

The Universal Blueprint™ Model for Effective Parenting and Parent Educator Training

An Evaluation Study of *The Parent's Toolshop*

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INTRODUCTION

In 1996, there were more than 300 known parenting curricula, at least 1,000 books on parenting, and probably in excess of 7,500 designs being used in 50,000 programs.¹ Until the 1990s, there were few guidelines parent educators could use to evaluate the content and effectiveness of these resources.

The Parent's Toolshop: The Universal Blueprint for Building a Healthy Family is a book that serves as the foundation for a comprehensive parent education program. Parent's Toolshop programs teach parents and family-service professionals a decision-making model and practical skills for preventing or effectively responding to child care challenges involving children ages 1-18. Parent educators can use this model as a process-based skill-building curriculum (Doherty's "level 4"²) and guide for developing and teaching a variety of parenting programs to diverse populations in multiple settings and formats.

This evaluation study details the findings of the Parent's Toolshop program model. It references a statistical analysis of outcome measures compiled for Parent's Toolshop programs and recent studies and guidelines to answer the following questions:

1. **Is the content of Parent's Toolshop programs complete and effective?** Does it meet the guidelines for what effective parent education programs should teach?
2. **Are the Parent's Toolshop program's evaluation methods sound?** Does it use multiple direct and indirect measures that are qualitative, qualitative, process and outcome-focused?
3. **Is the Parent's Toolshop model effective?** Do parents improve their parenting skills? Can they devise individualized responses and solutions in their own families? Will they use these skills to improve non-parenting relationships? Is this model effective with and appropriate for diverse populations?
4. **Are Parent's Toolshop instructors, called "Certified Parent's Toolshop Tour Guides" (TGs), adequately prepared to teach these parent education programs?** Does the program and instructor training and certification process adequately screen, evaluate and train parent educators?

THE NEED FOR ANOTHER PARENT EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The author of *The Parent's Toolshop (TPT)* is a licensed social worker and CFLE with over twenty years experience. She and the parents who attended her early parenting classes (1986-1992) encountered 12 recurring problems with the parenting resources available at that time, including the following:

- Some taught quick-fix methods that were ineffective long-term or were simply outdated.
- Most discussed only one topic, skill, developmental stage, or type of relationship.
- Good ideas and skills were dispersed throughout countless resources, but no one book had them all.
- Skills were presented haphazardly, which was confusing for parents and impeded their learning.
- There were few guidelines for *when* it was best to use certain skills.
- Some resources were so culturally-specific they were inappropriate to use with diverse populations.

The author of *TPT* needed one resource she could use with diverse populations that addressed or resolved these frustrations. The resulting fourteen-year process of research, development and field testing produced *TPT* and its unique "Universal Blueprint™" decision-making model.

EVALUATION OF THE PARENT'S TOOLSHOP'S CONTENT

The Structure of The Parent's Toolshop

The Table of Contents (see Appendix) shows the general skill areas *TPT* teaches. The theoretical foundation of the Universal Blueprint™ decision-making model combines the teachings of Gordon, Dinkmeyer & McKay, Covey,* Dreikurs and Nelsen.* Each chapter defines terms, summarizes the philosophy, describes how and when to use each skill, shows examples of skill applications at several childhood developmental stages and ends with a summary page, practice exercises and suggested answers. (If this is a hands-on workshop, participants can practice using the Universal Blueprint™ model.)

Criteria for Choosing Core Content

The author screened and tested all advice prior to its acceptance into the book. Her criteria was consistent with the recommendations of Matthews & Hudson (2000)³ that parent education content should be founded on sound theoretical principles and have long-term evidence of effectiveness. *TPT* references selected teachings of dozens of authors, including: Ames/Ilg, Coloroso*, Curran, Ellis, Faber/Mazlish, Fay*/Cline, Kohn, Popkin . . . and more.

Evaluating the Content

The evaluation study compared the content of *TPT* with recent guidelines that identify important content areas effective parenting programs should teach. *The Parent's Toolshop book* teaches 25 of the National Extension Parent Education Model's⁴ (NEPEM) 29 "critical parenting practices." Instructors integrate the remaining 4 practices by assessing the individual parents or parent groups' needs.

Presenting the Content ~ Program Formats

All Parent's Toolshop programs teach parents a "balanced" (aka "democratic") parenting style and effective practices. Through relationship-building, instructors determine the inter-parental, familial, and societal factors that may be influencing each parent's behaviors and child's adjustment, as well as the impact of family structure and household composition (Demo & Cox, 2000)⁵.

Parent's Toolshop instructors have implemented Parent's ToolshopSM programs with 17 of the 19 program focus issues identified in a 1998 University of Delaware (U.D.) literature review⁶ and in formats that fit all 4 categories of parent education programming identified by Cheng, Gorman & Balter (1997)⁷

Targeting the Content ~ Programming for Diverse Populations

Parent's Toolshop instructors regularly use this model with diverse populations, including all 12 "at-risk populations" identified in the U. D. literature review and 22 of the 24 "settings and population groups" listed in the U. D. study and NEPEM.

ASSESSMENT OF THE PARENT'S TOOLSHOP EVALUATION METHODS

Evaluation Methods

Parents Toolshop instructors use a pre/post outcome-focused skill assessment tool (see Appendix) and multiple evaluation methods that meet Matthews & Hudson's (2000) standards for evaluating parent training programs. These tools were developed by the author and a PhD evaluation consultant for the

* Authors' names with an asterisk next to them have endorsed *The Parent's Toolshop*.

