

# REFLECTIVE DIALOGUE PARENT EDUCATION DESIGN

## FOCUS ON PARENT DEVELOPMENT\*

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*Parent development as an outcome of parent education is conceptualized. A cognitive theory-based educational design for facilitating parent development and its implementation in 4 parent education sites is described. Preliminary evidence is reported regarding theoretical aspects of parent development and the efficacy of the educational design in producing parent development outcomes. Implications of focusing parent education on complex parent development outcomes are discussed.*

Most parent education programs seek to help parents learn new skills, knowledge, and attitudes, and also offer parents support. Such programs provide parents with information they can immediately apply in their parenting and the sense that they are not alone in their struggles. By emphasizing principles of child development, parenting practices related to problems parents experience, and confidence-building social support, these programs are moderately to largely successful in fostering the changes sought in parents (Anchor & Thomason, 1977; Dembo, Sweitzer, & Lauritzen, 1985; Pinsker & Geoffrey, 1981). An assumption underlying such programs is that more skilled, knowledgeable, and supported parents will be better able to foster their children's development (Powell, 1986, 1988; Weiss, 1988). A substantial body of evidence exists that supports the validity of this assumption (e.g., Dembo et al. 1985; Gray & Ruttle, 1980; Pfannenstiel & Seltzer, 1989; Powell, 1983, 1986; Slaughter, 1983; Yawkey, 1982).

Despite these profiles of success, parent education programs and the outcomes they seek have been criticized. Critics have claimed, for example, that simply providing parents with information about children's development and teaching parenting as a collection of skills is not likely to affect deeper, critical parental perspectives (Bromwich, 1981). Others have pointed out that typical programs are successful with only a narrow range of parents (Howrigan, 1988; Jackson, 1983), that broader individual and family-level outcomes are rarely addressed (Sheehan & Keogh, 1981; Simeonsson, Cooper, & Scheiner, 1982; Travers & Light, 1982; Upshur, 1988; Zigler & Balla, 1982), and that such programs fail to reflect newer, more complex and comprehensive perspectives of family and human development (Newberger, 1980a; Upshur, 1988).

Such criticisms have generated alternative ways of thinking about parent ed-

ucation. These alternative perspectives are typically broader and more comprehensive than conventional ones, focusing, for example, on the entire family system (Noller & Taylor, 1989), self psychology (Brems, Baldwin, & Baxter, 1993; Kohut, 1978, 1982), and parent development (Brooks, 1991; Upshur, 1988). Design and evaluation of parent education based on these newer paradigms require new concepts and new educational and evaluation approaches (Weiss, 1988).

This article explores parent development as an aim of parent education and considers the relevance to parent education of educational applications of cognitive theory. Parent development is conceptualized, a cognitive theory-based Reflective Dialogue Parent Education Design (RDPED) is described, and preliminary evidence regarding parent development and the RDPED obtained from a field study is reported. Interest in parent development as an aim of parent education is based on the assumption that parents who have reached higher levels in their own development have a wider repertoire for dealing with, and more complex ways of understanding, their children, their parenting role, and their parent-child relationships than parents who have not reached these levels (Upshur, 1988; Weiss, 1988). Parents who are more emotionally and cognitively mature or advanced should be better able to support their children's development than parents who are less mature.

### CONCEPTUALIZING PARENT DEVELOPMENT

Use of parent development as a basis for educational design requires that it be clearly and adequately conceptualized. Theorists (e.g., Piaget, Kohlberg) have characterized development as occurring in qualitatively different stages that reflect increasingly comprehensive, complex, and integrated capacities. Two con-

ceptualizations of parental development were selected to undergird the educational design reported here based on substantial or promising evidence for their validity: Parental Awareness (PA) and Interpersonal Interaction Themes (IIT).

#### Parental Awareness

Newberger's (1977, 1980a, 1987) theory of parental conceptions outlines a descriptive, developmental continuum of parental social-cognitive awareness. According to this theory, the parent's conceptions of the child and the parental role represent a cognitive structure of parenthood (Newberger, 1980a). Cognitive structure refers to stable patterns of thought that define how an individual makes sense out of experience and organizes his or her responses to it. As a result of interacting with the environment, the structure of a person's thinking broadens to include a wider array of information and perspectives and also reflects increasing depth and flexibility. Newberger identifies PA as the cognitive structure that parents use in interpreting children's responses and behavior and in formulating policies to guide parental action. PA reflects a growth process that progresses from self-centered egoistic views, to conventionally oriented views reflecting cultural norms, to understanding that individuals are unique and different. The process culminates in an analytic, systems-oriented view of the parent and child as interdependent self-systems (Newberger, 1977, 1980a).

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**Level 1: Egoistic.** At the egoistic level, parents are self-focused and see children only in terms of their effect upon the parent, in terms of the parent's interests and needs. A child is seen as a projection of the parent's own experiences, and in terms of what a child does to the parent. Only the needs and experiences of the parent are considered. The following is an example of an egoistic expression: *I enjoy that she is getting more independent. I can sit down and read a magazine while she is up and about and it's kind of nice. A lot of times she still has to be right there, you know, and I can't just sit to write a letter or pay the bills because she wants to do that stuff too, but it is starting. I'm starting to get a little bit of freedom back.*

**Level 2: Conventional.** At the conventional level, parental perspectives shift from self-centeredness to what is expected by the culture. Parenting is seen as reasoning about issues such as the correct way to discipline or toilet train children. Parents justify their child-rearing beliefs and choices by drawing from tradition and authorities, from their understanding of age-related norms for children's development, and from socially prescribed norms for childrearing. Fulfilling one's role as predetermined by tradition is primary. A conventional level perspective is reflected in the following expression: *For my three year old, I have different expectations than for my one year old. He is beginning to learn about rules, so I have expectations of him to be able to follow rules. As he gets older, you give them more boundaries and privileges. Perhaps use time-outs if necessary to get him to follow rules.*

**Level 3: Individualistic.** At the individualistic level, parents view their child as a unique individual who may be different from the norms. Individualistic-level parents broaden their reasoning about parenting and organize it around identifying and responding to the needs of this particular child. Individualistic parental reasoning is illustrated by the following expression: *I like to play with her with her toys and get involved in some of that imaginative play. She likes me to do that and I have found that a lot of fun. We sit and have wonderful conversations either in play or during the day. It is more fun now that she has started to develop her verbal skills more. She is so different from my son who would not tolerate sitting.*

**Level 4: Analytic.** At the analytic level, parents view their parenting, themselves, and their children as embedded within interacting, mutual systems that influence family, community, and

global relationships. They see themselves, as well as their children, as growing and maturing through the process of parenting. The following is an example of an analytic level expression: *Well, I guess it must be . . . playing some role in the development of this human being. You know, taking responsibility for her is really satisfying—it really is. I think the responsibility of it all is not just food, clothing, and shelter, but all of the other aspects, whether it is her emotional development or physical development. That seems somehow real freeing to me. I have that ability to respond to her and for me to develop, too. I feel that she is really keyed into us and we into her. I still wrestle with that part of letting her go, though. I think it is kind of a big picture transformation. It is real satisfying.*

Each level of Newberger's continuum of parental conceptions is a qualitatively different, more comprehensive, and differentiated way of understanding reality that is believed to build from, rather than discard, the preceding level. Each level reflects increased awareness of the psychological complexity of persons, interdependence among relationships, and of persons and roles as continually interacting and developing. Parents at each successive stage of PA would be expected to be aware of deeper aspects of the child and of more complex interactions between themselves and their child. Greater flexibility in sorting through issues and arriving at resolutions of parenthood tasks is expected to accompany greater awareness. Newberger has found that individual parents' thinking reflects one level of awareness most frequently and adjacent levels some of the time (Newberger, 1987; Newberger & Cook, 1983). In addition, stress, unmet needs of their own, or other circumstances may cause parents' thinking in a particular instance, or at a particular time, to reflect a lower level of parental awareness than they are capable of expressing (Newberger, 1980a).

