

WHAT YOU DO MATTERS: PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF THE 6-WEEK PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAM

Sarah Huisman *

Fontbonne University, United States

Abstract

Parent training programs have served many purposes for encouraging positive parenting and discouraging harmful practices to children. With many parenting programs seeking to give knowledge and skills to parents by empowering them with efficacy building strategies that enhance the parental self-efficacy (PSE), it is important to understand how parents felt about their experiences in the program to encourage enrollment and retention in voluntary programs. In this phenomenological qualitative research study, parental self-efficacy was explored with 20 parents at the completion of a 6-meeting parental training series called What you Do Matters designed by the Parents as Teachers National Organization. Parents were interviewed after the completion of the series in open-ended semi-structured interviews to explore their experiences and self-reported parental self-efficacy. Three themes emerged from the data, verbal persuasion or affirmation of parenting skills, the value of community in adult learning, and the connection and value of content in a parent training program. These themes can be beneficial to developing new parenting programs and making inclusive programs where parents feel welcome and find value in their participation.

Keywords: parent training program; parental self-efficacy; program evaluation

Introduction

Parent education or parent training programs have been around for many years to benefit both parents and children by educating parents about various parenting strategies (Wyatt Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle, 2008). Parent education is a more passive approach to learning about parenting, where the

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to:

* Ph.D., Fontbonne University. Address: 6800 Wydown Blvd., St. Louis, Missouri, 63105, United States. E-mail: shuisman@fontbonne.edu

parent may attend lectures or presentations on parenting topics with the goal to learn content (Wyatt Kaminski et al., 2008). Whereas parent training is a more active approach where the parents acquire parenting skills through actively engaging in skills training with the content in some method, such as role playing or engaging with the child (Wyatt Kaminski et al., 2008). Parent training often has the duality of both parent education and the active element of skills training (Wyatt Kaminski et al., 2008). The intended purpose of many parent training programs is to prevent harmful parenting skills that lead to mistreatment of children (Barth et al., 2005; Fennell & Fishel, 1998; Gaudin, Wodarski, Arkinson, & Avery, 1990;), treatment of identified developmental concerns or disorders (Anastopoulos, Shelton, DuPaul, & Guevremont, 1993; Barrett, Dadds, & Rapee, 1996; Bradley et al., 1994), and promotion or enhancement of positive parenting skills (Fewell & Wheeden, 1998; Glover & Landreth, 2000; Hutcheson et al., 1997; Johnson, Howell, & Molloy, 1993; Kissman, 1992; Koniak-Griffin & Verzemnieks, 1991). Research on parent training has been categorized by determining if the program is intended for prevention or intervention (also referred to as treatment) (Wyatt Kaminski, 2008). For both prevention and intervention, many parenting programs seek to give knowledge and skills to parents by empowering them with efficacy building strategies that enhance the parental self-efficacy (PSE) (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001; Dumka, Gonzales, Wheeler, & Millsap, 2010; Junttila, Vauras, & Laakkonen, 2007; Izzo, Weiss, Shanahan, & Rodriguez-Brown, 2000; Sevigny & Loutzenhiser, 2009; Wittkowski, Garrett, Calam, & Weisberg, 2017). PSE has been found to impact parental behaviors and ultimately effective child treatment outcomes (Levac, McCay, Merka, & Reddon-D'Arcy, 2008; O'Connor, Rodriguez, Cappella, Morris, & McClowry, 2012). Enhancing one's knowledge does not necessarily change behaviors and research has shown that self-reported knowledge and attitudes are more likely to change from parent training than behaviors themselves (Albarracin et al., 2003; Webb & Sheeran, 2006). Furthermore, not all families benefit equally from parent training programs (Lundahl, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2006). Parent attributes (Kaminkski et al., 2008), culture (Borrego, Ibanez, Spendlove, & Pemberton, 2007; Wong, Roubinov, Gonzales, Dumka, & Millsap, 2013), mental health (Ludmer, Salsbury, Suarez, & Andrade, 2017), and gender (Chase & Peacock, 2017, Lundahl, Tollefson, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2008) may impede effects of parent training. Social economic status (SES) is a variable that has mixed outcomes on whether it impacts the effects of parent

training (Furlong & McGilloway, 2014). Several studies have reported that low-SES does impact the effects of parent training (Beauchaine, Webster-Stratton, & Reid, 2005; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1997) and other studies have shown that SES does not impact the effects (Baydar, Reid, & Webster-Stratton, 2003; Gardner, Hutchings, Bywater, & Whitaker, 2010; McGilloway et al., 2012).

