COUN 40030 - Research Project

Cherishing Our Parents

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Abstract

There is no formal training or qualifications for the role of parenting. This combined with the fact that some individuals become parents before they have reached emotional maturity, can result in poor quality parenting. The quality of a child's parenting has been shown to be a contributing factor in the development of the child's cognitive skills and subsequent mental health. This research sets out to compare the effectiveness of two parenting courses (Parent Plus and JWWN), based on differing psychotherapeutic approaches, in meeting criteria identified for effective parent education courses. These criteria were: a) increased empathy b) increased ability to manage stress c) support and acceptance received and d) increased confidence in own abilities. The research design included quantitative data in the form of questionnaires and qualitative data through the use of individual interviews. The conclusion suggests that there is a significant difference in these courses in meeting these criteria.

Cherishing our parents

'Just as children are absolutely dependent on their parents for sustenance, so in all but the most primitive communities, are parents, especially their mothers, dependent on a greater society for economic provisions. If a community values its children, it must cherish their parents.' (Bowlby 1952) p84.

Introduction

Parenting children and preparing them to be responsible, engaged members of society is, arguably, the single most important role an adult can undertake. The quality of parenting is vital, as it is a crucial element in determining the values, norms and behaviours of future adults. Parenting, along with education, sets out to directly shape and influence young minds and, as a result, it can potentially have a great impact on the shaping of society and future generations.

The health and well-being of our citizens depends in part on the quality of parenting in children's early years, as parenting has been shown to have an effect on children's mental health (Dretzke, et al. 2005). The quality of parenting has also been shown to be crucial in the way it affects the development of cognitive skills in children (Bowlby 1969). Indeed, it has been suggested that a deficit in these skills can predict consequent behavioural difficulties (Lupien, et al. 2009). As a result, these cognitive and behavioural problems are an important educational, health and social issue.

Enhancing the quality of parenting has been shown not only to be cost effective as an intervention, but also effective in reducing the strain on the level of future social services and healthcare provision requirements (Kazdin 1997). A number of the studies undertaken to date (Barlow and Stewart-Brown 2000) (Hertzman, et al. 2010) suggest that parental education programmes can have a positive effect on both parental perceptions and children's consequent behaviour, and that these changes are maintained over time.

Given that the quality of parenting is such a crucial component in the health of our children and of society in general, ensuring that any such intervention incorporates the most effective elements is an important consideration for both policy-makers and funders. Improvements in the quality of

parenting in the current generation of children could reap societal and financial rewards in future generations. This would be effected through a reduction in adolescent behavioural problems and adult mental health difficulties, thus reducing the strain on health services in the future.

Parent education programmes vary considerably in terms of content, style and underlying psychological approach, and it has been shown that while some of these interventions have proved effective, others have not, and this is reflected in the lack of agreement in the research into such interventions (Arbuthnot, Kramer and Gordon 1997). These differing research findings, which will be expanded on further in this paper, can cause great confusion. Establishing the most effective elements in parent education intervention is vital, in order to ensure that we are delivering the most effective approach to parents and also to ensure that course providers have adequate information for decision-making in relation to the most effective use of available funds.

The question being addressed in this research is to investigate the effectiveness of two differing parent education courses with contrasting underlying psychological approaches. The two courses investigated were the 'Parent Plus' (Connolly, Sharry and Fitzpatrick 2001) course, which is based on a Cognitive Behavioural approach and the 'Just What We Need' (JWWN) course, which is based on the Human Givens approach (Griffin and Tyrrell 2004).

Cognitive Behaviourism was developed in the 1960s through merging Cognitivism (Beck 1970) and Behaviourism (Skinner 1963) (Watson 1997). It is a psychotherapeutic approach that assists individuals to understand how their thoughts and feelings influence their behaviour.

The Human Givens approach is an integrative bio/psycho/social approach to promoting emotional health. It is grounded in the organising idea that human beings have needs (both physical and emotional) and resources and, like all living beings that thrive, require that these needs are met, and that these resources work effectively. The needs should be met in balanced ways through the use of the individual's own resources. It has been shown to be an effective therapy model for working with service users who are suffering with anxiety and depression (Andrews, W., Twigg, E., Minami, T., & Johnson, G,. 2011).

The two courses were compared with the objective of determining the effectiveness of each course in meeting certain criteria which have been identified as requirements for effective parent education courses (Barlow and Stewart-Brown 2006a)(Barlow, Parsons and Stewart-Brown 2005) (Kane, G, Wood, V, Barlow, J. 2007). The criteria identified were: a) increased empathy and ability to identify with their children; b) increased ability to manage stress; c) support and acceptance received; and d) increased confidence in the parent's own abilities.

It also aimed at identifying examples of where either approach demonstrated positive effects on parenting styles; identifying any negative effects, and identifying how the positive aspects of the differing approaches could be utilised to deliver more effective and cost-beneficial courses.

The research question centred on the hypothesis that the design and emphasis of the JWWN course enables parents to have greater empathy with their children through a greater ability to identify with their children's needs. The JWWN course is based on assisting parents to gain an understanding of their own innate emotional needs and resources and, as a result, the needs and resources of their children. Consequently, the parents are better equipped to manage their own levels of stress and thus carry out their parenting more effectively. The research suggests that this approach leads to improving parenting skills and that it is more effective than the cognitive behaviourist approach of the Parent Plus course.

The data collected was designed to measure the extent to which each course met the four criteria outlined above (empathy, stress management, support and confidence). As a result, the data would either concur or refute the hypothesis. The research set out to contribute to the existing literature on parenting education in a number of ways. Firstly, it compared two differing psychological approaches to parenting, and set out to establish if there was a difference between these approaches in terms of creating an increase in empathy, and an ability to manage stress, support and confidence. Secondly, it investigated if focusing on the emotional needs and behaviour of both the parents and children (rather than on the behaviour of the parents and children) led to greater empathy with the child and consequently a more effective parent education course.

Review of relevant research literature

Parenting courses are focused, short-term interventions aimed at improving a parent's relationship with their child/children. Improving the relationship is achieved by increasing the parent's awareness of the effects of differing parenting styles on a child, and assisting the parent in choosing the most appropriate parenting style. The existing research in this area is extensive and, as a result, a focused search strategy was adopted by the researcher. The search was completed in two stages, firstly through reviewing literature found in electronic databases using online keywords and, secondly through searching articles cited in some of these articles. The databases searched were JSTOR, ERIC, PsycINFO, ScienceDirect, Academic Search Complete, PsychARTICLES, and WileyOnline Library. Only articles and reports published in English in the past 20 years were considered. The search terms used were: "parenting", "parent training", "parenting training", "parent education", "student engagement", "patient-therapist interaction", "parent empathy", and "parent stress".

The articles selected were the more recently published ones. However, frequently cited and highly regarded older articles were also included – especially those that were pertinent to the history and understanding of the effects of abusive parenting and parent training. The reference lists of articles identified by this search strategy were also analysed – in particular the reference lists of systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and those judged to be relevant were selected. Reports were included if they either analysed or discussed the history, psychotherapeutic approaches and effectiveness of parenting courses in differing settings.

Background

The concept of parenting training is a relatively new phenomenon, having first emerged in the early 1970s along with phenomena such as the popularity of group work in the field of psychotherapy. Prior to the 1970s, individuals learned their parenting skills from their own parents and other caregivers within family units, with the extended family, culture and religious beliefs all having a strong influence on parenting approaches.

As knowledge of the factors that contribute to good and abusive parenting has grown, coupled with greater awareness that these effects have on outcomes for children, we have seen the development of many interventions that build on this knowledge and attempt to minimise the instances of abuse, as well as increase the likelihood of positive experiences and outcomes for children. For the most part, the design of these interventions has been based on various psychotherapeutic approaches, according as they developed over the decades. It is not surprising that the early interventions were designed along behaviourist theory. Known as Behaviour Modification Interventions (BMI), they were used both as a prevention and a treatment for a range of behavioural and emotional problems in children (Rose 2007).

As new theories and advances in psychotherapy emerged, these courses were modified and elaborated. Following growth in the popularity of the concept of 'change agents' (catalysts for change), parents were enrolled in parenting training and were encouraged to act as 'change agents' of their children's behaviour (Johnson and Katz 1973).

