if there are any questions and move on to the next lesson. After six weekly sessions of this routine, the parents receive a certificate and have thus completed their court-ordered parent education class. The researcher believes that there is room for improvement and therefore suggests that facilitators be trained in a curriculum based on transformative learning theory and the techniques used to foster that transformation (Mezirow, 2000). It is the opinion of this researcher that the families involved with DHS deserve a facilitator who is trained and competent in the use of a curriculum that can foster real and lasting change.

Recommendations

1. The researcher recommends that this program be replicated in other venues and with other instructors. Additional testing needs to be conducted to determine if this curriculum is relevant with other groups of court-ordered parents and when taught by other instructors.

2. Since DHS referrals generally do not specify any required length for educational classes for their clients, the researcher recommends that the time frame for this class be increased from six weeks to eight weeks. The extra two weeks would allow for further exploration of certain topics, including stress management and FOO issues. The researcher discovered through the data analysis process that these topics were important to the participants and she believes that the curriculum should be expanded to allow for more in-depth discussions of these subjects. If the study is replicated with other audiences, the extended time frame would also allow for the inclusion of additional innovative techniques designed to foster transformative learning.

3. The researcher challenges investigators to use transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000) as the theoretical framework for inquiries into other types of family-life education. The researcher believes that transformative learning theory could be effectively applied to additional areas including marriage education and relationship training. From a broader perspective, the researcher believes that transformative learning theory could be used in any type of educational setting where life-change is the objective (e.g. addiction; weight loss) and therefore, recommends that it be the focus of research in these other areas.

4. The researcher also recommends that future studies involving any type of change, especially with transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000) as its

foundation, use a methodological design incorporating a delayed follow-up (e.g. a three – six month final interview). This longitudinal element is critical in determining if a perspective transformation is permanent. Without the inclusion of the follow-up interview in this study, the researcher would have had no evidence suggesting a lasting perspective transformation.

Conclusions

The researcher sought to determine if the use of transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000) within the context of a court-ordered parent education class could change the parenting style of the participants. The researcher concludes that this transformation to a more authoritative style of parenting occurred in almost all of the participants. She also believes that all of the participants experienced a disorienting dilemma, which through the process of critical reflection and rational discourse led to a perspective transformation in most of them. The facilitator used a variety of methods to foster transformation. She believes that these techniques along with Baumrind's (1966) typology of parenting styles were critical elements in the fostering of a transformed parenting style. The final participant interview indicated that the perspective transformation was lasting, at least in the three months between the second interview and the follow-up interview. The researcher believes that the findings from this research have implications for adult education theory, practice and policy. Specifically, she believes that transformative learning theory is an appropriate, effective and essential theoretical foundation for curriculums designed for court-ordered audiences.

The researcher recommends that policy makers consider a mandated training and certification process for facilitators of court-ordered parent education and that those facilitators be trained in adult learning principles and in a curriculum that is based on

transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000). She also recommends that research be conducted in other areas of family-life education using transformative learning theory as the foundation. Additionally, it is recommended that any studies that focus on change, especially any research using transformative learning theory as a framework, use a methodological design that has some type of delayed follow-up (e.g. a three-six month delay in the final interview). Finally, the researcher recommends the use of transformative learning theory in other educational settings where life-change is the objective (e.g. addiction; weight loss).

APPENDIX A

AUTHORIZATION FORM TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

AUTHORIZATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Consent is hereby given to participate in the study titled: **Through the Lens of Perspective Transformation: The Impact of Parent Education on the Parenting Styles of Court-Ordered Participants**

1. Purpose: The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of parent education on the parenting styles of court-ordered participants.

2. Description of the Study: The researcher will conduct three semi-structured personal interviews, (one prior to parent education, one immediately following parent education, and one three months after parent education) with parents enrolled in parenting classes under the instruction of Mariann Taylor, to be held at a location of their choice. An audio recording will be obtained for later transcription. Each interview will last approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours. All information provided during the interview will be kept confidential with the assurance that the identity of participants will not be revealed. Participants may be contacted for a follow-up session to obtain their opinion of the accuracy of the researcher's understanding of the information provided during the interviews. In addition, the researcher will observe parent/child interactions during a prescribed activity, which will be conducted during visitation at the Department of Human Services. All information obtained from the observation will be kept confidential with the assurance that the identity of participants will not be revealed. Participants will also be asked to reflect on the weekly parenting class discussions and then write their thoughts in a journal following each class. In addition, they will be asked to reflect upon incidents that occur with their children related to the weekly topic and to record in their journal both successes and challenges related to their handling of the incident. With participants' permission, the researcher will review the journals weekly. The focus of the study is in your learning about parenting style. No data will be collected about your child/children.