When developing a new preventative parent training program, many things need to be considered and it is important to examine the effects and perceptions of the parents at the completion of the training. In preventative parent training programs, parents often voluntarily participate in the program and unlike clinical interventions, parents may not see a need to participate if an identified problem does not exist. Studies have shown that only about 30-35% of invited families enrolled in a prevention parent training program (Garvey et al., 2006; Heinrichs, Bertram, Kuschel, & Hahlweg, 2005). With low enrollment and limited research on preventative parenting programs, findings are limited in scope. When examining parent training, there is a need to explore the levels of engagement in determining the program's effects and more specifically the levels of engagement, attendance, adherence, and cognitions (Becker et al., 2015; Staudt, 2007). Even after parents enroll in voluntary parent programs, having parents return each session can be a challenge and high attrition rates exist consistently throughout programs (Friars & Mellor, 2007; Kazdin, 1996; Wierzbicki & Pekarik, 1993). Many parent programs are 8-14 sessions in length and lasting one to two hours however 'light touch' programs exist with less than 8 sessions or meetings (Piotrowska et al., 2017; Tully & Hunt, 2016).

Clinical trials can be valuable for parent training programs to measure effects, but can be costly, time consuming and may not capture the perspective of the parents thoroughly to better understand why parents enroll and continue to attend, how they perceive the program and ultimately what their overall experience was. It is of great importance to receive feedback in developing parent training programs, both from an evaluative perspective to see if the program itself can be enhanced, to determine what the experience of the participants are, and ultimately to determine if the program is reaching the intended audience it is developed for. Many studies are limited in exploring the parent perspective of a preventative parent training program and rely heavily on the quantitative data. A metasynthesis of 5,687 research studies on parenting programs found that only 26 studies explored the qualitative nature of what makes interventions meaningful and helpful to families (Butler, Gregg, Calam, & Wittkowski, 2020). Most studies

explore the quantitative nature of the efficacy of a parenting program. The efficacy of parenting programs and interventions matter greatly, however the quality and content of a program is only as good as the ability to engage parents to enroll in voluntary programs (Piotrowska et al., 2017). It is of great importance to understand why parents decide to participate in a preventative parent training program, what keeps them returning each week, what engages them, what their thoughts on the program are and overall, how they perceive the experience from a qualitative perspective (Kane, Wood, & Barrow, 2007). Qualitative research assists with identifying the critical elements of a program's success under 'real world' conditions (Furlong & McGilloway, 2012) By exploring these things, an understanding of how parent trainings can assist parents better and reach a wider audience in preventative parent training. This research seeks to capture the experiences and voices of parents that self-selected to engage in a preventative parent training series called What You Do Matters (WYDM). The purpose of the study was to understand how parents identified and experienced the What You Do Matters (WYDM) parent training series.

Objectives

Children have behavioral and developmental issues that could be remediated and supported by parent training programs based on the principles of social learning theory (Barlow & Coren, 2018; Eyberg, Nelson, & Boggs, 2008). However, parents often do not enroll in voluntary preventative training programs because of various barriers (Owens et al., 2002) and especially if they do not see a need to enroll. Parent training can be beneficial to supporting development and enhancing positive parenting practices, but the parental perceptions are imperative in mobilizing parents to enroll, see the value, continue to attend, and ultimately enact their own learning. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative research study is to examine parents' perceptions and experiences after they participated in a voluntary 6-week parent training program called What You Do Matters.

The overall guiding research question is, what is the experience of parents after participation in the What You do Matters program? Several sub questions will assist in exploring this broad question including, why do parents enroll in a voluntary parent training program? What value do parents give to the participation in the program? What types of topics or support are parents looking for in a parent training program? What do the parents do with the

information from a parent training program? And lastly, did participation in the parent training program impact their self-reported self-efficacy?