This period also saw the emergence of Carl Rogers' client-centred psychotherapy approach (Rogers 1951). New interventions were designed based on Rogers' approach, an early example of which includes the PET (Parent Effectiveness Training) course. These Rogerian principles were later developed into the STEP (Systemic Training for Effective Parenting) course, which expanded the original course by including the work of the Adlerian, Rudolf Dreikurs. This introduced the concept of consequences to actions and behaviour into the course (Dreikurs 1973).

With the continuing development of alternative psychotherapeutic approaches, such as systemic family therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, brief solution-focused therapy and so on, further parenting courses which reflected these approaches were developed.

The research in this area has been extensive and, as a result, a number of meta-analyses have been conducted on the existing research. A review of the findings of these meta-analyses suggests that there is little agreement on the effectiveness of such courses or on what constitutes the components of an effective course.

Some of the more recent meta-analysis, including that carried out by McLeod and Nelson, found that programmes with high levels of participant involvement, intensive interventions and an empowerment/strength-based approach were the most successful (MacLeod and Nelson 2000). Barlow and Stewart-Brown conducted a review of random control trials of parenting courses, and showed that courses improved behaviour in the short term, and improved maternal psychosocial health, thus reducing anxiety and depression (Barlow and Stewart-Brown 2000). 'The findings of this review provide some support for the use of group-based parenting programmes to improve the emotional and behavioural adjustment of children under the age of three years' (Barlow, Parsons and Stewart-Brown 2005, Barlow and Parsons 2003). Lundahl's meta-analysis in 2006 was conducted to evaluate the ability of parent training programmes to reduce parents' risk of abusing a child. Their conclusion was that the inclusion of home visits and conducting parent training in both the home on an individual basis and in a group setting enhanced effectiveness – particularly when a behavioural component was also included (Lundahl, Nimer and Parsons 2006). A more recent study (Wyatt Kaminski, et al. 2008) which reviewed 77 evaluations of parent training programmes, concluded that the effective components included 'increasing positive parent-child interactions and emotional communication skills; teaching parents to use 'time out', coupled with emphasising the importance of parenting consistency and requiring parents to practise new skills with their children during parent training sessions. Programme components consistently associated with smaller effects included teaching parents problem-solving; teaching parents to promote children's cognitive, academic, or social skills; and providing other, additional services.'

In investigating these meta-analyses more fully, it became apparent that much of the research into the effectiveness of different courses places little weight on the underlying psychotherapeutic theoretical basis. As a result, this means that the research compared courses of different content and approach. The question remains: how valid is it to research the effectiveness of courses without investigating the effectiveness of the approach underpinning it, which informs the content of the course? This question is supported by the findings of Jack Arbuthnot who investigated mandatory parenting courses for divorcing couples and concluded: 'Because the parent education programs may vary considerably in content, style and theoretical basis, it is difficult to generalise

about their effectiveness, because some may be effective, while others may not, and the mixed outcome of the studies reflected that' (Arbuthnot, Kramer and Gordon 1997).

Investigating the research into the effectiveness of differing psychotherapeutic approaches, the relationship between client/patient and therapist was deemed to be a significant factor (Cooper 2008). This is supported by recent research in the field of education into the factors which support student engagement (Klem and Connell 2004, Zepke, Leach and Butler 2010). The results of their research showed that the majority of students thought that the influence of teachers was most important in their engagement. (Zepke, Leach and Butler 2010). It has also been shown that teachers or facilitators, who are perceived as approachable, prepared, and sensitive to participant needs, will create the environment to engage and therefore participants will achieve deeper learning and be more confident in the learning environment (Mearns, Meyer and Bharadwaj 2007). It seems apparent that the outlook and attitude of the facilitator towards the participants plays an important role in determining effectiveness.

Methodological criticism

A question arises over the methodology of the research conducted, because the approaches have not necessarily assessed the deep learning required in order to change behaviour. Research into parenting education and training which were mandated by the courts in the United States criticised the customer satisfaction survey as a valid method of determining their efficacy (Cookston, et al. 2002). Reginald Nixon of the University of Sydney also conducted a review of existing research and concluded that many studies had methodological limitations (Nixon 2002). Evidence of deep learning and changed behaviour was not assessed. They questioned the reliance on participant feedback and satisfaction survey methods as methods of determining efficacy.

Johnson *et al.* conducted an analysis of parent education programmes available for families involved with child welfare services and they also criticised the research into parenting programme efficacy, suggesting that many programmes lacked methodological rigour, and stating that 'knowledge development in this area has been stymied by the methodological limitations of many of the existing studies reviewed'. They also noted that the conditions under which most of the research they reviewed was conducted, differed in many ways from the conditions under which these programmes are delivered in everyday settings. For example, they differ in terms of the training and style of the practitioners implementing the programme, the physical location of the sessions, characteristics of the organisation responsible for the programme delivery, as well as other elements such as payment and financing (Johnson, et al. 2008).

While some researchers highlighted methodological limitations (Nixon 2002), others suggested that many lacked methodological rigour (Johnson, et al. 2008). Taylor *et al.,* (Taylor and Biglan

1998) found that 'interventions are often evaluated by asking clients if they feel that things have improved, and most clients answer "yes" to the question, *even when more careful assessment shows that no improvement has occurred'* (Patterson and Narrett 1990, original italics).

Given the wide number of variables involved in researching parenting courses, the psychotherapeutic approach, the influence of individual facilitators, the demographics of the participants, funding scenarios, mandatory attendance and so on, it is difficult to compare one course with another, and it could be said that any group of parents coming together for support will provide positive feedback from the group without creating any lasting change. Although in general parenting courses have been regarded as successful both for treatment and prevention, (Kazdin, Siegel and Bass 1992), there are many criticisms of this approach in terms of how it facilitates change.

The criticisms of this type of intervention (Noller and Taylor 1989) can be summarised as follows:

a) Parents should not be seen as therapists for their children.

b) The courses create an overly simplistic belief that applying the right technique to an interpersonal situation will solve the problem.

c) Parents may learn to mistrust their own capabilities and intuitions, and therefore become overly dependent on such techniques.

d) The one-sidedness (i.e. parents only) of the training implies that parents are totally responsible for the ways children behave, and this parental guilt may be increased.

These are valid criticisms, and they are representative of a general trend in society to consult experts, and mistrust common sense and intuitions (Hui and Stickley 2007). Other negative findings include the apparent increase in dissatisfaction with the partner's parenting which seems to be related to participation in a parenting course. They also criticise the negative aspects interventions have on parents' self esteem (Noller and Taylor 1989).

Effective components

An analysis of the research, which was aimed at extracting the most effective components, suggests the existence of a number of common elements, one of which is empowerment and respect. Braver's study into courses aimed exclusively at fathers concluded that 'successful interventions not only attempt to change fathers, but they also empower and respect them' (Braver, Griffin and Cookston 2005). Zeedyk's research focused on the longer-term perspective,

and found that participants felt the programme had lasting effects on their ability to manage their children's behaviour, and that it empowered them as adults. One of the findings suggested that these programmes 'should focus on more than parenting skills, by assessing the impact on participants' wider lives' (Zeedyk, Werritty and Riach 2008).

Kane, Wood and Barlow's review of research findings suggests "that the acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding, together with feelings of acceptance and support from other parents in the parenting group, enabled parents to regain control and feel more able to cope. This led to a reduction in feelings of guilt and social isolation, increased empathy with their children and confidence in dealing with their behaviour" (Kane, G, Wood, V, Barlow, J. 2007). Their conclusion states that "this evaluation provides an indication of the components that parents perceive to be necessary in the provision of parenting programmes, independent of the particular type of programme being provided". (Kane, G, Wood, V, Barlow, J. 2007). The research found three ways in which participants appeared to have benefited: "(1) the support they received in their parenting role from other parents, including a mirroring of problems; (2) the regaining of a sense of control in the parental role, in part through an increase in their capacity to think about matters calmly, and also through the provision of new tools with which to do the job of parenting, and (3) an increased ability to empathise and identify with their children, and a better understanding of the factors which motivate children to behave in particular ways."

They also found that "empathy in particular is central to effective parenting" (Barlow and Stewart-Brown 2006b). This agrees with Braver's findings of research with fathers (Braver, Griffin and Cookston 2005). Parents' insightfulness (the capacity to see things from the child's viewpoint) and empathy have been observed to be critical factors in secure parent and child attachment (Oppenheim and Koren-Karie 2002). The importance of empathy has been tied to numerous positive behaviours, such as altruism and helpfulness (Davis 1983) and it has been postulated that empathy is central to the healthy growth-promoting relationship between child and caretaker ((Brems, Baldwin and Baxter 1993, Brems and Sohl 1995, Stern 2000).