3. Benefits: Participants will have the opportunity to reflect upon and share their experiences related to court-ordered parent education. It is hoped that these shared experiences will lead to a better understanding of the learning that takes place in a court-ordered parenting class and the resulting impact on parenting style. Using the results of the study, the researcher also hopes to develop a parenting curriculum, which focuses on parenting style with court-ordered parents as the target audience. Participants who complete all phases of this research, including the three-month follow-up interview, will receive a \$50.00 gift certificate to Wal-Mart.

4. Risks: This study poses no foreseeable risks to participants. As court-ordered participants, some parents may feel pressured to give socially-appropriate answers, but no question will ask them to report a behavior that would potentially jeopardize their status as custodial parents. Although not anonymous, the identity and personal information of participants will not be revealed. This research may result in journal articles and the development of a parenting curriculum designed for court-ordered parents. Every effort will be made to protect you identity and confidentiality.

5. Confidentiality: Please be assured that all information shared with the researcher will be kept private and confidential. Audio-recorded interview tapes, the transcribed interviews, observation records, and copies of journal entries will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. The researcher is the only one with access to the data. Audio recordings will be destroyed after one year, with transcriptions destroyed after two years. The transcripts will contain no identifying information. Pseudonyms will be used to identify participants in this study.

6. Alternate Procedures: Not applicable.

7. Participant's Assurances: Whereas no assurance can be made concerning results that may be obtained (since results from investigational studies cannot be predicted), the researcher will take every precaution consistent with best scientific practice. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. Questions concerning the research should be directed to Mariann Taylor at (601) 433-4258. This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601) 266-6820.

8. Signatures:

Signature of the Research Participants _____ Date _____

Signature of the Person Explaining the Study _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

BEFORE-TRAINING INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The Impact of Parent Education on the Parenting Styles of Court-Ordered Participants

1. How many children do you have? What are their ages?
2. Would you be willing to describe the situation that brought you to parenting classes at the Jones County Families First Resource Center?
3. Describe what it was like when you first learned that you were under investigation with the Department of Human Services. What were you feeling?
4. What was your initial reaction to being required to attend parenting classes?
5. What do you hope to learn in the parenting class? Is there anything that you find particularly challenging as a parent? Is there anything that you would like to change in your interactions with your children?
6. Stress management is one of the topics of discussion in our class. How would you describe your current stress level? What measures are you taking to manage your stress?
7. How would you define self-esteem? Describe some techniques that you use to build the self-esteem of your child/children.
8. Describe some discipline techniques that you have observed parents using with their children. What techniques do you believe are the most effective?
9. Has there been a recent situation where you had to tell your child/children “no”. Describe the situation and how you handled it. Specifically, what did you say to your child/children?
10. Describe a recent situation in which you felt truly “connected” to your child/children. What were you doing? What were you talking about?
11. Would you describe your parents as controlling/strict, laid back/lots of freedom, or somewhere in the middle? Please give an example.
12. Define and describe the role of a parent in the lives of their child/children

APPENDIX C

AFTER-TRAINING INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The Impact of Parent Education on the Parenting Styles of Court-Ordered Participants

1. How many children do you have? What are their ages?
2. Would you be willing to describe the situation that brought you to parenting classes at the Jones County Families First Resource Center? How did you feel when you found out that you were involved with DHS?
3. What was your initial reaction to being required to attend parenting classes? Since you have now completed the class, how has your reaction changed?
4. Is there anything about your overall approach to parenting that you feel has changed since taking the class?
5. Stress management was one of the topics of discussion in our class. How would you describe your current stress level? What measures are you taking to manage your stress that you were not doing prior to the parenting class?
6. What was the most significant lesson that you learned through the class – about yourself? About your child/children? About Parenting?
7. Describe a recent situation (post parenting education) that involved an opportunity for self-esteem building with your child/children. How have your methods of self-esteem building changed since taking the class?
8. Describe a recent situation in which you used one of the discipline methods discussed in class. What method of discipline did you use? What made you select this specific method? Was it a difficult method to use? If so, in what way? What was your child's/children's reaction to the chosen discipline method? How has your overall approach to discipline, including the specific methods of discipline, changed since taking the parenting class?
9. Have you changed your communication style with your child/children since the class? If so, please explain those changes. Describe a recent situation in which you encouraged verbal “give and take” with your child/children.
10. Has there been a recent situation where you had to tell your child/children “no”. Describe the situation and how you handled it. Specifically, what did you say to your child/children? Has your response to a “no” question changed since you took the parenting class?