Newberger (1980a) differentiates Parental Awareness from parental attitudes by the depth of thought involved. PA is assumed to represent an underlying structure of concepts of people and roles rather than more superficial points of view about specific caretaking behaviors and styles. PA should be interpreted as a reflection of what is cognitively and developmentally available to parents as they interpret and resolve conflicts and address tasks inherent in the parent-child relationship. In other words, PA reflects the complexity and flexibility of the underlying cognitive resources a par-

ent has available, not a correct or incorrect mode of thinking.

**Significance and construct validity of Parental Awareness.** Newberger's (1977) work translates more general developmental models of interpretive frameworks (e.g., those of Kohlberg, Piaget, Selman, and Loewinger) into a more specific developmental model of parenting interpretive frameworks. Newberger's research has provided a means for investigating the organization and development of PA, and her own and others' research has provided evidence of its construct validity. For example, Newberger (1977, 1980a) has demonstrated that the continuum of PA levels meets criteria for a cognitive-developmental stage sequence. Flick (1985) has demonstrated that Parental Awareness increased with age in a sample of young mothers ranging in age from 15-20; Newberger has reported similar data for children ages 8-16. PA has also been linked to years of experience as a parent and has been shown to be unrelated to sex, race, and social class (Newberger, 1977, 1980a; Newberger & Cook, 1983). Evidence regarding the relationship between PA and parental behavior is limited but suggestive. For example, differences in PA between small samples of abusive and nonabusive parents have been found (Newberger, 1980a; Newberger & Cook, 1983), and higher PA levels have been linked to parents providing more encouraging and positive stimulation, more accepting behavior, and more responsiveness to their child in distress, and to having a child who is more likely to respond to, and less likely to withdraw, when the parent approaches the child (Flick & McSweeney, 1985).

The significance of PA is supported by other evidence that suggests parental behavior is driven by deep-level conceptual organizations and systems that reflect beliefs about the world, the self, and others. For example, when under stress, parents are likely to function within their deeply held meanings and beliefs even though they may have acquired new parenting techniques and more accurate knowledge of children's development (Belsky & Pensky, 1988; Egeland, Jacobvitz, & Papatola, 1987; Hess, 1981; Putallaz, Costanzo, & Klein, 1993; Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 1992).

**Potential relevance of Parental Awareness for parent education programs.** If PA is related to what parents do regarding their children, and if parents at higher levels of PA have greater capacities for supporting their children's development, then the promotion of PA

development in parent education programs may be a worthy aim (Flick, 1985; Newberger, 1980a, 1987). Whether or not PA can be facilitated through educational means remains a question (Newberger, 1987), but a study by Sandy (1982) suggests the possibility. It has also been proposed that understanding the PA of parents involved in parent education programs may help parent educators to design more appropriate educational experiences (Flick, 1985). Newberger (1980a) suggests that PA supplements current approaches for understanding and explaining parent processes and strengthening parent-child relationships by offering more comprehensive understandings and new insights.

Parent education programs that facilitate the development of PA may have a potentially far-reaching and significant intergenerational impact because children of parents at higher PA levels are likely to acquire more complex perspectives. Parents' perspectives are likely to be transmitted to their children, even without the intent for such transmission. Based on a review of the parent-child interaction literature, Putallaz et al. (1993) conclude:

Parents share not only their love, affection, hostility, nurturance, and neglect with their children, but also their hopes, dreams, cognitions about social action, and social meaning . . . They do so wittingly by instruction and coaching and unwittingly by the direct modeling and enactment of their own implicit social beliefs. (p. 94)

### Interpersonal Interaction Themes

Themes have been characterized in the cognitive literature as deep motivations and interests that generate, organize, and give meaning, pattern, and predictability to a person's priorities, goals, plans, and actions (Galambos, Abelson, & Black, 1986; Schank & Abelson, 1977). Spanning conceptual, motivational, perceptual, and behavioral systems, themes integrate and lend coherence to a person's thoughts, observations, and actions. Interpersonal Interaction Themes (IIT) are a set of constructs widely reflected in the child development, parenting, and parent-child interaction literatures as differentiating parental orientations. Based on observations of parent-child interactions, different researchers have identified similar qualities of parent behavior that appear to influence both parent-child relationships and child outcomes (Brazelton &

Cramer, 1990; Bromwich, 1981; Isabella & Belsky, 1991; Maccoby, 1980). Parents who are sensitive and responsive to their infants; who engage in reciprocal exchange with their child; and who provide supportive environments through the use of developmentally appropriate materials, activities, and experiences enhance their child's development.

The patterns of *sensitivity*, *responsiveness*, *reciprocity*, and *support* were conceptualized in this study as a cluster of related themes that, when reflected in parent-child interaction and in the orientations of parents, encourages children's development. In contrast to these *encourage development themes*, as they are labeled in this study, the child development and parenting research literature refers to other parent-child interaction qualities that limit children's development (Maccoby, 1980). These qualities, referred to in the literature by such terms as insensitive, unstimulating, rejecting, and over stimulating, reflect parental motivations, interests, and goals that are unconnected to the needs of the child. A theme cluster representing these orientations was labeled in this study as *constrain development themes*, which were identified as *insensitivity*, *unresponsiveness*, *intrusiveness*, and *domination*. They reflect qualities of parent-child interaction and parental motivations, interests, and goals that result in parents ignoring, interfering with, or seeking to unnecessarily restrict the actions of their children.

*Sensitivity and responsiveness.* Sensitive parents notice what the child needs and accurately read the child's cues, the signals or messages the child provides (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; McGovern, 1990). Early parental sensitivity to children's needs is predictive of the quality of later parent-child relationships and of relationships children form with other individuals (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bromwich, 1981; Bronfenbrenner, 1991; Matas, Arend, & Sroufe, 1978). Responsive parents provide contingent, consistent, and appropriate responses to their child's cues. In other words, they respond to the child's needs in ways that meet them, changing their approach to fit the child's developmental stage (Clarke-Stewart, 1973). When parents behave in an attentive, responsive manner, their infants are more likely to develop trustful or secure attachment relationships and to experience accelerated cognitive development (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Beckwith, Cohen, Kopp, Parmelee, & Marcy, 1976; Epstein & Evans, 1979; Lamb, Thompson, Gardner, Charnov, &

Estes, 1984; McGovern, 1990; Stevenson & Lamb, 1979).

*Reciprocity.* Reciprocity involves mutual give and take in which both parent and child contribute to and significantly influence their interaction (Brazelton & Cramer, 1990; Bronfenbrenner, 1991). Parents who engage in reciprocal exchange with their child read and respond to the child's cues and, in turn, give signals that the child learns to read (Bromwich, 1981; McGovern, 1990). Reciprocity is reflected when parent and child read each other's cues accurately and are responsive to each other, each influencing the other's behavior (Clarke-Stewart, 1973).

*Support.* Parents support their child's development by providing an environment that is visually and verbally stimulating and enriching and that contains appropriate materials, by trusting children to be capable and competent, by participating in children's activities as a partner, and by allowing children to actively explore even though it might be messy and not very convenient (Clarke-Stewart, 1973; Epstein & Evans, 1979; Gulley, 1982; White & Watts, 1973). Supportive environments provide children with opportunities to develop their capacities, which, in turn, make it possible for them to participate in and benefit from increasingly challenging experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1991).