This suggests that important aspects leading to the success of these courses is the sharing of experiences with others in similar circumstances and receiving support from both the participants and facilitators; empowerment and respect; understanding the effect of external influences; stress management leading to gaining a greater sense of confidence; an increased ability to empathise.

Current approaches

The approach most favoured currently is based on cognitive behavioural therapy – due to its popularity in the world of psychotherapy, as well as its large evidence base. One example of this approach is the 'Parent Plus' course developed by Irish psychologist Dr John Sharry. This is a

video-based parent training programme broadly based on the Webster-Stratton Programme (Webster-Stratton 1981, Webster-Stratton, Hollinsworth and Kolpacoff 1989) which uses videotapes of modelled parenting skills.

"The Parent Plus Programmes are video-based parent training programmes that were developed in partnership with parents and children with the specific aims of reducing behavioural problems, and promoting learning and positive parent–child relationships" (Connolly, Sharry and Fitzpatrick 2001). "The programme is based on a behavioural cognitive model and at the core of this approach is the simple idea that people change as a result of their daily interactions with each other" (Sharry, et al. 2005).

 New research is now emerging to suggest that although cognitive behavioural-based parenting and modelling courses are effective, an approach which focuses on combining developing empathy with children, stress reduction and cognitive behavioural strategies may be even more effective (Epstein 2010).

A newer approach is the Just What We Need (JWWN) parenting course which was designed and developed specifically for marginalised parents in crisis (Hoggan and Kane, 2008). It is based on the Human Givens approach (Griffin and Tyrrell 2004) and has been designed from the concept that unless a parent has an understanding of how to make their own life work, and manage their stress levels, they cannot be expected to provide the ideal conditions for bringing up their children (Hoggan and Kane 2008). The aim of the programme is to help parents understand their emotional needs and innate resources, and build on parents' strengths and skills. This leads to greater understanding of the children's needs and resources. The programme differs from others in that it is not focused on behaviour; it is concerned with raising awareness, identifying unmet needs, managing stress, and increasing empathy and insightfulness. It is a twelve-week programme, run by two trained facilitators, which allows sufficient time to build rapport and relationships within the group.

This comparative study aimed to identify the effectiveness and strengths of each course, and to explore whether one approach was more effective than the other, based on the effective components outlined above.

Methodology

This research project was based on the hypothesis that the design of the JWWN course better enables parents to appreciate the needs and resources of their children; that their ability to empathise with their children improves, thus creating a more positive parenting experience for

themselves and their children. The aim of the research was to compare the effectiveness of two differing approaches informing parent education courses.

The two courses compared were the Parent Plus course (Connolly, Sharry and Fitzpatrick 2001), which is based on a cognitive behavioural model, and the 'Just What We Need' (JWWN) course, which is based on the Human Givens approach (gaining an understanding of the innate emotional needs and resources of the human).

The effectiveness of the courses were measured based on the four criteria that have been identified as requirements of effective parent education courses. The data collected was designed to either concur with, or to refute the hypothesis, and to show the degree to which each course met the criteria of:

  a) increased empathy and ability to identify with children's needs

  b) increased ability to manage stress

  c) support and acceptance received from parents and facilitators

  d) increased confidence in parents' own abilities

Methodological approach

The methodological research approach adopted was comparative and deductive. The research was designed around the hypothesis and the data collected would either concur or refute this hypothesis (Henn, Weinstein and Foard 2009). It used a non-experimental design, involving participants from existing scheduled courses. A mixed-methods approach was used in order to utilise "quantitative and qualitative techniques within the same framework, mixed-methods research can incorporate the strengths of both methodologies" (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). Increasingly, mixed methods are used alongside each other as a means of validating the data. A key feature of mixed-methods research is its methodological eclecticism, which frequently results in superior research (compared to mono-method research). "A tenet of mixed-methods research is that researchers should mindfully create designs that effectively answer their research questions; this stands in contrast to the common approach in traditional quantitative research where students are given a menu of designs from which to select"(Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004).

Note. "qual" stands for qualitative, "quan" stands for quantitative, "+" stands for concurrent, "→" stands for sequential, capital letters denote high priority or weight, and lower case letters denote lower priority or weight.[11]

FIGURE 1 - MIXED METHOD DESIGN MATRIX WITH RESEARCH DESIGNS SHOWN IN THE FOUR CELLS

From (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004)

In this study, a concurrent/equal-status design was used, (see Figure 1) with quantitative data collected prior to the course, and both quantitative and qualitative data collected on completion of the course.

Methods

Four differing data collection methods were used, employing quantitative and qualitative data.

Questionnaires

First, quantitative data in the form of questionnaires were completed by parents, prior to attending the course. This questionnaire (Appendix 1) was based on measuring the effective criteria in order to establish a baseline. The layout was in the form of sample statements and a discrete visual analogue scale (DVAS). Each parent then attended either the Parent Plus course or a JWWN course. A follow-up questionnaire was administered following completion of the course, using the same measures with some additional questions pertaining to the parents' experiences of the course (Appendix 2). These pre- and post-course questionnaire results were then compared and analysed.

Focus Groups

Second, qualitative data in the form of informal focus group interviews (Appendix 3) were conducted after the course was completed in order to determine the parents' experience of the course. This data was collected in the form of informal focus groups carried out at the end of the courses, as previous experience of interviewing parents showed that they found individual interviews intimidating and they felt more open and relaxed in a group setting. The use of a

research focus group with a lower socio-economic group is preferable (Wilkinson 1998, Morgan and Spanish 1984), as they provide "a safe environment where they can share ideas" (Madriz 2003) p 364.

Online Survey

Third, these were augmented with an anonymous online survey (Appendix 4) to counteract any 'halo' effect (Nisbett and Wilson 1977) and to address the lack of robustness of the customer survey-type questionnaire (Cookston, et al. 2002). The survey was conducted following a three-month interval. The questions were quantitative with answers corresponding to a 1-5 likert scale and also qualitative by introducing 'scenarios', and asking the respondents to describe their approach to handling difficult parenting situations. Its aim was to assess the learning derived from the two courses and was designed to assess the extent of deep-level, as opposed to surface-level learning and merely a pleasant experience (Trigwell 2009). The survey was also conducted in order to gain an understanding of participants' perception of their learnings from the course as an "examination of the perspectives of the people is important – their ideas, attitudes, motives and intentions" (Henn, Weinstein and Foard 2009) p176.

Interviews

Finally, interviews were conducted with the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) officer, in order to secure an independent assessment, and also with another parent course facilitator who was experienced in delivering both courses (Appendix 5).

The mixed-method research approach was used because it was decided that it could best provide information on the differing aspects and cover the discrepancies of each method, "to attack a research problem with an arsenal of methods that have non-overlapping weaknesses, in addition to their complementary strengths" (Brewer and Hunter, 1989 cited in (Henn, Weinstein and Foard 2009). It was also used to attempt to overcome the limitations of using quantitative data alone (Carr 2008), and also in an attempt to overcome the researcher's bias as to how the research should be structured and interpreted (Henn, Weinstein and Foard 2009).

Ethical issues

A number of ethical issues were identified prior to the research. First, the researcher would also be acting as one of the facilitators on the JWWN course. These dual roles could have been seen as a conflicting and complicating factor for both the participants and the researcher. This issue was considered unavoidable due to the fact that there are currently no other facilitators running JWWN courses in Ireland. It was decided that in the event of a conflict, the facilitator role should supersede the researcher role in order to facilitate group cohesion and service provision. To

further address this issue, the HSCL officer was asked to provide feedback as an independent assessor; the anonymous online survey would also go some way towards addressing this. This issue could also be regarded as researcher bias and, as a result, the questionnaires were based on independent criteria identified by previous researchers (Barlow and Stewart-Brown 2006a, Kane, G, Wood, V, Barlow, J. 2007) and the research questions were clearly defined so as to determine the extent to which each course met these independent criteria.

Second, the assistant facilitator on the Parent Plus course had completed the Human Givens training and, while not trained in the JWWN course, she was familiar with the concepts. Her knowledge of these concepts could also be regarded as a complicating factor as it could be suggested that she could have unconsciously included some of the JWWN concepts in the Parent Plus course.