11. Describe a recent situation in which you felt truly “connected” to your child/children. Has your “connection” to your child/children grown or developed since taking the class? If so, please explain.

12. We talked about parenting style at length in class. Can you describe your style? Have you noticed any changes that have occurred since taking the class?

13. How has your role as parent changed since taking the class?

14. How would your children describe their relationship with you? Would they say that it had changed since the class?

APPENDIX D

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (AFTER 3-MONTH DELAY)

The Impact of Parent Education on the Parenting Styles of Court-Ordered Participants

1. How many children do you have? What are their ages?
2. Would you be willing to describe the situation that brought you to parenting classes at the Jones County Families First Resource Center? How did you feel when you found out that you were involved with DHS?
3. What was your initial reaction to being required to attend parenting classes? Since you have now completed the class, how has your reaction changed?
4. Is there anything about your overall approach to parenting that you feel has changed since taking the class?
5. Stress management was one of the topics of discussion in our class. How would you describe your current stress level? What measures are you taking to manage your stress that you were not doing prior to the parenting class?
6. What was the most significant lesson that you learned through the class – about yourself? About your child/children? About Parenting?
7. Describe a recent situation (post parenting education) that involved an opportunity for self-esteem building with your child/children. How have your methods of self-esteem building changed since taking the class?
8. Describe a recent situation in which you used one of the discipline methods discussed in class. What method of discipline did you use? What made you select this specific method? Was it a difficult method to use? If so, in what way? What was your child's/children's reaction to the chosen discipline method? How has your overall approach to discipline, including the specific methods of discipline, changed since taking the parenting class?
9. Have you changed your communication style with your child/children since the class? If so, please explain those changes. Describe a recent situation in which you encouraged verbal “give and take” with your child/children.
10. Has there been a recent situation where you had to tell your child/children “no”. Describe the situation and how you handled it. Specifically, what did you say to your child/children? Has your response to a “no” question changed since you took the parenting class?

11. Describe a recent situation in which you felt truly “connected” to your child/children. Has your “connection” to your child/children grown or developed since taking the class? If so, please explain.
12. We talked about parenting style at length in class. Can you describe your style? Have you noticed any changes that have occurred since taking the class?
13. How has your role as parent changed since taking the class?
14. How would your children describe their relationship with you? Would they say that it had changed since the class?
15. When was the last time you thought about this class?
16. How would you describe this class to a friend?

APPENDIX E
JOURNAL PROTOCOL

Please record your thoughts and experiences in this journal. I encourage you to share both successes and challenges. Remember there is no such thing as a perfect parent. We all make mistakes. Reflecting on our decisions and actions and learning to recognize our own positive or negative behavior paves the way for us to be better parents. The information that you put into your journal is private. I will not ask you to share your reflections with anyone but me and whether or not you do that is up to you.

Week One:

1. How would you describe the best parent you know?
2. How would you describe the worst parent you know?
3. How would your child/children describe you?
4. Think about the topics that were discussed in class this week. How would you define parental responsibilities?

Week Two

1. Describe the last time that you felt stressed out.
2. What did you do? How did you react to those around you?
3. What are your stress management plans for this week?

Week Three

1. What parenting styles did you experience as a child?
2. Describe some specific parental behaviors that let you know the parenting style of each parent.
3. Describe some things that your parents did that you would not mind repeating with your own child/children.
4. Describe some things that your parents did that you would never, ever do to your own child/children.

Week Four

1. How did your parents let you know that you were loved?
2. How do you let your child/children know that they are loved?
3. How often do you provide specific, positive feedback to your children? How often do you criticize your child/children?
4. Describe the last conversation that you had with your child/children. Is there anything that you find difficult to talk about with your child/children? If so, please explain.

5. Describe a time when you wanted to intervene and do something for you child/children, but instead you let them do it for themselves.