*Insensitivity and unresponsiveness.* Insensitive parents fail to notice their children's cues, signals, and messages. As a result, they act in ways that are unconnected with, and therefore unresponsive to, their children's needs, interests, and goals (Clarke-Stewart, 1973). Such parents respond only to their own schedules without considering their children's needs (Maccoby, 1980). These parents are emotionally and cognitively unavailable to their children. When interaction does occur, it is limited to brief, superficial encounters regarding routines and schedules. Insensitive, unresponsive parents convey to their children a sense of disinterest, a sense that the child is unimportant (Maccoby, 1980). Infants who experience an unresponsive human environment show signs of apathy, passivity, and depression remarkably early (Brazelton & Cramer, 1990). Children who experience insensitive, unresponsive caregivers during their formative years are more likely to have a troubled adolescence and, when they become parents, to perpetuate a cycle of unmet needs and troubled children from one generation to the next (Bretherton & Waters, 1985; McGovern, 1990). Such children develop a sense of having little control

over what happens to them, which contributes to low self-esteem, lack of self-control, and deep feelings of anger and hostility (Maccoby, 1980).

**Intrusiveness.** Intrusive parental behavior reduces or prevents the child's well-being, autonomy, and self-expression by interfering with or restricting the child's pursuit of his or her own interests and goals and development of his or her own perspectives (Maccoby, 1980). Overstimulation (McGovern, 1990) is an example of intrusiveness. Because the intrusions are in the service of the parent's needs, interests, goals, and perspectives, the parent's actions are not contingent upon the child's responses (Isabella & Belsky, 1991). Parents may reflect intrusiveness when they intervene by providing unwanted help and advice when a child makes an error or encounters difficulty. Intrusiveness in such cases results from an intent to be helpful that is unaccompanied by sensitivity to the other person. Intrusiveness is believed to interfere with a child's sense of being in control, willingness to try a variety of new tasks, and persistence when difficulties are encountered (Maccoby, 1980).

**Domination.** Dominating interactions limit children's development and learning by unnecessarily restricting children's activities through the arbitrary exercise of power and authority over the child (e.g., "Do it because I said so"; Maccoby, 1980). Parent-child interactions are characterized by bargaining, dominance of the parent's goals over the child's, and use of directives rather than suggestions (Maccoby, 1980). If the child does not follow the parent's wishes or defies the parent's position, the parent may use physical punishment. Such interactions serve the parent's needs and interests without consideration of those of the child (Maccoby, 1980). Children who experience such interactions on a consistent basis are likely to have low self-esteem; to be obedient; to have problems establishing relationships with peers; and to lack curiosity, originality, independence, empathy, and internalized moral standards, revealing instead an orientation toward external rewards and punishments (Baumrind, 1975; Maccoby, 1980). Arbitrary power assertion on the part of parents is also related to defiant and antisocial behavior on the part of children (Maccoby, 1980; Patterson & Bank, 1989; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989).

**Significance and construct validity of Interpersonal Interaction Themes.** The significance in children's development of parent-child interaction and the

kind of environment parents establish has been well documented. In addition to the consequences already indicated earlier, patterns and qualities of parent-child interaction have been related to language development and to children's later academic achievement and have been found to be a powerful predictor of children's development across social classes (Bromwich, 1981; Epstein & Evans, 1979).

Clinical work and educational research involving parents suggest that parental expression of encourage development themes increases with the expansion of parents' knowledge of their child, themselves, and children's development and ways to support it (Brazelton & Cramer, 1990; Bromwich, 1981; Cooke, 1988). This work suggests that parent development in terms of IIT may be represented both by a shift in qualities of parent-child interaction toward encourage development themes and away from constrain development themes and by a similar shift in parents' verbal expressions of their motivations, interests, and goals concerning their child.

Viewing Interpersonal Interaction Themes as a model of parent development raises questions about how IIT might relate to PA. Although such a relationship has not been directly explored, suggestive evidence has been reported. For example, Newberger (1977, 1980a) reported that her interviews with abusive parents reflected a lack of sensitivity to their child's perspective. Such parents functioned mostly at the egoistic level of PA (Newberger, 1977; Newberger & Cook, 1983). Flick and McSweeney (1985) reported findings suggesting a link between higher levels of PA and positive qualities of parent-child interaction (e.g., parental responsiveness, acceptance of child, encouragement, positive stimulation). Other clues to a potential relationship come from the parental cognition and parent-child interaction literatures. Parents who are sensitive to their child accurately perceive their child's nature and needs, can more adequately see the world through their child's eyes, and can take into account a broader array of factors that might influence a child's nature and behavior (characteristics of parents at higher levels of PA) than those who see their child only in terms of their own interests or conventional norms (Brazelton & Cramer, 1990; Sameroff & Feil, 1984; Sigel et al., 1992). Parents who can do this more complex mental processing are more likely to engage in parent-child interactions that are supportive of children's development than are parents whose

mental processes do not reflect this complexity.

The relationship between IIT and PA can be theoretically posited as follows. Parents at the egoistic level of PA would be expected to exhibit constrain development themes because of the focus of parents at this level on themselves to the exclusion of consideration of their child. Because sensitivity to children for conventional parents would emerge from an external conception of what children are like, such parents could be expected to be sensitive to aspects of their children that are consistent with developmental norms and societally prescribed patterns and, at the same time, to lack sensitivity to their children's unique qualities and patterns. The most consistent expression of encourage development themes should be reflected by parents at the individualistic and analytic levels of PA, given the capacity of parents at these levels to see and accept another's perspective.

**Potential relevance of Interpersonal Interaction Themes for parent education programs.** There is considerable evidence that the qualities of early parent-child interaction have implications for the long-term nature of the parent-child relationship and for children's development over time. If parent education can facilitate parents' expression of encourage development themes in their early interactions with their child, the quality of the parent-child relationship and children's development may be enhanced. To the extent that IIT and PA are related, themes are a potential avenue through which parent educators might promote the development of PA.

## DESIGN OF PARENT EDUCATION TO PROMOTE PARENT DEVELOPMENT

In order to investigate the potential relevance for parent education of parent development, a design for parent education was developed to promote PA and IIT. Cognitive theory and research provided a source of relevant educational design concepts.

### *Nature of Conceptual Change*

Conceptual frameworks, such as Newberger's PA levels, reflect conceptual structures in which both content and organization are significant aspects (Strike & Posner, 1985). Conceptual change includes modifications in either content or structural organization, or both. New ideas are not merely added to

old ones; in the process of learning, conceptions are transformed (Strike & Posner, 1985). A change from one level to the next in stage theories of conceptual development, such as Newberger's levels of PA, entails reorganization, not simply change in content. A consequence of conceptual structure reorganization is a change in perspective (Mezirow, 1991; Tennant, 1993), for example, a change from a self to other orientation.

Although some degree of conceptual change is presumably the result of a gradual, continuous process, more radical conceptual change is viewed as a difficult and painful process that requires commitment on the part of the learner (Strike & Posner, 1985). Because conceptual frameworks resist change, people are unlikely to make major conceptual changes unless they view their current perspective with some dissatisfaction and believe that less radical changes will not work (Strike & Posner, 1985). Without such dissatisfaction, people are likely to locate their problems outside themselves, leaving their current conceptual structure unchanged (Strike & Posner, 1985). Mezirow (1991) suggests that, for adults, conceptual change is motivated by a disorienting dilemma, a conflict resulting from the awareness of contradictions in one's thoughts or feelings.