What you Do Matters Series

This research explores the What you Do Matters (WYDM) Series that has been developed by the Parents as Teachers National organization. The WYDM series is a voluntary preventative parent training program designed for caregivers of children ages 4 and under to promote positive parent child interactions, parenting skills, and overall knowledge of child development. The program explores various topics on child development in a 6-meeting format that is developed for adult learners. The program is didactic in nature and has both informational learning, discussion and then a hands-on portion of the program. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to bring their children to the program. The program is based on a weekly meeting that is 1 hour in length and is comprised of 5 parts to engage the parents. The first part is the opening (introduction) that is developed to build a relationship between the facilitator and parents, introduce the weekly topic, and find out through discussion what parents already know about the topic. After week one the facilitator summarizes the previous week's topic for a review during the opening period to ensure continuity of learning. Following the opening, the focus shifts to the knowledge sharing portion which includes presentation style and reflection prompts that encourages reflection by the parents in order to connect directly to the weekly topic. The knowledge sharing is followed by a processing activity such as a video or activity that promotes different sensory systems. The opening, knowledge sharing, and processing activity is approximately 15-minutes in length. The fourth part is a parent-interaction portion of the weekly meeting. Parent and child engage in attachment building activities that also allow for the parent to engage or practice the information they were just exposed to in the knowledge sharing portion. The last part of the meeting is the closing, where all parents and the facilitator come back together to reflect on what they learned that week and to answer any questions.

Each week has a new topic that focuses on an element of child development. The following are the weeks and topics: Week 1: "Your Child's Brain and Its Amazing Potential" Neuroscience and general learning processes in children, Week 2: "Movement and Motion" Gross and fine motor development, Week 3: "Now Hear This!" Language development, Week 4: "Feelings" Social-emotional development, Week 5: "What Do You Think?" Cognitive development,

and Week 6: "Making It a Routine" review of the learning processes and domains of development, plus reflection on possible next steps for families.

Efficacy building strategies

Self-efficacy is the belief that an individual has in completing a task (Bandura, 1997) and these beliefs can impact behaviors, effort exerted, and resiliency when faced with challenges (Bandura, 2006). Self-efficacy is internally assessed by the individual and often is impacted by four different factors: positive mastery experiences of the individual, vicarious experiences, such as watching others in which the individual can relate to, social persuasion, and mental or physiological experiences (Bandura & Adams, 1977). More particular, parental self-efficacy (PSE) is the belief in one's own parenting (Coleman & Karraker, 1997).

The WYDM series focuses on possibly three PSE enhancing strategies, positive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, and social persuasion. Mastery experiences may be enhanced by the WYDM series by applying the information that is taught during the knowledge sharing portion (part 2) and the processing activity (part 3) during the parent-interaction portion (part 4) of the training. The WYDM series was set up to engage the parents in a parent-interaction time specifically to allow for and vicarious experiences and social persuasion through the discussions with other parents and the facilitator.

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to understand the perspective of parents that participated in the What You Do Matters series developed by the Parents as Teachers (PAT) National organization. In exploring the parental perspective, this research hopes to explore how participation in the What You Do Matters series was perceived by parents from diverse ethnic, socio-economic status, and education level. Additionally, this research seeks to explore why parents self-select to participate in a preventative parent training series, their expectations of the series, and the value they place on their participation.

Method

Background

The research was funded by the United States Department of Health and Human Services Affordable Care Act: Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program and internal funds from PATNC. Institutional reviews were conducted and approved by the state health department and through the

university of the lead researcher. The author has no conflict of interest with this research.

Participants

This study used purposeful sampling procedures to identify parents or caregivers that participated in the WYDM parent training series. Seventeen sessions of the WYDM series were offered in two midwestern United States at 13 different locations. Out of the 13 sites, 7 were in urban areas, 2 in suburban areas just outside of a large city, and 4 in rural. All participants for the WYDM series were recruited by Parents as Teachers (PAT) organization, a state health department, and a Latino community agency through flyers, advertisements on social media and radio and recommendations by friends. IRB approval was gained by the state health department and the university of the lead researcher. All participants of the WYDM were voluntary. The 17 different offerings of the WYDM spanned a year in time and a variety of parent educators offered the series utilizing the standardized WYDM curriculum. The series was offered in two different midwestern states. State A had 66 participants begin the series and 47 completed the series with a 29% attrition rate. State B had 62 participants begin the series and 46 completed the series with a 26% attrition rate. Attendance was maintained at each of the 6 meeting sessions and the attrition rate only reports those that did not attend the last meeting of the series. 93 participants in all completed the WYDM series, with 86 participants signing consent forms and completing demographic information. The series was comprised of mothers (N=74; 86%), fathers (N=9, 10.5%), and others, such as grandmothers, grandfathers, and aunts (N=3, 3.5%). 71% (N=61) identified as being married and 49% (N=42) identified as participating in the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program prior to participating in the WYDM series. Out of the 86 participants, 36 individuals were identified by the parent training facilitator to be interviewed after completion of the 6-meeting series. Only participants that were willing and able to be interviewed in English were recruited. Individuals were selected to represent a variety of perspectives varying in gender, number of children, education level, relationship to the child, and level of participation in the series. The individuals were asked by the facilitator of the parent training series if they would be willing to be interviewed over the phone and informed that they would receive a \$50 gift card to a local general store for participation. The 36 individuals signed consent forms to give permission to be interviewed by the