The power discrepancy between the researcher and the participants was also identified as a potential issue. Moreover, it raised the question of whether the participants felt they had the freedom to be sufficiently negative or critical. This was particularly relevant in the case of the JWWN course participants, as the difference in socio-economic backgrounds between the participants and the facilitators was greater due to composition of that cohort. It was felt by the researcher that the online survey would help to counteract this.

There were no stipulations about the number of participants required to participate on each course. As a result, there was no pressure on participants to participate, and they were informed of their right to withdraw at any time. All data was anonymised and no payment or enticements were made.

Ethical approval was granted for this project by the Student Research Ethical Committee of Nottingham Trent University on 18 February, 2010.

Analysis of data

The quantitative data collected was analysed for changes in the participant's experiential views of themselves as parents as well as their comments on the course's effectiveness. The data was categorised and weighted (see Appendix 8) according to ten competencies that predict good parenting (Epstein 2010) (see Appendix 9) which in turn were matched against the effective criteria. These were then analysed using mixed-model ANOVAs. The qualitative data was coded and categorised into themes which corresponded to the same components: empathy, stress reduction, support and confidence. Two additional categories were added; 'techniques' and 'control' and they were also weighted using the same competencies.

Findings

Participants

The two courses were run between September and December 2010 in two schools in Dublin, one on the north side of the city and the other on the south side. Due to the nature of the offering bodies, the participants were from different demographics as follows:

Parent Plus:
Attendance at this course comprised self-selecting parents whose children were attending a secondary school. The parents had responded to an advertisement for an evening course at the school; they were middle class, and were self funding. Their aim in attending the course was to improve their parenting skills. All were parents of children in the first/second year in the secondary school and were facing the prospect of their children moving into adolescence. The participants in the study were all mothers (n=7). The mean age was 43.6, the average number of children was 2.75, and the mean age of the children was 12.31. The average age of the women was 28.25 when they first became mothers. Five of the mothers were married and two were single. One had completed fourth-level education; four had completed third level and two second level. Six of the women were in paid work and one was a homemaker (Appendix 6).

Just What We Need:
Attendance at this course comprised parents from a number of DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools) schools in a school cluster from a number of disadvantaged areas. The course was commissioned by the HSCL officer and was funded through the VEC (Vocational Educational Committee) and DLRCC Southside Partnership (Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council 2010). These participants were working class and they were encouraged to attend by their HSCL officers. The course was held in the school during mornings, and these parents were also offered a crèche place for any pre-school children. The participants in this group were mothers (n=6) and one father (n=1). The mean age was 33.71, the average number of children was 2.28, and the mean age of the children was 8.9. The average age of the participants was 23.42 when they first became parents; two were married; two were in long-term relationships; one was divorced and two were single. Three had completed second-level education and four had first-level education. Two of the women were in paid work and five were homemakers (Appendix 7).

The composition of the two groups was quite dissimilar and any conclusions drawn from comparing both cohorts of parents need to take this discrepancy into account. Nonetheless, as an initial research exercise it was useful to gain insight into the differences of the approaches. The experiences of these cohorts could be valid to inform further research with less diverse participant samples.

The data collected was analysed and the following results were obtained:

Questionnaires

The study sought to determine whether the design of the JWWN course better met the four criteria (empathy, stress reduction, confidence and support) which have been identified as requirements for providing effective parent education courses. The null (Barlow and Stewart-Brown 2006a, Kane, G, Wood, V, Barlow, J. 2007) hypotheses was therefore: there would be no difference between the Parent Plus (CBT-based) and the 'Just What We Need' (JWWN) course which is based on the Human Givens approach.

A mixed-model repeated measures ANOVA was conducted on the pre- and post-questionnaires for each group and the results showed that there was overall a significant difference in how both courses, the Parent Plus and the JWWN course, met the criteria, with the JWWN scoring higher in meeting the criteria: $F_{(2, 14)} = 0.67$, *p=0.03.*

Focus Groups

Parent Plus

The feedback from the course overall was very positive; the participants enjoyed the course and all felt that they had benefited from it by learning new skills. They reported that support from other parents was particularly important, as was getting advice from other parents.

> 'I found course really helpful and to see you are not on your own!'

> 'We do not have any great issues in our home at present. The course merely reinforced for me our parenting style and improved my confidence in dealing with situations.'

> 'It was good to share experiences with other parents and know you are not alone. We were also able to give sound advice to hear other.'

> 'I have better skills and techniques for dealing with my children'

JWWN

All participants reported enjoying the course, and a number expressed interest in repeating it at a later date. They found that recognition of their emotional state coupled with learning strategies to lower stress and emotional arousal were the most beneficial aspects of the course. They also found that the course gave them greater insight into not only their children's needs but also those of other people in their lives.

> 'It's made me appreciate what I have ...'

> 'I learned to relax more ...'

> 'It's boosted my confidence and helped me feel better about myself ...'

'I now see emotional needs in others ...'

'Emotional needs are an eye-opener, both from an adult and a child perspective ...'

'More aware of my children's needs ...'

'Communicate better with my children ...'

'Spend more time with my children ...'

'I see disruptive children now, as an attempt to get a need met, I am more tolerant ...'

They also found that setting needs-related future goals was beneficial as this had not been their focus previously, a phenomenon that has been observed in this socio-economic grouping (Zimbardo and Boyd 2008).

Online survey

Multiple Choice Questions

The online survey (Appendix 4) was completed anonymously by participants in both groups (Parent Plus n = 6, JWWN n = 8). The multiple choice questions 2 – 11, 13 were compared between groups, and no significant differences were seen between the groups see Figure 2:
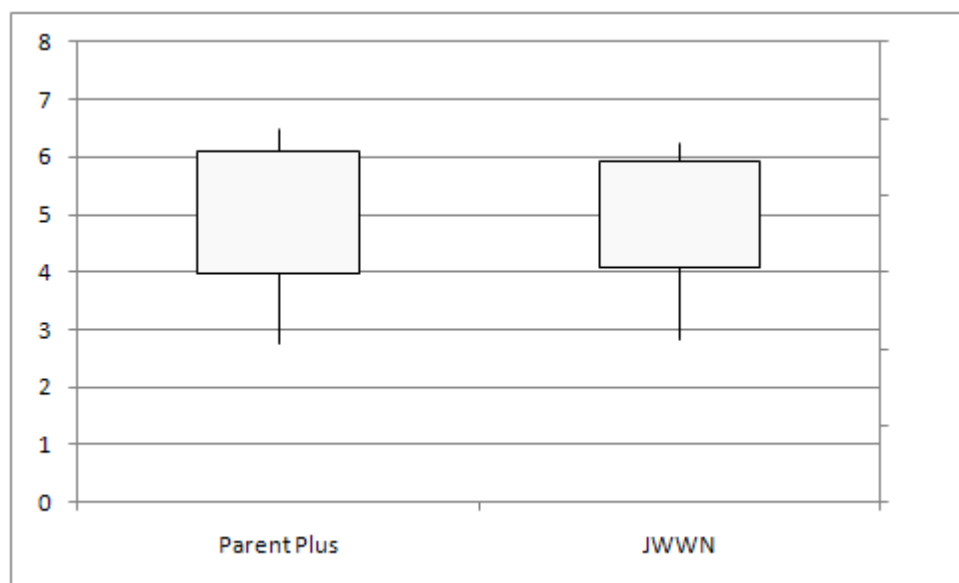
FIGURE 2 - ONLINE SURVEY QUANTATITIVE ANSWERS (2-11, AND 13)

Scenarios

The scenarios were designed to determine participants' perception of their learning from the course and how that matched the different criteria. The scenarios were then analysed into themes which correspond to the research criteria. No weightings were used and the results are outlined in Figure 3:
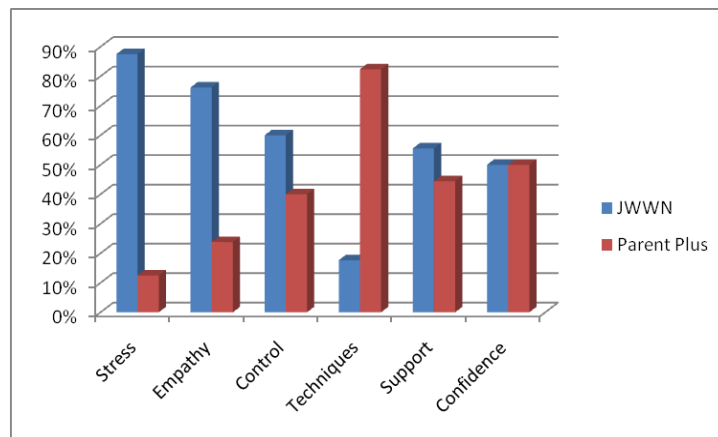
FIGURE 3 - COMPARISION OF COMPONENTS MET BY EACH COURSE

The results above show that the JWWN course scores highly in the categories of 'stress', 'empathy', 'control' and 'support', while the Parent Plus scores much higher on 'techniques'.