The tenacity of conceptual frameworks is believed to arise from their unconscious and emotionally connected nature, and because they relate to a wide variety of phenomena. Conceptual frameworks are both a precondition for, and a product of, experience. Being a product of one's history of experience-based conceptual development, existing conceptual frameworks are rarely arbitrary or altogether unreasonable. They are continuously strengthened and broadened as they are used in interpreting a wide range of further experience (Strike & Posner, 1985). Changing conceptual frameworks involves abandoning or superseding these pervasive, established conceptions in favor of other, more adequate ones. This process is painful because it entails risk and necessitates acknowledging inadequacies in one's past ways of viewing the world.

Even major conceptual change, once triggered, involves a gradual, piecemeal evolution characterized by temporary advances, frequent retreats, and periods of indecision (Strike & Posner, 1985). Each new adjustment requires time and connecting to many different experiences in order to lay the groundwork for further adjustments.

## Conditions That Promote Conceptual Change

Because conceptual frames are frequently unconscious, and because they are emotionally rooted, tenacious, and pervasive, conceptual change is unlikely to result from parent education that does not give special attention to conditions that facilitate it. Such conditions have been identified as including (Champagne, Klopfer, & Gunstone, 1982; Doll, 1977; Hatano & Inagaki, 1992; Strike & Posner, 1985; Thomas, Anderson, Getahun & Cooke, 1992):

*Awareness of one's current conceptions*—becoming conscious of the meanings one holds, one's deep assumptions about oneself, others, and the world.

*Dissatisfaction with one's current conceptions*—seeing current conceptions as contributing to one's problems.

*Support, understanding, respect, and caring from others*—an environment that is psychologically, emotionally, and physically safe, accepting, and unpressured.

*Exposure to alternative ways of thinking, alternative conceptions, alternative meaning frames*—interaction with other people who think with a different perspective from one's own.

*Opportunities for and encouragement of reflection on both one's own perspective and those of others*—coming to an accurate understanding of other perspectives and comparing their reasonableness with that of one's own.

*Valuing of deep understanding*—priorities in the educational setting that emphasize gaining an adequate understanding over superficially covering a wide spectrum of content.

The first two conditions are internal to the learner; the last four are within the environment and are thought to promote the first two. For example, exposure to alternative ways of thinking, alternative conceptions, and alternative meaning frames is thought to produce conceptual conflict ("I hold view A, but there are many things that appeal to me about views B and C; I hold view A, but persons I respect for their wisdom hold views B and C"), which creates dissatisfaction with one's own conceptions ("The view I subscribe to lacks some features I think are or may be important; the view I hold is less adequate than it could be or than I would like it to be"). Opportunities for and encouragement of reflection on both one's own perspective and those of others enable shifts in perspective that produce resolution of internal conceptual conflict (Cham-

pagne et al., 1982; Doll, 1977). For example, sustained dialogue concerning alternative views on regulating children's behavior can bring to light evidence, reasons, and assumptions underlying each, which helps parents who are dissatisfied with their current child behavior regulation ideas to modify them or replace them with ones they view as more adequate. Support, understanding, respect, caring from others, and valuing of deep understanding by those in the educational setting facilitate the risk-taking and persistence that are required for conceptual change to occur (Strike & Posner, 1985; Thomas et al., 1992).

## Nature, Function, and Acquisition of Themes

Because they are broad, overarching, general concepts and principles that allow diverse situations, people, and objects to be related to one another, themes have been identified as a primary vehicle through which people transfer their knowledge from one situation to another and integrate their knowledge, awareness, and actions (Spiro, Vispoel, Schmitz, Samarapungavan, & Boerger, 1987). Themes are believed to generate goals, thereby influencing what a person notices and the goal-focused moves a person creates (Schank & Abelson, 1977). For example, a person oriented toward competition finds ways to compete with others across many different kinds of situations, which may include getting the biggest or best portion of food at the table, a place at the front of a line, the highest grade, or being the fastest car on the highway.

Themes are believed to be constructed by people from experiences that vary in context and specific features but that are similar in thematic principles (Spiro, Coulson, Feltovich, & Anderson, 1988; Spiro et al., 1987). In addition, interpretation by other people of one's experience attaches their meanings to it. In this way, themes can be acquired or internalized from other people—especially if the other people are significant in a person's life (Vygotsky, 1978). Consequently, through the processes by which parents interpret and otherwise mediate their children's experience, parents' themes are internalized by their children.

Cognitive research has suggested that the following facilitate learning at higher, more encompassing, theme levels (Bransford, Vye, Kinzer, & Risko, 1990; Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1990; Spiro et al., 1987; Spiro et al. 1988): (a) extended exposure to problems or situations related to

a theme, (b) viewing of the theme in multiple contexts and situations or cases, (c) generation of problems and problem interpretations by learners, and (d) exposure to alternative interpretations and ideas. Problems and problem interpretations that learners generate reflect learners' themes. Because different learners express different themes, learners are likely to be exposed to alternative interpretations and ideas when they share with each other the problems and interpretations they generate.

### *The Reflective Dialogue Parent Education Design*

The principles and concepts discussed in the preceding sections were integrated into a Reflective Dialogue Parent Education Design (RDPED) intended to support parents' development of parental awareness and interpersonal themes supportive of children's development. The goals underlying the educational design were to support parents in: (a) constructing perspectives grounded in accurate understanding of children's general and individual nature and complex understanding of parent-child relationships; (b) constructing interpersonal themes that center on sensitivity, responsiveness, reciprocity, and support; (c) transferring their learning to different stages of children's development and to varied types of situations; and (d) becoming aware of their own perspectives and themes and implications of these for their parenting practices.

The RDPED was structured in three phases: (a) theme construction, (b) theme elaboration and linkage to existing knowledge structures, and (c) exploration and evaluation of current parenting practices. The following sections describe instructional processes, procedures, and materials that were developed to reflect the principles and concepts outlined in the preceding sections.

*Phase I: Developing awareness.* Phase I was designed to help parents become aware of differences in the features of parent-child interaction reflecting the two theme clusters and begin to either construct encourage development themes or become more consciously aware that such themes already govern their parent-child interactions. In this phase, parents are exposed to *strategically arranged*, 3- to 10-minute, *videotaped cases* of parent-child interaction that reflect the themes. The cases depict the interactions of actual parents and children and are not explained, interpreted, or narrated.

Videotaped scenes that depict the same situation but that reflect different theme clusters are presented in pairs. These scenes are referred to as *contrast sets*. One scene in each pair depicts parent-child interaction characterized by constrain development themes in the context of a play situation involving a basket of toys. The other scene depicts parent-child interaction in the same play situation with the same basket of toys, but is characterized by encourage development themes. By keeping the physical and social situation, the activity, and the age of the child the same across each pair, the contrast in themes is heightened.

A format of *open-ended questioning* was designed for discussion of the contrast sets. The questioning structure supports reflective dialogue and the noticing of patterns that reflect interpersonal interaction themes. The *reflective dialogue* generated by the questions engages parents in the process of problem generation and interpretation and exposes them to ideas and interpretations that differ from their own, two key learning processes believed to facilitate theme-level learning.

The questioning sequence, pursued after each contrast set, has the form of an hour glass. It begins with broad, general, open questions: What was happening here, what did you notice? What thoughts did you have as you viewed the scenes? What were your reactions? Questions then focus on specific aspects of a video segment: What actions did the adult take? What goals do you think the adult had? What goals do you think the child had? How did this action, goal work for the adult? Why? How did this action, goal work for the child? Why? How do you think the child felt? Why? How did the adult feel? Why? Questions then broaden to focus on implications, consequences and conditions: What do you think would happen if these actions and goals would continue? Is it possible for parents to both meet children's developmental needs and address their own goals? Under what conditions—what does it take to do this? What implications do you see in the ideas we have generated about how conditions may affect parents' goals?