researcher over the phone at the last meeting of the series. All 36 identified participants were then contacted by the researcher by phone. 20 out of the 36 were then interviewed based on availability and willingness to participate. Out of the 16 participants that were not interviewed, the main reason was because of lack of communication and the participant not returning a text or call to be interviewed. Each participant was contacted three times before eliminating them from the study. The 20 participants that were interviewed represented the 12 out of the 17 WYDM offerings. Participants were initially contacted by the researcher by phone to set up an interview and then contacted a second time by phone to be interviewed.

Research design

The purpose of a phenomenological qualitative study is to explore a phenomenon at a deep level to make sense of a shared experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study the phenomenon being explored was parental self-efficacy at the completion of a preventative parent training program called What You Do Matters (WYDM). Transcendental phenomenology includes bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) the researchers' prior experiences to have a fresh perspective of the phenomenon. As a self-efficacy researcher and parent, it was important for the interviewer to acknowledge this and attempt to bracket any preconceived notions. A social constructivist approach of interpreting the participants in the series and constructing meaning of their shared experiences was used as an interpretive framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ontologically the participants can have varied perspectives after the completion of the WYDM series and it is appropriate to use the phenomenological approach in exploring the research questions. Further the epistemological assumption that the researchers make, helps with making sense of these experiences and representing it methodologically and take in to account the axiological beliefs of hearing the voices of the participants.

Procedure

The open-ended questions were developed by the researchers to explore the research questions and to better understand the experience of the participants at the completion of the series. Interviews were all conducted by the lead researcher over the phone and recorded with permission. Interviews lasted 7 to 32 minutes in length with an average length of 14 minutes. All interviews were transcribed and read through for accuracy. Transcripts were read though one

time for clarity and any questions found within the transcripts were followed up by the researcher with the participant with member checking. Only one participant could not be reached for clarification when needed. The clarification was not deemed crucial to the validity of the interview, but more information would have assisted with understanding one of the participant's responses.

Twenty participants were interviewed following their participation in the WYDM series (7 from state A and 13 from state B). Eighteen out of the 20 participants were mothers, one was a father, and one a grandmother. All 20 participants volunteered to be interviewed over the phone by the researcher. Semi-structured open-ended questions were used to guide the interview and explore the participants' perspective and experiences in participating in the WYDM series. The grandmother attended the series with her daughter (who was also interviewed). Four of the mothers and the grandmother have children with identified and/or diagnosed special needs. Two of the mothers identified themselves as military wives (husbands were reported to be active members of the United States military) and live on a military base. Four mothers identified themselves as single and the remaining father and mothers were married (N=16). All participants engaged in the WYDM for voluntary reasons. Variability in the number of children that participants had ranged from 1 child to 5. Five mothers and one father reported having 1 child, 8 mothers reported having 2 children, 3 mothers reported having 3 children, 1 mother reported having 4 children and 1 mother reported having 5 children. Four of the participants identified as being black or African American, 3 identified as Hispanic, and 13 as white or Caucasian.

Data analysis

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for common themes. Transcripts were read through a first time and follow ups were made with participants if needed for clarification and accuracy. Following the validity procedure of member checking, transcripts were read a second time by both researchers for line-by-line deductive coding of the data. Data was coded both initially by hand and a second time using NVivo 12. Reliability strategies of intercoder agreement of 80% was maintained between the researchers (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and memos and a qualitative codebook was utilized to ensure a drifting of codes did not occur during the coding process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A deductive coding structure was used based off the concept of parental

self-efficacy (Coleman & Karraker, 1997) and possible PSE enhancing strategies (Bandura & Adams, 1977). Initial deductive codes used were, positive mastery experiences of the individual, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and mental or physiological experiences (Bandura & Adams, 1977).