Interviews

A semi-structured interview was conducted with a facilitator (PG) in Dublin who had assisted on both the Parent Plus and the JWWN courses. The interview structure was based on the same research criteria.

Facilitator interview

PG was first asked to outline her understanding of the Parent Plus course. She described it thus: 'The course is based on videos of different parental behaviour – one the 'wrong' way and one the 'right' way'. She described it as a behavioural approach rather than a cognitive behavioural approach as it tells you directly 'this is what you do'. There is no focus on the parent's thinking. 'Their most important point is "pressing the pause button", just not reacting to situations and trying to stop yourself reacting…which is very behavioural.'

When asked if the course would help reduce stress, she responded that it would help with stress but 'it taught no specific stress-reduction methods'. With regard to empathy, her experience was

that it asked the participants to 'remember what it felt like to be a teenager or a child' but it doesn't ask 'can you imagine how the child feels?' She felt that the parents experienced a lot of support from the others in the group as they all had children around the same age in the same school. She did feel that parents felt more in control and had more techniques for dealing with disruptive behaviour.

When asked about the strengths of the course, she said that '… it's very simple and the points are repeated, so that by the end you know the four of five points in it. It repeats it, you watch a video, you talk about it, you do a work sheet, it is repeated again later in the course; there is a lot of repetition and a very simple message.'

The weaknesses were described as '… it's quite superficial, … if the parent had long-standing issues or long-standing resentment of the child or whatever … if there are other issues going on, it doesn't address them, … it's superficial, ... It's just, 'do this, do this', and it is consequences, consequences.'

When asked about the JWWN course, she responded that it deals with stress reduction 'more head on. It does more relaxation.' She felt it provided more support through the exercises; 'the types of exercises are different, where they have to co-operate and communicate and do different stuff, definitely potential for more support.' She felt that understanding of emotional needs and resources, on which the course is based, would far better develop a parent's empathy for their child.

On the question of control, her response was; 'I'm not sure parents would go out having a sense of more control … more control over themselves perhaps, but not necessarily in engaging with their children.'

She felt that the strengths of the JWWN course was that it gave 'the parent a lot more insight and awareness into their own emotions and reactions ... and it was less superficial.' The weaknesses were a lack of behavioural techniques.

Other comments were that the JWWN course resulted in creating 'more awareness of their own emotional reactions whereas the other course doesn't really go into that at all … Parent Plus doesn't really talk about emotional reactions. The Parent Plus videos aren't great, they don't identify with them.' She also said that she felt that facilitator training was lacking. The JWWN training was more comprehensive and prepared the facilitator better for difficult situations that might arise.

Her final comment was that in directly 'comparing the two courses with regard to listening, both talked about listening, but JWWN actually had people experience not being listened to, which is much more effective'.

HSCL interview

A more open-ended interview was conducted with the HSCL officer who commissioned the JWWN course; this person had also commissioned the Parent Plus course in the school. The HSCL officer felt that in general the parents enjoyed the Parent Plus course, but it was more geared to telling people the right thing to do. With regard to the JWWN course, she felt that the parents were 'better disposed' to it as they were 'not being told what to do'; they described it as 'good fun'. The parents' reports to her were very positive: it 'seems to increase their sense of well-being'. 'They have also gone on to get involved in other courses ... it acts as a stepping stone and they have made friends'. She also noted that the 'personal development end of it is great', adding that she felt it was very important for parents to realise 'the importance and impact they have on the child's life' and that she found that one of the biggest problems she came across was that often the parents 'are anti their children, they really don't like them'. Therefore, creating empathy with the child was paramount. She also felt that an important aspect of the JWWN course was the relationship between the group and the facilitators, as well as the facilitator's approach to the participants.

Discussion

The results of the study show that the Human Givens JWWN parenting course is more successful in meeting the criteria of an effective parenting course (empathy, stress reduction, support and confidence) than the CBT-based Parent Plus course. This is notable, as recent research stresses the importance of empathy to the healthy growth-promoting relationship between child and caretaker (Brems, Baldwin and Baxter 1993, Brems and Sohl 1995, Stern 2000).

Results also revealed that the JWWN course was not as effective at teaching techniques and strategies for dealing with child-disruptive behaviour. It was also not as effective in giving parents a greater sense of control in their families. This is not surprising as it is not designed as a behaviour management course. Recent research casts doubt on the importance of this. 'Behaviour management ranked low across the board; it was a poor predictor of good outcomes with children' (Epstein 2010).

Limitations

There are, however, limitations to this study. The comparison between such demographically different cohorts, and the small numbers involved in each group, could put in doubt the

generalisability of the results, the sample sizes were too small to be conclusive. A potential shortcoming is the use of 'scenarios' in the online survey as opposed to a real-life situation. Most people can better modulate their responses in a socially desirable direction on a written task than in a real-life scenario (Graziano, Raulin and Cramer 2000).

The combined role of researcher and facilitator is a primary design flaw and the main limitation of this research. The possibility of the researcher's training influencing the outcome and causing a resulting 'confirmation bias' also needs to be taken into consideration. This has been shown to be the case even when these overlaps are not in place (Lilienfeld 2010). The threat of 'going native' and the degree of subjectivity of the researcher also has to be questioned. Over a period of 12 weeks, the researcher had built up a facilitator relationship with the participants. While the professional experience of the researcher may have counteracted this issue to some extent, researching the effectiveness of the course delivered by another facilitator would, in the future, give additional validity to the study results (Henn, Weinstein and Foard 2009).

As can be seen in research into psychotherapy, the effect of individual facilitators could be regarded as another limitation of the study (Beutler 1997, Lambert and Barley 2001). This effect was referred to in the interview with the HSCL officer. In other words, that a facilitator, who is perceived as approachable, someone who is prepared and sensitive to participant needs, will create an environment that engages participants (Mearns, Meyer and Bharadwaj 2007). It seems apparent that the outlook and attitude of the facilitator towards the participants will also have an effect in determining effectiveness. This is a particularly important issue as it may require a lot of effort and commitment to attend a course which, to an extent, could be regarded as an admission of possible 'flaws' in parenting skills. The facilitator's approachability can do much to overcome this.

Future research needs to take these limitations into consideration. In addition, the research design could be improved if the course facilitators were not aware of the research being conducted. This is because the process of researching can have an unconscious effect on the facilitators' attitudes. In the case of this study, the fact that both facilitators were aware of being researched could be said to cancel out the effect of this variable.

This study, while it is not definitive due to its limitations, has several implications for clinical practice. Courses which are designed to take into account the emotional needs of the participants can help to develop empathy and reduce stress. They are more effective and they can create a greater degree of engagement with the participants. In contrast, teaching empathy will, in itself, not address parents who 'are anti their children...they really don't like them' (interview with HSCL officer). Recent research into the difficulties of teaching parents empathy found that:

'it may be very helpful to make parents aware of the positive and potentially negative consequences of assumptions they make about children. On the one hand, parents need to learn about that predictions they make about their children may help them understand their children more quickly and easily. The potential pitfall, on the other hand, may be that the parents respond to their child out of an habitual pattern of relating, without paying sufficient attention to the specifics of the situation' (Brems and Sohl 1995).

The issue of predictions is directly addressed in the JWWN course, as the Human Givens organising idea not only incorporates emotional needs but also includes innate human resources (Griffin and Tyrrell 2004). These innate resources include the rational mind, imagination, emotions, memory, dreaming, observing self, and so on, and the 'pattern matching' mechanism of the brain which is involved in making predictions made based on past experience. Recent evidence from neuroscience regarding the effects of this 'pattern matching' and subsequent high emotional arousal (Damasio 1994, LeDoux 1996) illustrates how the 'pattern match' to past experiences influences the predictive element of decision-making and consequent behaviour.

Parents on the JWWN course are made aware of possible inappropriate pattern matching, along with the misuse of the other resources, such as imagination and memory, together with the importance of stress reduction in reducing emotional arousal. Extensive use of relaxation is used at each session to develop the 'observing self' through mindfulness-type techniques (Davidson, et al. 2003, Kabat Zinn 2003) and the use of stories to develop all their resources. Research has shown that stories and metaphor are effective in developing empathy (Joachim, 2008).