Once a sufficient number of contrast sets accompanied by the questioning sequence are experienced for parents to gain a sense of the contrasting themes, cases that vary in situation, age of child, and gender of parent are introduced. These cases are intended to help parents develop appropriately complex understandings of parent-child interaction themes and to avoid overly simpli-

fied understandings. The cases are discussed using selected questions from those used for the contrast sets. Because these cases are more complex, they invite a wider range of contradictions in interpretations. As parents struggle to understand views of other parents that differ from their own, they become more conscious of their own perspectives. When parents' examination of several of these cases reflects a sufficiently complex understanding of the themes, the second phase of instruction is introduced.

*Phase II: Clarifying, organizing, elaborating, and connecting themes.* In this phase, parents label, organize, and connect concepts abstracted from the cases and discussions of them in Phase I, and elaborate and integrate their understanding of themes. Depending on the parent group, this stage is carried out in one of several alternative formats. In one format, parents are asked to individually write down concepts and thoughts that summarize what they have learned during Phase I, and to organize these on a sheet of paper, newsprint, or on note cards in a way that makes sense to them. Then, small groups of parents are asked to combine and organize their individual *concept maps* into a group composite. This reflective dialogue, in which parents share and explain their maps to each other, like that stimulated by the contrast sets and open-ended questioning, confronts parents with views different from their own and facilitates parents' conscious awareness of their own views. This process intensifies conceptual conflict because some resolution of contradictions in parents' concept organizations is needed in order to create the composite map (How can I choose among or synthesize these different and sometimes opposing views into a coherent whole that reflects the contributions of value reflected in each?). Parents' reconstruction of their own understanding is further enhanced as the groups then share their composite concept maps with the whole group and as the similarities and differences in the maps are discussed (There are many different ways to think about this!).

From this point, more complex videotaped cases are introduced. These cases reflect more subtle and mixed expression of themes than those experienced in Phase I. They are also explored in a more learner-directed fashion than that used in Phase I. Because parents are ready to more immediately pursue aspects of the cases that interest or perplex them, they now typically take the lead in directing the discussion. Rather than posing the open-ended questions,

the instructor enters the discussion as a participant when a significant point might be clarified or extended, or when specifically asked a question by the parents. Parents ask their own questions, and also introduce and discuss cases from their own experience. Instead of the central focus they had in Phase I, the videotaped cases in this phase stimulate discussions that pursue a theme or perspective in depth, which become the central focus and learning experience. In these parent-directed dialogues, parents now begin to focus on patterns and problems they can see in their current perspectives regarding their child, their parenting, their relationship with their child, and the consequences of these patterns and problems. Insights emerge regarding the challenges they are experiencing and alternative perspectives they are considering, trying out, or hoping to develop. This increasingly personal focus of the discussions sets the stage for Phase III and for parents' continued processing of their ideas beyond class sessions with persons available to them in their families and neighborhoods.

*Phase III: Linking themes to one's own situation. Exploring and evaluating one's own practices.* Noticing patterns in another's interactions is assumed to be an easier task than noticing them in one's own. It is one thing to watch another parent's interaction and intellectually examine it, and quite another to try to bring one's own hidden perspectives and themes to consciousness, confront elements in them that may be disturbing, and attempt to modify these familiar lenses and construct new ones. Although some integration of learning with personal perspectives is assumed to also occur in the earlier phases, the central intent underlying Phase III is to support the parent in exploring his or her own patterns of parent-child interaction. Purposes of this exploration include becoming aware of the perspectives and themes reflected in one's own parent-child interaction patterns, integrating new understandings with current perspectives, and restructuring current perspectives to reflect more complex and comprehensive ones.

This phase includes a one-to-one instructional format that takes place in each parent's home, or other site during a separate time set aside for each parent. The format for this individualized session is based on a *stimulated recall* procedure used by researchers to study people's thinking (Calderhead, 1981; Cooke, 1988). The 60-90 minute session begins with the parent facilitator creating an informal, supportive atmosphere. The parent is then asked to engage with his or

her child in free play activities for about 15 minutes while the parent facilitator videotapes the interaction. The videotape is then immediately replayed in short segments while the parent and the facilitator watch. At the end of each segment, the facilitator asks the parent to verbalize what he or she had been thinking during the interaction depicted in the segment and to infer what the child was thinking and feeling. The stimulated recall procedure generates a reflective dialogue between the parent and the parent facilitator. At the end of the session, the parent is offered a copy of the tape to encourage reexamination of the interaction and continued reflection.

In addition to the individualized session, exploration of cases in the group sessions also continues as described in Phase II. By this time, however, parents' discussions are deeper than in the earlier phases, focusing more immediately on underlying perspectives, themes, and other abstract principles and concepts, and on connecting these to their own childhood, to other interpersonal relationships in their lives, and to a wide array of contexts and specific situations they experience. These reflective dialogues reveal attempts by parents to understand origins and implications of interpersonal interaction themes they see in their own interactions. They also provide the interpersonal support parents need to be able to acknowledge what they see in themselves and engage in the risky process of change. Through these reflective dialogues, new learning is further integrated into parents' personal perspectives, the stage for transfer of learning across contexts is set, and a self-directed stance toward learning is strengthened.

## FIELD STUDY

A field study was conducted in order to ascertain the contextual validity of the Reflective Dialogue Parent Education Design (RDPED) for parent education programs and audiences. This study also provided an opportunity to obtain preliminary evidence regarding the efficacy of the RDPED in influencing parent development outcomes of interest (PA and IIT), to obtain evidence relevant to the construct validity of PA, and to explore the possibility of a relationship between PA and IIT. The aspects of the field study and findings that concerned PA and IIT are reported here.

Data relevant to PA and IIT were collected at four field study sites. Three of these sites were school district-based adult parent education programs. Two of these served suburban, middle-class

adult parents. The third was an outreach program for parents referred by compensatory programs (such as Head Start) in which their children were enrolled. The fourth site was a university campus infant and child-care center in which a parent group was formed especially for the field study from among the center's clientele.

### *Implementation of the RDPED at the Field Study Sites*

The group of parents involved in the study at each site was formed at the beginning of the field study. Parents in the suburban school district sites learned about and voluntarily enrolled in the RDPED course in the same way they would have enrolled in any school district-sponsored parent education course. At the outreach site, school district staff contacted and arranged for the participation of parents who had been referred to the school district's parent education program, as indicated earlier. At the university site, a flier was shared with all parents whose children received child care announcing the dates and times of the RDPED sessions and inviting parents to participate.