Results

From the 20 transcriptions, 133 significant statements were extracted that were clustered in to 3 main themes. Common themes found in the transcripts were, verbal persuasion/affirmation of parenting, sense of community and content.

Verbal persuasion / Affirmation of parenting

The concept of self-efficacy is founded in the research of Albert Bandura (1977) and one of the identified methods of increasing efficacy is through verbal persuasion (sometimes called social persuasion). Verbal persuasion is when one receives affirmation or feedback from others. Important to note that simply receiving feedback does not necessarily increase self-efficacy but rather the individual weighs the value of the persuasion in their head to determine the value of the content and more importantly the source or person who gives the feedback. The relationship of the source can depict the value that we place on the persuasion. Often verbal persuasion is coupled with other self-efficacy enhancing methods such as mastery experiences or vicarious experiences. The power of verbal persuasion is the ability it has in increasing one's likeliness to attempt new strategies or be reflective in one's own current practice (Bandura, 1982). Nine of the 20 participants mentioned verbal persuasion/affirmation in their current parenting practices as being influential in their participation in the WYDM series.

Participant #1, a single mother of a 2-year-old states,

"Some of the stuff that they taught us was ... new, it did help me, because I didn't know a lot of it. But some of it I'd already kind of knew, like reading and everything. ... but the comments that they would ... that would help give me more confidence with the things I already knew..."

Similarly, participant #2 states *"And it made me also feel real good. Some of the things like I should know. Like I was already doing it, and it just was confirmation to me, too"*. Several of the participants made mention of how this affirmation of their parenting practices gave them a sense of accomplishment, pride, or recognition of their overall parenting efforts. Participant #4 discusses how

she learned that the repetition of reading and speaking with one's child is important, and she realized she was already doing this when she states,

"I think it just more reinforced that as any parent, although there's no guidebook of what to do, I kind of do everything I can, And so it just kind of reinforced and reassured me just to go with my gut, and everything we're doing for him is right. And it was just all positive. I like it"

This affirmation that one is making good parental choices and behaviors that are research and evidence-based practices came up in several of the interviews. Several of the parents commented that they did many of the strategies or suggestions from the series already, but the value came from the parent reflecting on their behaviors and recognizing that they were doing this behavior already.

Participant #5 discusses that she felt more confident after participating in the WYDM series because of her ability to reflect on her parenting and receiving verbal persuasion and affirmation that she is doing well as a parent. She discusses this when she shares how she has had to develop a schedule with her autistic son,

"It [WYDM] made me feel like all the things I've done already with my son...like he's on a set schedule...I have a visual aid schedule for him that he sees every day. And I try to keep everything visually...every point of the day so that he's not overwhelmed. It [WYDM] made me feel like a lot that I'm doing is already taking part and good"

One element that is necessary for verbal persuasion or affirmation to be impactful to one's self-efficacy, is the individual needs to value the source in which the information is coming from (Bandura, 1986). Several of the participants stated that they felt welcomed in the learning environment and that the facilitators cared about them. Developing a welcoming, positive learning environment appeared to be imperative to encouraging self-reflection especially about a topic that is personal and sensitive like parenting. Additionally, the environment appeared important to encourage parents to feel and see the value of the program and voluntarily return each week.

Participant #1 states that she at first felt hesitation in the experience when she says, *"I thought that it was OK. At first, I didn't-I was kind of nervous. But then when I got to go into the classes, I really liked it. I enjoyed it. The people were nice. It seemed like they really cared. And they gave out good information"*. When asked why she was nervous she responds *"Well, for one, I've never done anything like that. And I never took my daughter to nothing like that either. Because the only*

programs that she do(es), the teachers comes to the house. So she had never had a chance to interact with different kids that she'd never seen before". Participant 1 touches on a valuable point that for many parents and children, these experiences may be the first type of social interaction they have had with people that are outside of their immediate family or in a setting outside of their home. Many of the children in this study were too young to be in formalized school settings. This unknown stress of how they feel and ultimately what the experience will be like for both themselves (the parents) and the child was mentioned several times by various participants.

Of the nine parents that specifically mention verbal persuasion as a benefit of the program, a common element of relying on the community and making valuable connections to other parents that they could relate to emerged. The dynamics of receiving information from parent-to-parent was mentioned more than the dynamic of program facilitator-to-parent.