Week Five

1. Why do you think children misbehave?
2. Describe a behavior of one or more of your child/children that you find particularly challenging. Describe a time that you handled the situation and felt proud of the results. Describe a time that you wish you could change.
3. How did your parents discipline you?
4. Think about the discipline techniques that we have discussed in class. What method do you think is the most effective? Describe how you would use it with you own child/children.

Week Six

1. Think about the topics that we have discussed the last several weeks. Which of the topics do you think has had the most effect/impact on your parenting?
2. Has your approach to parenting changed since we started the class? If so, please explain.
3. How would your child/children describe you now?

APPENDIX F

SYSTEM FOR CODING PARENTAL INTERACTIONS

Code 1 – Authoritarian Parenting – Limits without Freedom – Low Responsiveness, High Demandingness

Parent as authority figure

Controlling

Obedience valued

Verbal “give and take” limited

Parents’ opinion most important

Children respectful

Children rarely interrupt or challenge, but may complain

Code 2 – Permissive Parenting – Freedom without Limits – High Responsiveness, Low Demandingness

No one clearly has control or child has control

Parents may neglect to assert authority over a child who misbehaves or is disrespectful

Parents who do try to assert authority may be ineffective

Parents make few demands for appropriate behavior

Parents may appear to be passive or hapless

Child may be disruptive

Code 3 – Authoritative Parenting – Freedom within Limits – High Responsiveness, High Demandingness

Family members work together

Joint decision making

Verbal “give and take” encouraged

Consensus

Everyone has a voice, but parents have the most power

Code 4 – Inconsistent Parenting

Clashing parenting styles – parents undermine each other

Parents may exhibit criteria for more than one parenting style

Element of unpredictability

Inconsistent

Adapted from Kering, P. & Lindahl, K. (2001) Family Observational Coding Systems. Mahwah,

New Jersey & London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

APPENDIX G

COURT-ORDERED PARENT EDUCATION PROTOCOL

Week One – The Basics

Opening activity
Maslow's Hierarchy
Parental Responsibilities
Ages and Stages

Week Two- Stress Management

Stress Management Assessment
Stress Booklet

Week Three – Parenting Style

Parenting Style Assessment – Active Parenting
Parenting Style Power Point
Clothes Line Illustration
Problem Solving – how to handle specific incidents with children

Week Four – Self-Esteem and Communication

What is Self-Esteem?
Video
Ways to Love and Respect your Child
Jim's Story
Communication Booklet
How to Listen So Kids Get Heard
Practice "I" messages and active listening

Week Five – Communication and Discipline

How to Listen So Kids Get Heard
Practice "I" messages and active listening
Difference between discipline and punishment
How do you correct your children?

Week Six – Discipline and Review

Discuss natural and logical consequences
Application with real situations
Review
Discussion

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (PILOT STUDY)

The Impact of Parent Education on the Parenting Styles of Court-Ordered Participants

1. How many children do you have? What are their ages?
2. Would you be willing to describe the situation that brought you to parenting classes at the Community Family Center?
3. What was your initial reaction to being required to attend parenting classes? Since you have now completed the class, has your reaction changed?
4. Is there anything about your overall approach to parenting that you feel has changed since taking the class?
5. What measures are you taking to manage your stress?
6. What was the most significant lesson that you learned through the class – about yourself? About your child/children? About Parenting?
7. Describe a recent situation (post parenting education) that involved an opportunity for self-esteem building with your child/children. How did you handle it? Describe your child's/children's reaction.
8. Describe a recent situation in which you had to discipline one of your children. What method of discipline did you use? What made you select this specific method? What was your child's/children's reaction to the chosen discipline method?
9. Have you change your communication style with your child/children since the class? If so, please explain those changes. Describe a recent situation in which you encouraged verbal “give and take” with your child/children.
10. Has there been a recent situation where you had to tell your child/children “no”. Describe the situation and how you handled it. Specifically, what did you say to your child/children?
11. Describe a recent situation in which you felt truly “connected” to your child/children.
12. We talked about parenting style at length in class. Can you describe your style? Have you noticed any changes that have occurred since taking the class? What do you see as the most important goal of parenting?

APPENDIX I

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 12062601

PROJECT TITLE: Through the Lens of Perspective Transformation: The Impact of Parent Education on the Parenting Style of Court-Ordered Participants

PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation

RESEARCHER(S): Mariann Taylor

COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology

DEPARTMENT: Educational Studies & Research

FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 08/08/2012 to 08/07/2013

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.

Institutional Review Board

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