Group RDPED sessions were held once per week and were 90 minutes in length. Ten group sessions were scheduled at the school district sites. Parents at the university site requested a six-group session sequence to accommodate their employment and student schedules. All sessions were taught by the same RDPED project staff member, who had 3 years of experience with the project and its design development and who had been the instructor for the piloting of the RDPED at two of three sites similar to those involved in the field study.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Data collection instruments and procedures were piloted at three sites prior to their use in the field study. Data from these sites were used to pilot data analysis procedures and for training the researchers in the coding procedures. Data regarding change in PA and IIT were obtained through a semistructured Parental Awareness Interview (Newberger, 1979, 1980b). This interview was administered during the month prior to parents' participation in the RDPED and was repeated during the month following the final group session. In this interview, parents are asked to describe their child, what they enjoy about their child, what they do not enjoy about their child, what parenting is like for them (what about it is satisfy-

ing, what about it is difficult), the sources of their ideas about parenting, what children need from their parents, how parents know what children need, and what goals they have for their children. Each interview took approximately 90 minutes to complete. All of the interviews were conducted in parents' homes by the same project staff member and were audiotaped. Completed interviews were transcribed, and transcriptions were segmented and coded for PA and IIT. Procedures recommended by Newberger (1979, 1980b) were used as a guide in segmenting the transcripts by topic and in coding the segments for level of PA. Inter-rater coding reliabilities of .88 to .96 (Cook, 1979; Flick, 1985; Newberger, 1979, 1980a; Newberger & Cook, 1983) and an internal consistency coefficient of .81 (Cook, 1979; Newberger, 1979, 1980a, 1980b; Newberger & Cook, 1983) for the coding documentation for the interview have been reported. Interview segments were then coded based on which of the eight IIT was most predominantly reflected. Segmentation and coding were done by three researchers using a procedure in which the code assigned to each segment was negotiated among the researchers. For each pre- and post-interview, the proportion of segments coded at each level of PA was calculated. Likewise, the proportion of segments that expressed encourage development themes and the proportion that expressed constrain development themes were calculated. Mean proportions of segments at each level of PA and of encourage development and constrain development themes were calculated for participants who completed both interviews. The *t* test (one-tailed) for correlated data was used to compare pre- and post-means.

Ratings of parent-child interaction were completed in order to explore the construct validity of PA. The videotape of each parent made during the Phase III individual session provided a record of parent-child interaction. The interaction on these tapes was rated on eight qualities (enjoyment, sensitivity to child's interest, responsivity, acceptance/warmth, effectiveness, pace, supportiveness, and nonintrusiveness) using a 5-point descriptive rating scale. The eight qualities scale was a shortened version of the Parental Behavior Rating Scale (Mahoney & Powell, 1986), which includes 12 dimensions. Ratings were completed by two of the same researchers who coded the interviews using a procedure in which the rating was negotiated between the researchers. A parent's ratings on the eight qualities were summed for a total rating (the higher the rating, the

more developmentally supportive the interaction). Using the level that characterized the majority of a parent's pre-interview responses as the parent's overall level of PA, a mean total parent interaction rating was calculated for parents at each level of parental awareness. A one-way ANOVA was used to compare these means.

The hypothesized relationship between PA and IIT was explored by calculating the mean proportion of encourage development theme responses and the mean proportion of constrain development theme responses in the pre- and post-interviews for parents at each level of parental awareness. A one-way ANOVA was used to compare these means to see if parents at different levels of PA expressed significantly different proportions of encourage or constrain development themes.

### Findings and Discussion

*Demographic characteristics of field study participants.* A total of 24 parents, including 22 mothers and 2 fathers, enrolled in the RDPED at the four field study sites. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 39 years. Eight middle-class mothers whose educational levels ranged from some college to a master's degree comprised the two suburban field study sites; half of these mothers had completed a baccalaureate degree. The outreach and university sites each included 3 mothers and 1 father. Four low-income parents comprised the outreach site; all 4 of these parents had completed high school requirements and 2 had completed a technical or community college program. Two parents at the university site held graduate degrees; 2 were currently enrolled in university degree programs. No parent had more than 2 children, and all children of parents involved were infants or preschoolers. One outreach site parent was African American; all other parents were White.

*Efficacy of the RDPED.* The efficacy of the RDPED in influencing parent development outcomes was explored by examining change from pre- to post-interviews in proportions of interview segments coded at the various levels of PA and for encourage development and constrain development themes. Interview segments illustrative of those coded for each level of PA are indicated below. These were all responses to the question, "What is hard about parenting?"

Analytic response: *Well, I do worry very much about the whole, societal kinds of things and pressures and ex-*

*pectations, how for her as a female quick to be stereotyped in terms of what is right for girls and what is right for boys. I'm concerned about that. Also, in my youth the whole drug notion, where there was almost some idea that recreational use of drugs and alcohol would be a social problem that might be resolved—and now within 15 years it has become a very serious problem in the United States. I don't think that is all of a sudden going to be eradicated. So, the wrestling of the whole drugs and the limits on her as a woman, as well as I think some of the limits with her Hispanic background, so I am concerned with that for her. That kind of influences how I try to interact with her and the kind of a setting I want for her.* (Note: This child was adopted.)

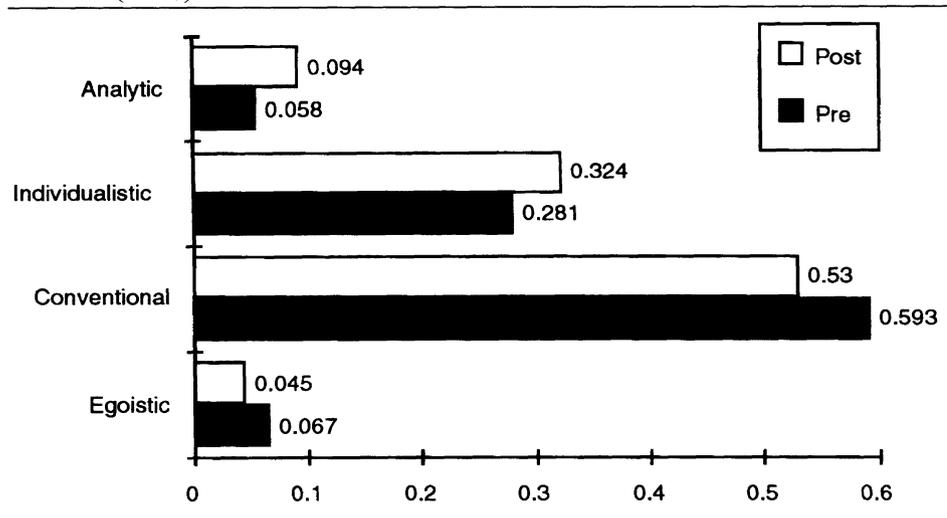
Individualistic response: *It's hard when she becomes frustrated by not being able to do something for herself. That becomes frustrating for me, too. But we try to work things out together. I try to listen to her, to see things from her point of view, and understand why she may be feeling that way.*

Conventional response: *They get out of this difficult stage. I think, and I know this, because I was a daycare person. When they get to be three or four they are a little more independent, they can bathroom themselves, they can dress themselves to a point and they are not as much physical work, the carrying. They are holding your hand and there is more of a verbal exchange in a lot of ways. There are a lot more motor skills they can handle.*

Egoistic response: *Well knowing that it is a 24-hour-a-day, 7-days-a-week job that you can't just pick up and go like you used to, there is a lot less freedom and when they are cranky and crabby and you wish you could just go do something else or just have them stop. I guess that's frustrating.*

Figure 1 portrays the change in the mean proportion of interview segments coded at each level of PA for the 17 field study participants who completed the RDPED sessions and both the pre- and post-interviews (during the 4-month field study, half of the participants in the outreach group had either moved or had changed employment situations and a few parents at the suburban sites went on extended vacations, which precluded their completing program participation). As Figure 1 indicates, parents' post-interview responses reflected lower proportions of egoistic and conventional segments and higher proportions of individualistic and analytic segments relative

Figure 1. Change in mean proportion of interview responses coded at each level of parental awareness ( $n = 17$ ).



to their pre-interview responses. The pre- to post-change was significant for conventional level segments ( $t[16] = 2.09, p = .05$ ), but not for the segments coded at other PA levels.

The following interview segments are illustrative of those coded for each of the eight themes. The question that elicited each response is also indicated.