Participant #8 sums this up when she stated,

"...having the camaraderie of almost a peer support group and people saying, hey this is what I've tried, or this is where I went wrong. But you know what? None of these mistakes are fatal. We have time to get kids back on track. You're not ruining their lives. And then just to say, this is where they are developmentally, and this is what you can expect. And yes it's going to drive you crazy some days. Here's why. And this is what you'll get through with".

Community

Twelve out of the 20 participants noted that the ability to interact with other parents and see a variety of ages of children was beneficial or impacted their experience. Sense of community can add to verbal persuasion (also known as social persuasion) and would possibly give parents the opportunity to observe other parents which is a vicarious experience (Bandura, 1986). Both verbal persuasion and vicarious experiences can assist with the self-efficacy of an individual (Bandura, 1977).

This sense of community was exhibited when participant #1 stated *"So she had never had a chance to interact with different kids that she'd never seen before. I got to see other parents and then meet new people out there as well".* Participant #7 discusses community in many places in her interview. First, she discusses how she felt a sense of community in participating in the series when she says,

"It was fun to get the babies-those who brought their children with-together. And then to learn from the other parents. Like, there was a mom who is on her fifth baby, and so she really had some good, practical advice. Mike, the guy leading the class, he has a baby right now too. And so, it's nice to know, well, what did you do at this age for this? That was probably - I don't know, can I say that's my favorite part instead? ...So that more of the community Like being with different people. Yeah, just getting together with people with babies and how they are dealing with it...".

Participant #7 continues to discuss the sense of community she felt when sharing how she and a few of the other mothers planned to meet up in the future now that the series was over,

"But the actual class themselves-... community-I think that is nice. Like we're going to continue to meet periodically just to talk about how things are going, and that's nice. I don't know who 's going to show up-but... yeah, it was really fun to see like, there was a 15-month-old baby, and he was the oldest baby in the class. And it was so fun to see- what does he do? And that my baby's going to do that eventually".

Participant #7 is discussing how vicariously she observed other parents and their interactions with babies older than hers. Vicarious experiences can enhance self-efficacy if the individual can relate to the person they are observing (Bandura, 1977). In this case it sounds as if participant #7 felt connected to the other mothers in the series because of the sense of community they built. Several of the mothers mentioned the positive and caring atmosphere they felt which led to a positive community.

Two of the participants reported that the lack of attendance in their WYDM series impacted their experience and they believed that having more parents in the series would have developed a more positive community for exchange of ideas and learning opportunities. The two participants that both mentioned this only had two parents in their WYDM series. Both participants were interviewed and both parents had similar comments. Participant #11 stated:

"The first meeting, there were more parents there and then participation kind of waned. So I wish that more parents had been involved...So there wasn't much to bounce off of experience-wise, but it was fine".

She continues when saying:

"Yeah, so I think it would have been more helpful if there were more parents to bounce ideas off of then. Yeah, I think a bigger group, we'd get more

opinions and more scenarios, different experience depending on the parents have multiple kids, their one kid, different ages. Yeah, that might have been a little different”.

Participant #12 similarly states,

“...there was only one other family that participated, with me and my kids. That's a pretty small amount..., right but then we were missing other people and being able to learn. I might have learned, what to learn from this series by seeing what other people learned”.

In comparison to other participants, participants #11 and #12 had quite different responses and feedback to give about the WYDM series. It is assumed that their experience was different because of the small parental participation in their series. Participant #11 rated the series a 7.5 out of 10 (1 being low; 10 being high) and participant #12 rated the series a 4.5. These ratings were much lower than the other 18 participants of the sample. Participant #11 stated that,

“I would probably rate it [the WYDM series] a 7 or 7.5 if I can give half points. I think I just [INAUDIBLE IN TRANSCRIPT] because I think it would have been more helpful to have more people or more tailored, structured agenda as we got down the lower numbers in a class, but it was definitely worth my time”.

Participant #12 in general had more negative feedback than the other 19 participants in many of her comments, much of which appear to relate back to the lack of community being present. She stated *“...It wasn't really easy for me to learn from honestly... like I got information, but I didn't feel like I got the point of the information, or what to do with it.”* When prompted to expand on what she was looking for specifically she stated *“...what I was looking for that I didn't really get was the parent's role ...”*. Still unclear to the interviewer, the interviewer asked her to clarify further and she states that she wanted more direct instruction,

“Do this, don't do that. If you do this, it will help your child with these developmental things. If you don't do this, or if you do this other bad thing, that at all keep your child from being able to develop. I mean, I don't know but that's what I was looking for. ...If that was there, it wasn't prominent enough for me. ... and somewhat the format, I just didn't get it”.