United Way of the Greater Dayton Area (UWGDA), following steps now recommended by the National Network for Family Resiliency⁸ (NNFR). The author tested the tools through the Families Count Project (FCP) of Catholic Social Services of the Miami Valley (CSSMV). Together, these tools provide direct and indirect evaluations of quantitative, qualitative, process and outcome measurements, consistent with NNFR recommendations.

Results

This evaluation study only included outcomes for Parent's Toolshop full-length parenting classes (a 10-24-hour series) provided by 7 instructors through the Families Count Project (FCP) from 1992 to 2000. Of the 787 participants who attended FCP programs, 85% successfully graduated. Their average pre-class skill rating was 5.45 on an 11-point scale, in the "Equally Skilled and Unskilled" range. The average post-class skill score was 7.92, in the "More Skilled than Unskilled" range, for an average improvement of 2.47 points. In participant evaluations, 83% rated the program "excellent," 100% rated it "good" or "excellent," 96% said they learned new information and 100% said they would recommend the program to others. Of the parents who had custody of their children, 100% said they successfully used the skills with their children and 97% said they had used the skills with other children or to improve adult relationships. During six-month follow-up evaluations, of which 76 parents (35%) participated, the average skill assessment score *increased* to 8.96, in the "Very Skillful" range, and 67% reported improvement in their memory and use of the skills or in the quality of the parent-child relationship.

When comparing mean skill improvement outcomes (difference between pre and post scores) between programs for parents of Tots (1-5), Tweens (6-12) and Teens (13-18), using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), results showed no significant variances.

Demographics

The target market for the earliest FCP programs was an inner-city impoverished Appalachian-culture neighborhood, but programs were open to the public and received referrals from court-affiliated agencies. Demographic data consists of annual counts reported as percentages of all participants and shows outcome results represent diverse populations. Since there are not individual demographics for each outcome result, it was not possible to calculate any variances (ANOVA) between demographic groups.

EVALUATION OF THE PARENT'S TOOLSHOP MODEL

The Parent's Toolshop model meets all 8 "underlying principles" that shaped the NEPEM model and all 4 "elements of program development" proposed by Riley (1994)⁹. All Parent's Toolshop programs meet 5 of the 8 "principles of successful parenting programs" identified by Riley (1994). The remaining 3 principles are met when programs have a specific format or serve targeted populations.

ASSESSMENT OF THE PARENT'S TOOLSHOP INSTRUCTOR TRAINING PROCESS

The instructor certification process was developed to maintain quality programming and consistent representation. It is overseen, maintained, evaluated and revised by a team of parent educators who serve on the Tour Guide Standards & Practices (TGSP) advisory committee. The author and a TGSP liaison are involved with each candidate throughout the certification process, which involves an applicant's screening, home-study pre-certification training (learning the curriculum content), 15-hour instructor certification training (learning effective group facilitation and program marketing skills) and a probationary period (practicum internship).

Assessing Instructor Capabilities

Throughout this multi-step training/certification process, the author and the TGSP committee assess the knowledge and skill areas identified by the University of North Texas' "Core Competencies¹⁰," which consist of 10 core knowledge areas and 77 subcategories. The pre-certification process and instructor certification process, alone, teach or assess mastery of 75% of UNT's 77 core competency areas. The candidate's education, experience and independent research usually provides knowledge and skill in another 21% of these areas.

When comparing mean skill improvement outcomes using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) between instructors, there was a significant effect on parental learning between instructors. No correlation could be found between the instructor's level of formal training/educational degrees or when each was certified, since the certification process has become more rigorous in recent years. Further analysis is necessary to determine the source of these variances and arrive at a plan for reducing the variance between instructors. With the recent development of the UNT standards, the TGSP committee is updating the certification process to ensure more consistent service provision among instructors.

CONCLUSION

This evaluation study reveals that *TPT* programs and resources are based on solid foundational concepts and long-term studies of effective parenting practices. It employs sound evaluation methods that meet current standards. The curriculum meets the criteria for an effective model and has been successfully implemented in many formats, settings and with diverse populations. Parent's Toolshop instructors are well trained and prepared to teach parent education, but a variety of factors may influence their effectiveness. Although *TPT* meets most or all the standards for quality parent education, the author and TGSP committee constantly evaluate the program in light of new research.

Implications for Practice

Professionals can use *The Parent's Toolshop* model to create comprehensive parent education programs at a local level that meet the specific needs of the parents they serve. It is not a "canned" program that must be used as-is, with no additions or modifications. Parent's Toolshop instructors often network with community service providers or access supplemental resources to best meet the needs of the parents involved.

This is consistent with "the three primary benefits of *The Parent's Toolshop* and its Universal Blueprint"¹¹ model. (Additional notes [in brackets] show how these benefits apply to parent educators who use *The Parent's Toolshop*.)

1. It is a *universal plan* for effective parenting [and delivering effective parent education programs].
2. It provides methods for applying this plan in ways that meet the *individual needs* of each family, even when these needs (such as personalities, values, or cultural beliefs) differ from other families or among family members [or within the parenting group].
3. It allows parents [and parent educators] the freedom to express their *unique personal style*, while using the Universal Blueprint™ and its tools [as a foundational guide, while allowing for supplementation with other resources that are consistent in philosophy].

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