*Encourage development themes.*

**Support.** Q. What do you enjoy doing with Tommy? A. *He is really fun to be with. It is fun because everything is so new and everything is so wonderful, a blade of grass, the sidewalk, rocks. Even now, we have been saving empty grocery containers, and the lids from the milk and juice containers, syrup bottles, and he does pretend play which he wasn't doing before. He stirs them up and moves them around and he has a little cart with the groceries in and he knows what they are for the most part. He opens the boxes and pours them into things and everything gets pretend syrup on it.*

**Reciprocity.** Q. How would you describe a good parent-child relationship? A. *I think it would be a patient relationship, that both of us would be patient with one another and kind of willing to listen. Sometimes I worry that I don't listen closely enough to Lisa, to what she is trying to tell me, so you know, I wish sometimes I had a little more patience to listen and I guess I would want her to do that with me too. You know, respectful, I guess respectful of the differences between the two of us.*

**Sensitivity and responsiveness.** Q. What are some things that Lisa is doing? A. *She is struggling now with getting*

*her words out. She'll get going and go pffft and say, "Mom, help me," so I will say, "What you can do is sit down and take a deep breath," and then we can try again. She now can reach the pedals on her trike but she can't figure it out and that has been frustrating because she wants to make it go, and I've been working with her to try to teach her how to do it.*

*Constrain development themes.*

**Domination.** Q. What do you enjoy doing with Amy? A. *Everything. I like to teach her things. I got her coloring books, reading books, and we play games. I have had a very hard time with Amy and in the long run it was all worth it because she is so good. She is so good now, she listens. I mean sometimes I had to warn her. I'd just sit down and say, "Hey, if you're not going*

*to do something, then you can either sit there for 15 minutes or you get a slap and you can't do nothing all day, just stay in the house." Half the time she would just stay in the house.*

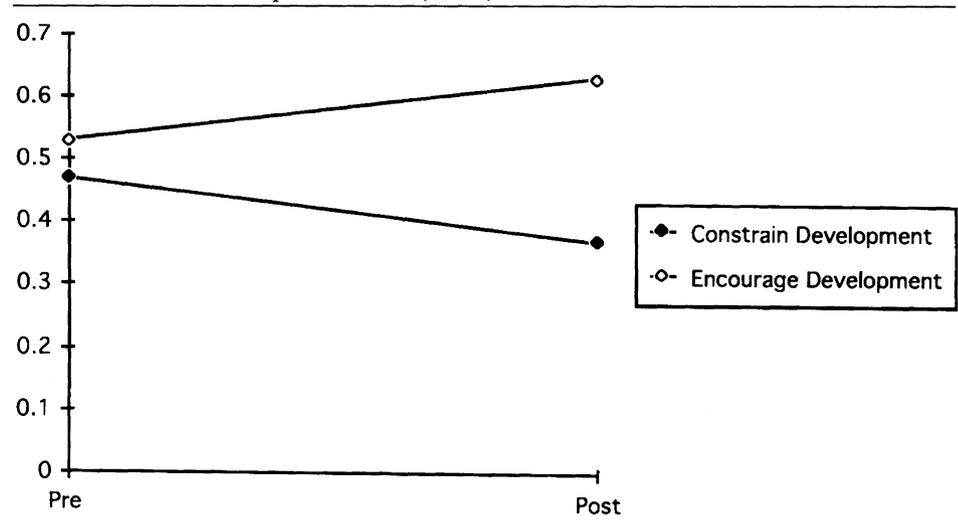
**Intrusiveness.** Q. What are some things you don't enjoy? A. *She's got a strong will. If she wants to do something, she is head strong she is real hard to steer into something else, so I don't like bringing her in from outside because she doesn't like that. She'll kick and yell and scream. She doesn't like it in the car. She will kick and scream there, too. She wants to be doing something.*

**Insensitivity and unresponsiveness.** Q. Is there anything else about Danny that might have changed? A. *Sleeping patterns are the same—sometimes I use my Walkman so I can't hear him cry. It's like the pressure, I don't know, I don't really like it, to hear him crying. I can't relax. Then I put my headphones on. But I still can hear it anyway.*

Change in mean proportion of interview segments expressing constrain development and encourage development themes is graphed in Figure 2 for the same participants as reflected in Figure 1. As reflected in Figure 2, responses reflecting encourage development themes (.53 pre, .63 post) increased ( $t[16] = 3.06, p < .01$ ) and responses reflecting constrain development themes (.47 pre, .37 post) decreased ( $t[16] = 3.06, p < .01$ ) from pre- to post-interviews.

**Construct validity of PA.** Whether PA level is related to parental behavior was the construct validity question pursued in the analysis concerning the parent-child interaction data. Mean ratings of parent-child interaction for parents at

Figure 2. Change in mean proportion of interview responses expressing encourage development and constrain development themes ( $n = 17$ ).



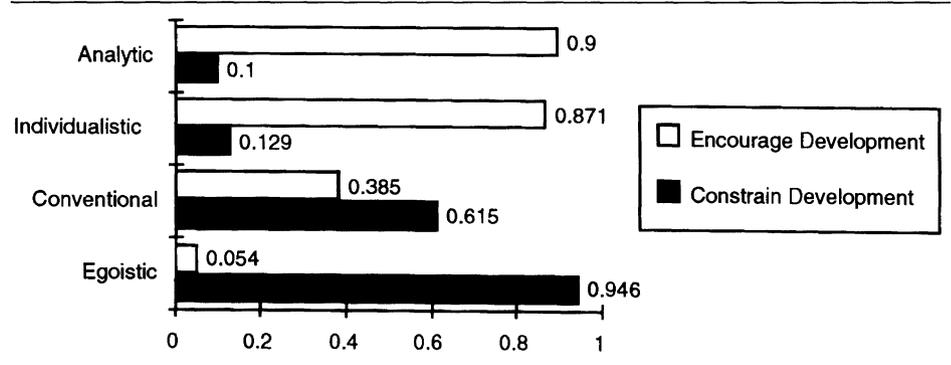
different levels of parental awareness as determined by the pre-interviews were: egoistic, 7.50 ( $n = 2$ ), conventional, 24.75 ( $n = 12$ ), and individualistic, 36.00 ( $n = 3$ ). This rating for the one analytic parent was 37.00. Higher parent-child interaction ratings reflect more developmentally supportive interaction qualities (i.e., more sensitive, responsive, accepting, supportive, nonintrusive interactions). A one-way ANOVA used to compare the three mean ratings revealed significant differences ( $F[2, 14] = 5.82, p = .01$ ). Parents at higher levels of PA had higher interaction ratings compared to parents at lower levels of PA (comparisons of mean interaction ratings for parents at the various PA levels were as follows: egoistic and individualistic parents,  $t[31] = 7.93, p = .004$ ; egoistic and conventional parents,  $t[12] = 2.33, p = .038$ ; conventional and individualistic parents,  $t[13] = 1.84, p = .089$ ). These findings, although limited, are supportive of the construct validity of PA as related to parents' behavior.

**Relationship between PA and IIT.** A one-way ANOVA used to compare mean proportions of pre-interview segments reflecting encourage development themes for parents at individualistic, conventional, and egoistic levels of parental awareness revealed significant differences in the patterns of theme expression for parents at these different levels of PA ( $F[2, 20] = 17.80, p < .001$ ). Because there was only one analytic parent, this parent's data (and, consequently, the analytic level) were omitted from this analysis. The same analysis using the constrain development theme data yielded identical parameters. As Figure 3 indicates, the proportion of interview segments reflecting encourage development themes was higher and the proportion of interview segments reflecting constrain development themes was lower for parents at each progressively higher level of PA. The systematic pattern of association between parents' PA levels and the kinds of themes that predominated in their interviews suggest that PA and IIT are related. A similar analysis using the post-interview levels of parental awareness and post-interview theme responses revealed a similar relationship ( $F[1, 14] = 27.51, p < .01$ ).

## IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preliminary evidence obtained in the field study is suggestively supportive regarding efficacy of the RDPED in promoting development of PA and encourage development themes. The data regarding change in PA and IIT are in

Figure 3. Proportion of pre-interview responses expressing encourage development and constrain development themes for one analytic parent and mean proportions for parents at individualistic ( $n = 4$ ), conventional ( $n = 16$ ), and egoistic ( $n = 3$ ) levels of parental awareness.



the direction that would be expected if the RDPED was a facilitating factor. Statistical results should be interpreted with caution, however, due to the small sample size. An experimental design involving a control group is needed in order to conclusively determine that the shifts in PA toward more complex awareness and in IIT toward encourage development themes were facilitated by parents' experience with the RDPED. It should also be noted that middle-class parents comprised the sample from which these data were obtained.

Regarding the construct validity of PA, the field study data are supportive of a link between PA and parental behavior. These findings add to the very limited exploration of links between PA and parental behavior involving normative populations and directly observed behavior.

Field study findings suggesting that PA and IIT are related raise both methodological and conceptual questions. Using the same interview segments to determine both IIT and PA may have resulted in an artificially high relationship between the measures of the two constructs. If, however, the relationship is not a methodological artifact, conceptual questions of whether PA and IIT may overlap sufficiently to be considered the same construct, or whether they are two separate but related constructs, are raised. There is the possibility that the conceptual structures underlying PA (a cognitive structure) generate IIT (motivational structures that have conceptual aspects and perceptual and behavioral implications), that motivations underlying IIT generate PA, or that PA and IIT both emerge from a common origin. The field study might be viewed as reflecting all three facets of themes, even though their conceptual aspect was what was directly coded in the interview data. Construction of themes by field study parents during the RDPED in-

struction depended heavily on the perceptual aspects of themes, because parents had to recognize the themes in the videotapes of parent-child interaction they were asked to view. The behavioral aspect of themes might be considered to be reflected in field study parents' behavior during interaction with their child. The integrative nature of themes may be revealed in the relationship of both the behavior ratings and the interview expressions of themes to PA.

The wide-span nature of themes in which concrete, behavioral representations are linked to highly abstract concepts gives themes special instructional value. Themes appear to be a potential avenue through which education might reach learners' deep-lying motivational and conceptual structures. Whether or not themes can be considered developmental phenomena needs much more exploration, but the shift from constrain development to encourage development theme expression evident in the field study data suggests that themes change with time and/or experience. In addition, the relationship between PA (for which a degree of validation as a developmental construct exists) and IIT found in both the pre- and post-interviews is also suggestively supportive of themes as a developmental phenomenon.

Themes are also potentially useful in evaluating program outcomes. For example, if the Parental Behavior Rating Scale reflects behavioral expression of themes as suggested above, change in parents' IIT might be detected by examining change in qualities of directly observed parent-child interaction. The focus on what parents do with their children is an advantage of such an approach. In addition, to the extent that different qualities of parent-child interaction may reflect different levels of PA (as the field study data suggest), change in ratings of parent-child interaction might

serve as a proxy measure for documenting change in PA as an outcome of parent education. This approach would offer a decided advantage over use of the Parental Awareness Interview in ongoing evaluation of parent education programs, because the personnel preparation required for analysis of interview data is extensive and interviews are very time consuming to administer and score. Without a clear and explicit connection to parent development constructs, however, ratings of parents' interaction behavior may reflect little more than the standard current approach of measuring parent behavior and skills.

Evaluating parent education programs that are focused on more complex perspectives of family and human development is not likely to be a simple and inexpensive endeavor. Whether outcomes of interest are PA, IIT, other kinds of parent development, or other types of complex outcomes, more sophisticated evaluation tools than are presently typically used in evaluating parent education programs will be needed to assess program efficacy. Even if needed tools are available, special personnel may be required to administer, score, and interpret the data they generate. Although the Parental Awareness Interview may be a reasonable tool for use with smaller clinical populations and in clinical settings where personnel who have the needed skills are likely to be available, its use with larger numbers in educational settings may be too costly for most program evaluation budgets. In sum, although PA is a useful construct in designing parent education, and its direct measurement is also useful in research on parent education, its feasibility as a formally assessed outcome in ongoing program evaluation is limited at present.

The parent development concepts underlying the RDPED aid understanding of why parents may continue to parent in ways that are familiar even though they may be dissatisfied with what they are doing and possess knowledge of alternative parenting practices. Simply knowing something as a fact, without its integration within one's motivational, conceptual, perceptual, and behavioral systems may have little impact on how one thinks, and even less on how one acts. Although experience with the RDPED has been encouraging, it should be noted that educators are only just in the process of learning how to facilitate theme-level learning and promote conceptual change as an educational outcome. Much more needs to be learned. Cognitive theory and research, as illus-

trated here, are a potential source of such understanding.

Implications of using field-based research are reflected in the field study. Although field-based research offers clear advantages in terms of contextual validity, distinct disadvantages are also evident. In this study, although parents were interested in learning about parenting, as volunteers, they were not willing, understandably, to reorganize their lives in order to participate in research procedures if those procedures did not fit with their schedules and plans (e.g., an extended winter vacation). Members of the outreach group experienced instability of residence and employment within a very brief time span, which affected their program participation and the opportunity to collect program outcome data. Despite special supports provided to facilitate parents' participation (e.g., bus transportation to sessions, child care at the program site, the program site located in parents' residential area), parents' participation was affected by factors beyond the control of program staff. These factors present a challenge for any educational program and for research and evaluation regarding it, not to mention the challenges they pose for parents themselves.

If parent development is to be a viable outcome of parent education, research regarding its conceptualization and documentation is needed. Research is needed that extends theoretical understanding and empirical evidence regarding PA and IIT as aspects of parent development that have potential as outcomes to be sought in parent education. In addition, studies that explore relationships between PA and parental behavior should be conducted with normative populations using samples that are distributed across all PA levels. Research that extends understanding of relationships between PA and IIT would contribute to resolving issues and exploring possibilities raised here concerning their use in evaluation of parent education. Such research will need to involve the development of approaches for documenting the multiple aspects of themes.

Future research regarding the RDPED should include qualitative studies that explore parents' experience with the RDPED and their meanings of parent development. Evidence regarding the efficacy of the RDPED in promoting parent development should also be sought through experimental studies that compare the RDPED in terms of parent development and child outcomes with alternative parent education approaches and with no parent education. These studies should also compare tra-

jectories of the outcomes over time, beyond the end of parents' participation in parent education, and involve larger groups than those reflected in the field study and diverse parent education audiences (e.g., father groups, groups of varying ethnic backgrounds).

Longitudinal, cross-generational studies that provide evidence regarding assumed long-term benefits accrued by programs focusing on complex outcomes, such as parent development, are needed. Evidence is needed regarding the links in the chain of logic that suggest such benefits. In terms of the RDPED, for example, evidence is needed that clearly links the RDPED to parent development outcomes (such as PA and IIT), parent development outcomes to qualities of and patterns in parent practices and parent-child relationships, and qualities and patterns in parent practices and parent-child relationships to child outcomes (this link has been established for IIT but not for PA).

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## Announcement

The National Council on Family Relations wishes to announce that **Jeff Dwyer** is the next editor of *Family Relations*, beginning with the January 1997 issue.

As of May 1, 1996, manuscripts should be submitted to:

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