The value of a positive learning community appears to be a contrast of participants 11 and 12 in comparison to the others interviewed.

Content

Thirteen participants commented on how the content of the WYDM series was beneficial and assisted them in one way or another. The participants made mention of how relevant the content of the series felt to them. Participant #1 stated, *"I liked everything... like they gave out good information. I liked the lady that was teaching the whole thing, because they was given me ...giving me good information to use in the long run for my daughter now and when she gets older. I thought that was really good."* She further states *"it [WDYM series] made me know more about how a child develops and what to do to help your child develop as your child gets older. So I liked that, so I can grow with my child too as well..."*. Participant #2 is a grandmother of a child with special needs, and she discussed how she wants to know as much as she can when she states, *"I'll be trying to learn as much as I can, update on different things because my kids, when they are growing up, they were raised much different"*. She continues when she says *"What I liked about it... it had up-to-date information on what to do with children. I just enjoyed the program. It gave me good information. More information than I had knowledge when my kids were babies, which has been 30 years ago. So they had good information"*. Participant #3 is a mother of 5 children ranging in age from 2 adult children to 16 months and she discussed how the current information has assisted her when she says,

"I know everything changes as we go and there's new information out there even though I was a parent already. You know, for a long time I feel like - I like us to be educated and know what's new and what's different because things change and even the way I look at things have changed from 20 years ago".

Participant #5 is a mother of a non-verbal autistic 3-year-old boy. She attended the WYDM series but did not bring her son to any of the meetings. She discussed how the information about tangible activities was powerful for her to observe and learn to try later at home with her son. She discussed this when she says,

"Even though my son didn't come with me, because he was in school during the time the classes were in session... so I wasn't able to bring him with me to all the different activities. But-just watching them singing the songs, and one lady had like a water bottle and she was spraying people with it because they were singing 'Itsy Bitsy Spider' and it was really fun and cute. And it made me think of it like, well that's a really cute way to sing a song to nay son, when

we're singing "Itsy Bitsy Spider" with a water bottle and spray it and shake little maracas around to make it more fun and interesting for him".

When Participant #5 was asked if she would recommend the series to a friend she states,

"Yes, I would recommend it because it was very beneficial. Like I took my nephew with me to the last two sessions and he was just like, he was learning things that he never knew because he doesn't have kids yet. But for him to just sit there and listen, it was just like- wow! ...Like he didn't know half the things, either. And it was beneficial for him to learn because he can learn to function with my son easier and better. And he was amazed at all the little kids can do and everything. So I would definitely recommend it to anybody that has time and is willing to go".

One of the participants also commented on the value of the written suggestions given in the 'tip sheets'. Participant #7 discussed this when she says *"The tip sheets... the sheets that we could take home... 'here's some specific things to do with your baby at this age to help with such and such'"*.

Seven out of the 20 participants noted that the content was basic information but acknowledged that they still learned from something in the series. Five out of the seven commented that they wished the content would have been more in depth. When asked if there was something specific that was missing, only one participant gave feedback on what they wished they would have learned in the series.

When examining the seven participants that stated that the content was basic, the demographics of the participants was further explored. Two commonalities were found between the participants, income, and level of education. The common demographic of high reported annual income was found amongst the seven. Six out of the seven participants reported annual household earnings of 75,000 or higher (N=4: \$75,000-149,999; N=2: \$150,000 or more). Additionally, participants that stated that content was basic, had higher levels of education level in comparison to the overall sample of those interviewed. Three out of the seven reported having graduate degrees, one reported having a Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.), two had Bachelor's degrees, and one reported some college. There was not a common theme of the seven parents participating in PAT or not. Four out of the seven parents reported not participating in PAT prior to WYDM and three reported participating prior.

Conclusions

Implications for parent training

Parent intervention programs have been found to have positive outcomes for parents and children in a variety of ways. In a meta-analysis of 102 studies that focused on parent intervention trials, specifically on children ages birth to 3 in 33 different countries, common findings of increased parent knowledge, parenting practices, and positive parent-child interactions were significantly found (Jeong, Franchett, Ramos, Clariana, Rehmani, & Yousafzai, 2021). Research demonstrates the benefits of cognitive, language, motor, socioemotional development, attachment, parent-child interactions, and reduced behavior problems as outcomes of participating in parent intervention programs (Jeong et al., 2021). The benefits exist, but how can this information translate in to promoting parents to voluntarily sign up and continue to attend parent training programs? How can parents see the value in a program? What elements of a program promote perceived value to parents? To examine this phenomenon, this study looked at a parent training program, What You do Matters (WYDM) to explore the perceptions of parent participants. In understanding the value and perspective of the parent, programs can be marketed and developed that are both effective and well-received by parents. In this research the overall guiding research question is, what is the experience of parents after participation in the What You do Matters program?