The study provides important information for parenting course policy-makers and service providers in ensuring that courses offered incorporate the most effective approaches that they have reliable information for coupled with the most effective use of funds available.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research appears to confirm the hypothesis that the design and emphasis of the JWWN course enables parents to have greater empathy with their children as a result of developing a greater ability to identify with their children's needs. The two courses compared were based on different psychotherapeutic approaches, Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy and Human Givens. Therefore, the two courses appear to have different ideological foundations.

The Parent Plus course appears as a static model, with clear definitions of 'correct' and 'incorrect' parenting. This model provides rules and guidelines, and can create a sense of safety and security for the parent that they are responding in the correct way to the child. The course repeats the guidelines, ensuring that the participants have learned the 'correct' way. One pertinent example

from a participant after attending a Parent Plus course was that she reported feeling less skilled and confident as a parent after completing the course as she was now aware of the 'correct' methods – something which is in line with some of the criticisms referenced previously (Noller and Taylor 1989).

The JWWN course could be described as a discovery model which is more child-centred. It is more holistic and it is open to people from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. It is not culturally specific, as the emotional needs and resources are common across all cultures, classes and genders (Ryan and Deci 2000). Therefore, it provides a foundation on which to build competencies such as empathy, stress management and relaxation techniques. This was borne out by the HSCL Officer who mentioned that many of the parents who attended the JWWN course have gone on to attend other education, or have opted to repeat the course in order to get a deeper understanding of the concepts of needs and resources.

Further research which would involve comparing the JWWN course with other parent course offerings (and taking into account the limitations of the current study) could provide additional data, knowledge and validation. The process of restricting interviews to participants, results in gaining merely a single perspective. The participants can only assess the effectiveness of the course through the lens of their own experiences. Assessing the efficacy of the course requires a broader perspective and also requires collecting qualitative data in the form of interviews if a more complete picture is to be created.

Word Count 8,406

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Pre Parenting Course Questionnaire

Parenting Course Questionnaire

Please answer as many of the questions as you can. For all questions (except where asked otherwise), indicate your answer by ticking the relevant box

Name: _____

Contact Number_____

Age : [   ]

Sex: Male [   ]   Female [   ]

No. of Children   [   ]

Ages of children_____

Marital Status:

Single	[ ]	**Separated**	[ ]
Divorced	[ ]	**Long Term Relationship**	[ ]
Married	[ ]	**Other**	[ ]

If other please explain _____

Education Level Achieved_____

Are you:

In education (full or part time)	[ ]	**In paid work (full or part time)**	[ ]
Self Employed	[ ]	**Homemaker**	[ ]
Training Scheme	[ ]	**Other**	[ ]

If other please explain_____

Please indicate on the scale 1-10 (Please circle your answer)

1 How confident or capable do you feel in your role as a parent?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not confident   Moderately Confident   Very Confident

2) Are there times that you feel you could do with more support as a parent?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Never   Sometimes   Often

3) How consistent are you in your interactions with your children?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not consistent   Moderately Consistent   Very Consistent

4) How important do you rate consistency in your interactions with your children?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not important   Moderately important   Very Important

5) How much do you feel you identify with, or understand your children's feelings and viewpoints?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Moderately   Completely

6) How important do you rate it to be able to see things from your children's viewpoint?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not at all   Moderately   Very Important

7) Do you feel 'in control' when interacting with your children?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Never   Moderately   All the time

8) Are you often angry or anxious when interacting with your children?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Often   Sometimes   Never

9) Do you feel that your own stress levels contribute to family conflict?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Often   Sometimes   Never

10) How much do you feel that external problems such as support from other parents affect your parenting?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Often   Sometimes   Never

11) How much do you feel that external problems such as financial concerns affect your parenting?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Often   Sometimes   Never

12) How much do you feel that external problems such as family issues affect your parenting?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Often   Sometimes   Never

13) How much do you feel that external problems such as unemployment affect your parenting?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Often   Sometimes   Never

14) Do you feel it is important to learn the correct techniques for dealing with children?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Not important   Moderately   Very Important

Are there times when you feel difficulty in coping as a parent?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Often   Sometimes   Never

Do you feel you lack certain skills as a parent?

Please explain (one example)
_____

How would you rate yourself as a parent?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Poor   Adequate   Very Good

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Appendix 2 – Post Parenting Course Questionnaire

Parenting Course Questionnaire 2

Please answer as many of the questions as you can. For all questions (except where asked otherwise), indicate your answer by ticking the relevant box

Name: _____

Contact Number_____

Please indicate on the scale 1-10 (Please circle your answer)

1 How confident or capable do you feel in your role as a parent?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Not confident   Moderately Confident   Very Confident

2) Are there times that you feel you could do with more support as a parent?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Never   Sometimes   Often

3) How consistent are you in your interactions with your children?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Not consistent   Moderately Consistent   Very Consistent

4) How important do you rate consistency in your interactions with your children?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Not important   Moderately important   Very Important

5) How much do you feel you identify with, or understand your children's feelings and viewpoints?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Not at all   Moderately   Completely

6) How important do you rate it to be able to see things from your children's viewpoint?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Not at all   Moderately   Very Important

7) Do you feel 'in control' when interacting with your children?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Never   Moderately   All the time

8) Are you often angry or anxious when interacting with your children?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Often   Sometimes   Never

9) Do you feel that your own stress levels contribute to family conflict?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Often   Sometimes   Never

10) How much do you feel that external problems such as support from other parents affect your parenting?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Often   Sometimes   Never

11) How much do you feel that external problems such as financial concerns affect your parenting?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Often   Sometimes   Never

12) How much do you feel that external problems such as family issues affect your parenting?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Often   Sometimes   Never

13) How much do you feel that external problems such as unemployment affect your parenting?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Often   Sometimes   Never

14) Do you feel it is important to learn the correct techniques for dealing with children?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Not important   Moderately   Very Important

Are there times when you feel difficulty in coping as a parent?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Often   Sometimes   Never

Do you feel you lack certain skills as a parent?

Please explain (one example)

How would you rate yourself as a parent?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Poor   Adequate   Very Good

Having completed the course

How interesting did you find the course?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Not Interesting   Interesting   Very Interesting

How useful did you find the course?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Not useful   Somewhat useful   Very useful

What was the most important aspect of the course for you?

What kind of impact do you feel that the course has had on your relationship with your child/children?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Negative   Neutral   Positive

What kind of impact do you feel that the course has had on your relationship with your child's other parent?

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Negative   Neutral   Positive

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix 3 – Focus Group Interviews

Focus Group Interview Questions

Did you find the course interesting?

What did you find interesting?

Did you find the course useful?

What aspects were most useful?

What was not useful?

What was the most important aspect of the course for you?

What kind of impact do you feel that the course has had on your relationship with your child/children?

What kind of impact do you feel that the course has had on your relationship with other adults in your life?

Appendix 4 – Online Survey

Screen print of survey used from Survey Monkey.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your support will assist us in identifying how we can improve the training for parents so that we can have better outcomes for both parents and children.
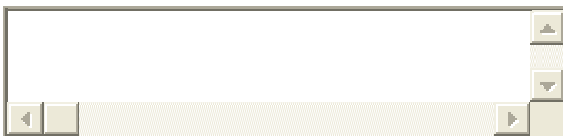
1. Where did you complete your course?

○   Where did you complete your course?

    Baldoyle

○   Sallynoggin

∗

2. Making changes in your parenting style can have either positive or negative effects on the atmosphere in the home. In the period since you completed your course, how would you describe your view of how the atmosphere has changed, or not changed, in your home?
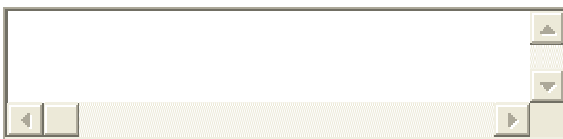
○   Making changes in your parenting style can have positive or negative effects on the atmosphere in a home. In the time since you completed your course, how would you describe your view of how the atmosphere has changed, or not changed, in your home? More pleasant and relaxed

○   Slightly more pleasant and relaxed

○   No change

○   Slightly more tense

○   Much more tense

○   Other (please describe)

∗

3. Making changes in your parenting style can also have positive or negative effects on your sense of confidence in your own abilities as a parent. How would you describe your own level of confidence in your abilities and performance as a parent?
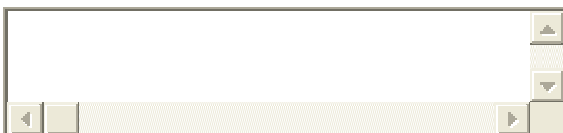
☐ Making changes in your parenting style can also have positive or negative effects on your sense of confidence in your own abilities as a parent. How would you describe your own level of confidence in your abilities and performance as a parent? More confident

☐ Slightly more confident

☐ No change

☐ Slightly less confident

☐ Much less confident

☐ Other (please describe)

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[text box]
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4. How did you find the experience of attending the course and discussing parenting problems with other parents?

