VALIDITY STUDY

Use of Concurrent Validity in Parental Needs Assessment

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The primary purpose of our study was to identify parental needs that may contribute to the development of a parenting program. In the focus group process of parents discussing their subjective experiences, we found that themes emerged which prompted the initiation of parental development activities. Our goal was to enlighten and add concurrent validity to the archival research provided. Numerous studies have been conducted which attempted to assess parental needs. Krueger's (1994, 1995) research into the implementation of focus groups shows that focus groups can greatly improve the planning and designing of new programs. The discussions that are part of focus group dynamics have been helpful in providing information about why people think or feel the way they do. People may need to listen to the opinions of other parents before they form their own opinion to become aware of their own needs. Asbury (1995) and Carey (1994, 1995) agree that whether used alone or in conjunction with other data sources, focus groups are well suited for needs assessment.

QUESTION

"In the group process of discussing parental subjective needs, what themes will emerge to prompt the initiation of a parenting program?"

METHOD

A specific sample of volunteer parents of middle school children participated in the focus groups. These parents are middle to upper class individuals residing in the Chicago area. Dr. Dana McDermott acted as the moderator of the groups. She recorded and transcribed the discussions. Each member of our research team studied the transcription individually and listed general themes. We then studied our findings and generated a list of the most salient themes that labeled parental needs. In order for a theme to be included in this final list, it had to be represented on 3 of the 4 independent rater's lists. This collaboration in translating what we agreed to be our results provided interrater reliability. To properly analyze our interpretation of the transcription, we compared the results of our thematic analysis with those generated by the moderator. This demonstrates the use of triangulation as a check in the adequacy of the previous assessment: (1) The focus group parents checked the themes of the (2) moderator and (3) the research team checked the themes of the moderator. The results of our analysis could also be shared with the parents to reassert the findings of the moderator. This is congruent with the continuity afforded by the theory.

RESULTS

After studying the transcriptions of the middle school parents we identified the following themes: Peer modeling, shared experiences, competition, enjoyment of parenting, gender issues, developmental transitions, discipline, involvement/ over involvement, participation in outside activities, support of faculty and education/updating. The salient themes which we found to be associated with parental needs, as well as a sample of direct parental quotes taken from the transcription are as follows: Although there were many broad topics that surfaced during our analysis, only the above themes coincided with a discernible parent need. As the moderator often used direct quotes to develop themes we have paraphrased some of them to demonstrate parallels between our themes and hers.

Our Themes	Moderator's Themes
Competition	Academic and Familial Expectations of Children
Education/Updating for Parents	Developmental Guidance and Expertise Discussion Groups
Involvement/Over Involvement	Age and Social Relations Adjustments
Gender Issues	Issues of Gender Sensitivity and Sexuality

Theme: Competition

Need: Parents need to be able to discuss the pressures surrounding their children's academic performance.

Parental Quotes: "Usually when parents get involved it's around an academic area where the child is having a problem." "We could use some examples from teachers to see what they are expecting from our children." "What do teachers expect from our children? We are not sure."

Theme: Education/Updating

Need: Parents need to have a voice in and understanding of their children's development concerning peer pressure and relationship issues.

Parental Quotes: "I was concerned about my shy son but he is growing well." "It would be nice if teachers called when our children were doing well or communicated in some way."

Theme: Involvement/Over Involvement

Need: Parents need reassurance regarding issues of control, compromise and when to intervene or protect. Parents need to have an active role in their children's education.

Parental Quotes: "We are concerned about when not to butt in on friendship problems." "We are upset when our kids are hurt and we are traumatized and feel somewhat helpless."

Theme: Gender Issues

Need: Parents need reassurance that their children's gender is considered in the school environment.

Parental Quotes: "We are concerned about our children . . . keeping their voices heard loud and clear." "My child is emerging as her own person and not a clone . . . her math teacher is gender sensitive."

From reviewing the first programming the moderator developed it is evident she used this information to inform the content. Specifically, she applied the consistently reoccurring themes of education, gender and involvement in the formulation of book group series for parents. The theme of education was demonstrated

through the guidance offered by both the moderator and the authors of the chosen books. This course of action was beneficial as it directly met the subjective needs of parents. Fliers were sent to the entire parent population. The topics of the selected book focused on gender issues as well as developmental themes. The positive feedback from and the excellent attendance by the parents provided convergent validity for the outcome of the moderator's study.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RESULTS

Our analysis was based on the concepts of systems theory. Two important premises were considered. First, one must consider individual development and secondly, the larger social network or school and peer relationships. By examining parenting concerns within the larger context of the school environment, a more complete understanding of the interactions between parental needs and parental development programs was developed. Feedback loops within and between the systems kept the network stable, but able to change. The less structured but more subjective focus group method allowed for the creation of a feedback loop between parents and the moderator in which parental needs were expressed and clarified.

Moreover, circular causality was evident in the strategy of planning, doing and reflecting employed by the moderator. "Programs can be considered effective only when they meet real needs and when the target population agrees that it has those needs" (Posavac & Carey, 1992, 111). The moderator summarized themes and sent them to the parents in the focus groups to make sure she had captured their themes accurately. In the future, the researcher could focus on devising a group meeting that involves parents within various SES and cultural backgrounds. The voices of parents could then be heard in other contexts, which could possibly provide external validity to the present study.