The analysis was explored from a qualitative phenomenological approach by exploring parental self-efficacy (PSE) and listening to participants to hear their various perspectives. Parental satisfaction and perceived usefulness have been explored through quantitative research and findings do show that parents are often satisfied after participating in parental programs (Karjalainen, Kiviruusu, Santalahti, & Aronen, 2020). Through qualitative methods, parent voices can be heard and used to inform further development of a parent training or education programs. Parents need to see the value in the program in order to sign up, participate, and continue to attend each week, these are crucial elements to parent education programs.

In this study it was found that the WYDM series was well perceived by parents for three main reasons, all of which are parental self-efficacy (PSE) enhancing strategies. These reasons included verbal persuasion or affirmation of parenting behaviors, the value of sense of community when learning in a group

setting, and finding value and connecting to the content of the parent education curriculum. This information is not unfounded and new (Butler, Gregg, Calam, & Wittkowski, 2020; Kane, Wood, & Barlow, 2007), but important when designing new programs. It is important that content is accessible to all participants and that parents feel welcome and safe when learning and discussing their parenting skills. Parenting skills can be personal and are not common place to discuss in a public format or an educational setting like a parenting program, but yet so much value can come from reflective discussions and thinking about parenting practices amongst trained facilitators and other parents.

Being well-received and having participants be able to find value is necessary for the learning process to occur. Specifically in this research study, participants were asked to discuss what behaviors they have changed in their parenting since they participated in the WYDM series. Even though responses are self-reported and opinion based, many of the responses were easy to recall following their participation in the program. For example one parent said that she watches her tone and voice with her child by avoiding yelling, another parent said that they are focusing on more consistent scheduling for bedtime routine. All 20 participants that were interviewed were able to respond to this question with an example of positive impact to their parenting knowledge, skills, or interactions with their child. Even if the response is self-reported, this reflective practice of taking content and applying to one's behavior is valuable both during the behavior itself and after the fact (Schon, 1991).

Limitations

Several limitations exist with this study. First, the participants in both the parenting education program of WYDM and those that agreed to be interviewed were voluntary. A diverse perspective could be gained through examining a program that is not voluntary or capturing the perspective of the caregivers that did not successfully complete the program by attending the last session of the 6-meeting format. Only those participants that were present for the last meeting were eligible to be interviewed for the study. Another limitation was that all interviews were conducted in English. Several of the parent education series were conducted in Spanish by fluent Spanish curriculum leaders. Only participants that could be interviewed in English were recruited for this research. Three out of the 20 participants identified their primary language as Spanish and this was disproportionate to the sample of the 93 participants in the

WYDM series. Lastly a limitation exists in the coding analysis being conducted only from a deductive model. This research was looking at parental self-efficacy (PSE) and how these elements were perceived by the parents, but other themes or topics could have been missed by the selected analysis methodology. An inductive methodology of coding could have assisted with ensuring that no themes or pertinent information was missed.

Future research

This research was focused on the parents' perceptions of the WYDM series and their thoughts on various PSE enhancing strategies. There is much research in this area and future research should continue to explore PSE, but expand and see what elements of PSE enhancers are more important to parents in the process of enhancing their parenting skills, knowledge, and positive behaviors. In this study, community was greatly mentioned by participants, further research should explore what elements of community building is essential and how various forms of technology, like online learning and video formats interplay with community building. This research did not explore the individual differences between participants to see what demographic information interplayed with their experience in the parent education program, this would be of value, especially when exploring those that voluntarily sign up and attrition rates. Recruitment and attrition rates of parent education programs is an important angle for research to continue to focus on. Parents need to see value in the program to be capable of learning and at the base level to sign up and continue to attend the programming.

Ethics statement

This study was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of the Research Ethics Committee of Fontbonne University.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest.

Author contributions

H.S. designed the study, conducted the statistical analyses, and wrote the manuscript.

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