☐ How did you find the experience of attending the course and discussing parenting problems with other parents? Very supportive

☐ Slightly supportive

☐ No Change

☐ I felt slightly more isolated

☐ I felt a lot more isolated

☐ Other (please explain)

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[text box]
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5. Have you had contact with the other members of the course since it has ended?

☐ Have you had contact with the other members of the course since it has ended? Yes

☐ No

☐ Other (please explain)

```


```

＊

6. Do you feel you that your child/children listen to you?

○ Do you feel you that your child/children listen to you? A lot more

○ Slightly more

○ No change

○ Slightly less

○ A lot less

○ Other (please explain)

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```

＊

7. Do you feel you listen to your child/children?

○ Do you feel you listen to your child/children? A lot more

○ Slightly more

○ No change

○   Slightly less

○   A lot less

○   Other (please explain)

[text box]

✳

8. If you asked your child/children about how you have changed since completing the course what would they say?

○   If you asked your child/children about how you have changed since completing the course what would they say? You are more in charge

○   Slightly more in charge

○   No change

○   Slightly less in charge

○   A lot less in charge

Please explain your choice in terms of whether you (or they) see this as positive or negative
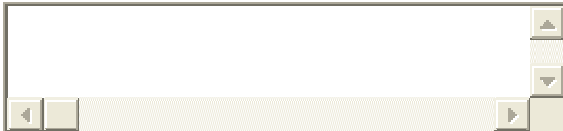
[text box]

change

✳

9. If you asked your child/children now about how much you listen and understand their point of view after doing the course what would they say?
You understand their point of view...

○   If you asked your child/children now about how much you listen and understand their point of view after doing the course what would they say? You understand their point of view... A lot more
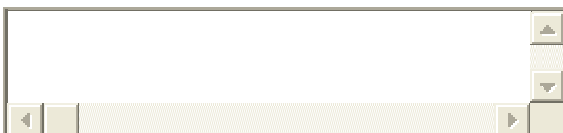
○   Slightly more

○ No change

○ Slightly less

○ A lot less

○ Other (please explain)

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│◄ ▌                          ►   │
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✳

10. Do you feel that your children understand your point of view?

☐ Do you feel that your children understand your point of view? A lot more

☐ Slightly more

☐ No change

☐ Slightly less

☐ A lot less

☐ Other (please explain)

```
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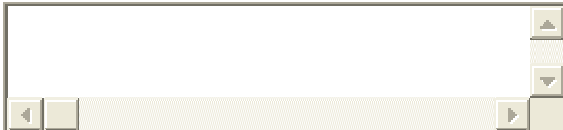
✳

11. In thinking about your child/children's behaviour, do you think that as a result of the course it is now...?
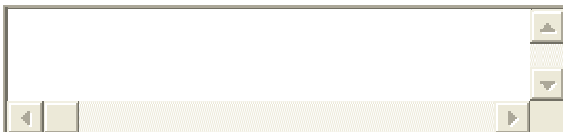
○ In thinking about your child/children's behaviour, do you think that as a result of the course it is now...? A lot more co-operative

○ Slightly more co-operative

○   No change

○   Slightly less co-operative

○   A lot less co-operative

○   Other (please explain)

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✳

12. Do you think that you have been able to teach your family any of the ideas or skills you learnt on the course and if so please explain?
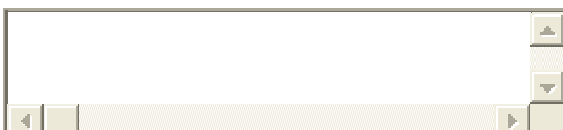
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Do you think that you have been able to teach your family any of the ideas or skills you learnt on the course and if so please explain?

✳

13. In dealing with your children do you think that you are:

○   In dealing with your children do you think that you are: A lot calmer

○   Slightly calmer

○   No change

○   Slightly less calm

○   A lot less calm

○   Other (please explain)

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And lastly, here are some scenarios for you: how do you think you'd deal with these?
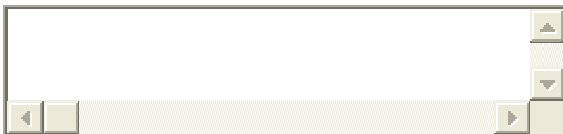
✱

14. You've had a busy day at work and you get in to find your child/children sitting in front of the TV. As soon as they see you they ask, "What's for dinner?"! How would you respond and what would you do?
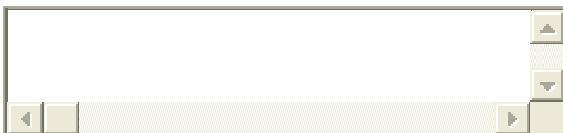
You've had a busy day at work and you get in to find your child/children sitting in front of the TV. As soon as they see you they ask, "What's for dinner?"! How would you respond and what would you do?

✱

15. Your child wants to stay in his/her room on the computer for long periods. You are concerned as to what they are doing. How would you respond and what would you do?

Your child wants to stay in his/her room on the computer for long periods. You are concerned as to what they are doing. How would you respond and what would you do?
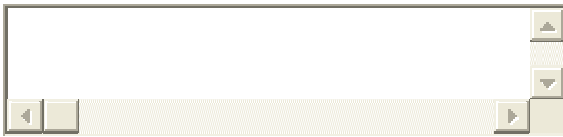
✱

16. Your toddler is unusually quiet and you are enjoying a few moments to yourself...when you go to investigate you see that they have tried out their new crayons on the newly painted walls. How you do respond and what do you do?

Your toddler is unusually quiet and you are enjoying a few moments to yourself...when you go to investigate you see that they have tried out their new crayons on the newly painted walls. How you do respond and what do you do?
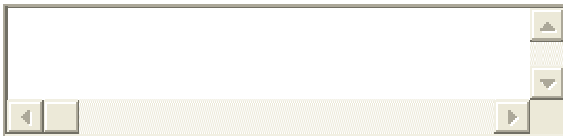
✱

17. Do you feel the course has prepared you to deal with such situations? And if so in what ways?

Do you feel the course has prepared you to deal with such situations? And if so in what ways?

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey, your feedback is greatly appreciated. If you have any other comments you would like to make please do so here.

18. Any other comments

Any other comments

Done

Appendix 5 – Individual interviews

Facilitator:

The facilitator was asked the same questions about both courses. To begin, all of the questions relating to the Parent Plus course were asked. Then all the questions relating to the JWWN course were asked.

- Please outline your understanding of the course.

- Did the course address the issue of stress and how to reduce stress?

- How well did the course address the issue of empathy with the child?

- Did the course provide support for the parents?

- Do you believe the course gave the parents a greater sense of control?

- Do you believe the parents felt more confident at the end of the course?

- Do you believe the course taught new skills and techniques to the parents?

- What were the strengths of the course?

- What were the weaknesses of the course?

HSCL officer interview:

This interview was a more open-ended interview in which she was asked to compare her experience of both courses and the feedback she had received from the parents who had attended.

She was also asked to give her opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of both courses.

Appendix 6 – Parent Plus Course

Parent Plus Programme

The Parent Plus programme is a group-based parent training package involving video modelling which was designed to be effective for children who have conduct problems, but do not have developmental disabilities.

The programme involves a series of 10 videotapes of modelled parenting skills. The tapes are shown by the facilitator to groups of parents over a 12-week period for one and a half to two hours every week. After each vignette, the tape recording is stopped and the facilitator encourages group discussion of the relevant interaction – in particular parents ' own ideas and problem-solving techniques. The programme is based on a behavioural cognitive model and at the core of this approach is the simple idea that people change as a result of their daily interactions with each other. The first phase of the programme concentrates on developing positive parent/child interactions by teaching parents how to play with their children and how to build their confidence by using praise and rewards. This is an attempt to break the cycle of negative reinforcement in which many families are caught. Effective limit-setting is also demonstrated.

In Ireland, the Parent Plus programme is the only available culturally sensitive, group-based behavioural parent training programme (Sharry and Fitzpatrick, 1998). The Parent Plus programme, which was specifically developed for use in an Irish context, is a practical and positive video-based course, which helps parents manage and solve discipline problems in 4 to 11-year-old children. It is a group programme involving eight weekly sessions of two hours each. The programme materials include two videos and a facilitator's manual. The manual contains directions on running the programme, session plans and handouts for parents. The videos show scenes, played by actors, of parents interacting positively with their children – both avoiding misbehaviour and dealing with it when it occurs – in addition to playing positive comments by clients who have used these parenting practices with their children. The video scripts were written in an Irish idiom and the actors all speak in Irish accents. However, the overall curriculum of the programme closely parallels North American Programmes that have been found to be effective in empirical studies (e.g. Webster-Stratton and Reid, 2003). Topics covered include using parental attention to change behaviour; play and special time; encouragement and praise; using reward systems effectively; setting rules and helping children keep them; using active ignoring; using time-out and other sanctions; and solution-building with children. A typical session involves a welcome from the facilitator; a review from the participants of how they have put into practice the new ideas from the

previous week's session; an introduction to the current week's topic; video input and discussion of the topic; role play and skills rehearsal; planning for the following week and summing up. The programme uses a broadly cognitive behavioural model, but is unique in being solution-focused, drawing on parents' strengths and expertise, and being highly collaborative in its approach. Table 1 summarizes the focus of each session. At the inception of the project reported in this paper, only the version of the Parent Plus programme for 4–11-year olds was available. Since then, a version for pre-school children has been developed (Sharry et al. 2003). Two evaluations of different versions of the Parent Plus programme have been conducted (Behan et al. 2001; Sharry et al. 2005). Behan et al. (2001) found that parents of 4–11-year-old children with conduct problems and normal ability levels who had completed the Parent Plus programme for families of primary school age children reported greater gains in the attainment of personal parenting goals compared with those in a waiting list control group.

Table 1 Content of Parent Plus programme sessions

Session Content

Encouraging children to change

1 Using parental attention to change behaviour

2 Play and special time with children

3 Encouragement and praise

4 Using reward systems effectively and how - to set rules and handle misbehaviour

5 How to set rules and help children keep them

6 How to use active ignoring to reduce misbehaviour

7 Using time out and other sanctions

8 Solution-building with children

(Sharry 2010)

Appendix 7 – 'Just What We Need' Parent Pod Course

'Just What We Need' Parent Pod – the Human Givens programme for parents

It is becoming clear that many emotional difficulties that children experience in school and later life stem from a lack of parental knowledge about innate emotional needs. When parents do not have this understanding about themselves, they cannot ensure that these needs are met in their own lives, let alone the lives of their children.

Without a reasonable degree of understanding about their own psychology and behaviour, parents struggle to provide the environment and the parenting that their children need in order to flourish.

The 'Just What We Need' Human Givens programme for parents is successfully addressing this problem and giving parents genuine insight into their innate emotional needs and how these are connected to mental well-being, behaviour and the healthy development of their children – as a result of recognising that their children have the same needs.

Based on sound Human Givens principles, and using fun activities and exercises, this programme has revealed a deep hunger for practical psychological knowledge among these parents and has shown how their awareness, self-esteem and confidence is improved dramatically by taking part in the programme.

Many of the parents joining the programme were young parents or single parents who as a result of becoming part of a 'Just What We Need' Parent Pod succeed in describing the experience as life-transforming and 'better than counselling'.

Because all people find it hard to think clearly or to take on board new information when they are highly emotionally aroused (anxious, depressed, angry and so on), parents are encouraged to participate in simple relaxation exercises, which they can use at home. They are also shown the effects on their thinking of raised emotional levels.

Many participants are finding that the 'Just What We Need' programme really is what they need to build their confidence and recognise their own capacity to be a parent.

Others have found that the programme proved to be the perfect springboard, enabling them to go on to successfully complete courses which focus more specifically on parenting skills; it also helped them to get the most out of those courses.

Content of 'Just What We Need' (Parent Pod) programme sessions:

Week 1:   Introducing the human givens: our innate needs and resources

Week 2:   Goal setting and group agreements

Week 3:   Security

Week 4:   Attention

Week 5:   Autonomy and control

Week 6:   Community outing – emotional connection with others

Week 7:   Privacy

Week 8:   Belonging to a wider community

Week 9:   Meaning and purpose

Week 10:   Sense of status

Week 11:   Competence and achievement

Week 12:   Evaluation and celebration!

(Hoggan, L., Kane, C., 2010)

Appendix 8 – Data categorisation and weighting

Question No.	Questions	Techniques	Control	Stress	Empathy	Confidence	Support	Overall
1	How confident or capable do you feel in your role as a parent?	1	3	5	1	10	1	3.73
2	Are there times that you feel you could do with more support as a parent?	1	2	4	1	6	10	4.06
3	How consistent are you in your interactions with your children?	1	3	6	3	1	1	2.88
4	How important do you rate consistency in your interactions with your children?	1	3	1	2	1	1	1.39
5	How much do you feel you identify with, or understand your children's feelings and viewpoints?	1	1	2	9	6	1	4.33
6	How important do you rate it to be able to see things from your children's viewpoint?	1	1	2	10	6	1	4.61
7	Do you feel 'in control' when interacting with your children?	1	10	5	2	5	2	3.67
8	Are you often angry or anxious when interacting with your children?	1	4	8	6	5	4	5.42
9	Do you feel that your own stress levels contribute to family conflict?	1	2	9	5	4	2	4.79
10	How much do you feel that external problems such as support from other parents affect your parenting?	1	1	1	1	2	7	2.09
11	How much do you feel that external problems such as financial concerns affect your parenting?	1	1	4	1	1	1	1.73
12	How much do you feel that external problems such as family issues affect your parenting?	1	1	4	1	1	1	1.73
13	How much do you feel that external problems such as unemployment affect your parenting?	1	1	4	1	1	1	1.73
14	Do you feel it is important to learn the correct techniques for dealing with children?	10	5	1	1	1	1	2.06
15	Are there times when you feel difficulty in coping as a parent?	1	3	7	2	9	4	4.76
16	Do you feel you lack certain skills as a parent?	6	3	2	2	8	1	3.36
17	How would you rate yourself as a parent?	1	1	4	4	10	4	4.64
	Relevance in effectiveness of parenting course	3	2	8	9	6	5	

Appendix 9 – Parenting Practices that predict best outcomes:

Robert Epstein's article:

They found 10 parenting practices that predict the best outcomes in raising children. In order, these practices are:

1. Love & Affection. You express love and affection toward your child. You praise your child regularly. You are generally supportive and accepting of your child. You listen actively when your child speaks. You spend quality one-on-one time with your child.

2. Stress Management. You reduce sources of stress for yourself and your child. You practice relaxation techniques. You interpret life events positively. You prioritize and plan appropriately. You teach stress-management skills to your child.

3. Relationship Skills. You maintain a positive relationship with your spouse/partner. You coordinate parenting techniques with the other parent. You plan quality family time. You spend couple time away from your child. You settle arguments out of your child's sight. You teach basic relationship skills to your child.

4. Autonomy & Independence. You treat your child (or children) with respect and try to build his or her self-esteem. You encourage your child to become self-reliant and self-sufficient.

5. Education & Learning. You promote and model learning. You support the completion of homework. You support and model reading. You support school curriculum goals within the home. You participate in school functions.

6. Life Skills. You manage your money responsibly. You have a steady income. You provide all household necessities consistently. You plan for shortages and emergencies. You plan for the future. You strive for improvement.

7. Behavior Management. You use positive reinforcement and reward systems extensively. You use minimal but effective forms of discipline. You provide a proper balance of affection and discipline. You teach your child positive and effective techniques for interacting with other people.

8. Healthy Lifestyle. You support and model healthy eating habits, daily exercise, good sleep habits, and good hygiene.

9. Religion & Spirituality. You support your child's spiritual or religious development and activity. You participate in religious, spiritual, or communal activities with your child. You support friendships with religious or spiritual peers.

10. Safety. You take necessary precautions to protect your child. You maintain awareness of your child's activities and friends appropriate to his or her abilities and level of maturity. You make your child feel safe about disclosing secrets. You establish rules appropriate to his or her abilities and level of maturity.

(Epstein 2010)

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