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# What do Parenting Educators Need to Know and Do?

Presentation at the National  
Forum on Professional Preparation  
Systems in Parenting Education, May 9<sup>th</sup>  
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## Goals for today:

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- Review the progress of our field in identifying **core competencies** for parenting educators
- Clarify some key terms
- Look for **consensus around core competencies**



# Clarifying terms

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- What do we mean by **knowledge**?
- What do we mean by **skills**?
- What do we mean by **competence**?



# Knowledge

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- The content of information we need to know about parenting education
- Information on how to accomplish the “doing” or performance component of parenting education, e.g. knowledge of the best practices of facilitating parent groups or home visitations

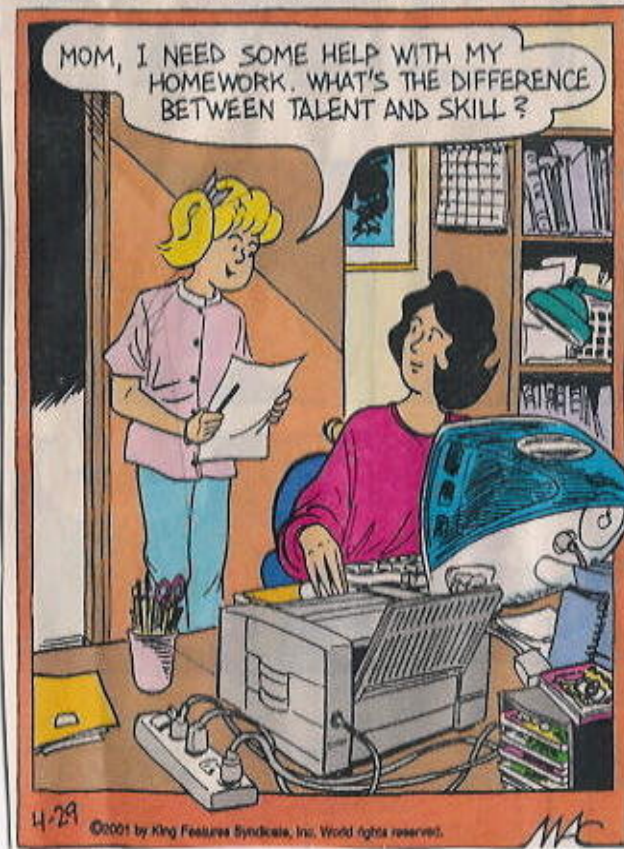


# Skill

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- The actual facilitating of the parent group or of effective interactions in home visiting involves a **skill** which is an ability that is learned and practiced.
- Words like skills, performance and behaviors all focus on the **doing** part or the **process** of Parenting Education.

SALLY FORTH/ by Steve Alaniz & Francesco Marciuliano



WELL, HIL, I'D CALL A PERSON'S NATURAL ABILITY TO DO SOMETHING A TALENT.



ON THE OTHER HAND, SKILL IS AN ABILITY THAT HAS BEEN LEARNED AND PRACTICED.



OK, THAT MAKES SENSE. SO WOULD YOU SAY PARENTING IS A TALENT OR SKILL?



PARENTING IS AN ART!





# Competence is knowing and doing well

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- It has to do with acquiring information (knowing);
- includes effective performance (doing);
- as well as application of ideas, and
- speculation resulting from reflection on experience.



# Another definition

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- Competence is also defined as “the ability to perform to the standard required in employment across a range of circumstances and to meet changing needs.”\*
- Thus, it is often generalizable and involves adaptation and flexibility.

\*Qualifications and Curriculum Authority  
[www.parentinguk.org](http://www.parentinguk.org)





# Competence examples

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From Parents as Teachers Competencies:

- Stays current on the latest research and trends in early childhood and family support (knowledge) and incorporates (skill) this information into the delivery of service



## PAT Competencies (cont.)

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- Can understand ones role as a broker of services (knowledge) and can connect families to resources and facilitate the process of accessing resources (skills)
- Reflects on own practice (skill) and identifies knowledge and skills that need further strengthening (knowledge or content)



# Definition of competence at DePaul University

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- Knowing about something sufficiently to be able to do something with that knowledge, and to arrive at an informed interpretation of its meaning
- The competent person knows how to do something, can do something well, and has reached some conclusions about why and how things are done.



# The how of competence

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- Has to do with actual content about the **methods** of working with parents
- Has to do with the **attitudes and dispositions** we bring to the process
- Has to do with **ethical practices** in our field that guide the entire process



# Attitudes & dispositions

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- Attitudes have to do with views we have about people, things, events, roles, etc. as they are reflected in our emotions, behavior and cognitions. They can be changed through experience and new learning.
- Dispositions have to do with internal standards of character/excellence.
- Both constructs are in contrast to the more technical aspect of skills.

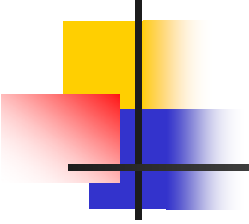


# Major focus of discussions

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- Since many programs consider competence as reflecting knowledge and skills, that will be the major focus of our discussions at this forum.
- We acknowledge that many lists of parenting educator competencies incorporate attitudes and dispositions into their frameworks and even in their lists of knowledge and skills.

# How have core competencies been identified?

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- By asking **practitioners** in the field what knowledge, skills and attitudes they think PE's need to serve parents and families
  - Relying on **theories** and **research**
  - Focusing on **observing** what parents do in caring for children
  - Ideally we access all sources of info.

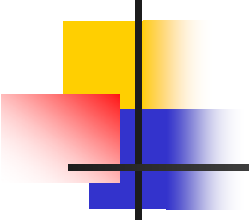


# Approach in Texas

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- The UNT Center for Parent Education and the Texas Registry of Parent Educator Resources conducted 19 focus groups and 19 conference calls with over 400 **participants from a variety of fields** including parent educators to identify and create a core knowledge for working with parents.





# Assumptions of their recognition system

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- Everyone working with parents should have some knowledge in each identified core area.
- It was also suggested that some categories of knowledge and skills might be more relevant to one group of PE's (e.g. those facilitating parent groups) than to another (those facilitating home visits).



## So what are the core areas?

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- A problem is that not everyone agrees on what “some knowledge” in each core area means.
- The basic knowledge perceived to be needed often differs.
- This is an issue we hope to explore further at this forum.



## In other states

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- Minnesota **parenting educators and program coordinators** developed a *Parent Education Core Curriculum Framework* focusing on 5 domains of knowledge related to what PARENTS need to know and do:



## Minnesota (cont.)

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- Parent Development
- Parent-Child Relationships
- Child Development
- Family Development
- Culture and Community

**These inform what parenting educators need to know and do.**



# Cooperative Extension

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- In 1992 **extension field faculty** began working independently, then joined together through surveying **family life education and human development specialists** from around the U.S., which resulted in a conceptual model based on the best available research on how children develop.



## Cooperative Extension (cont.)

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- They identified what children needed.
- Then they identified what parents needed to do to support that development.
- Then they identified what parenting educators needed to do to support parents in their role.



# NEPEM and NEPEF

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- From this work they identified priority practices for parents (NEPEM)
- and priority practices for PE professionals (NEPEF). See

[http://www1.cyfernet.org/ncsu\\_fcs/NEPEF/index.htm](http://www1.cyfernet.org/ncsu_fcs/NEPEF/index.htm) .



## NEPEM and NEPEF (cont.)

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- Many have used this model to inform their PE professional development (Iowa – Partnering with Parents),
- their practice and or for
- recommendations for content necessary for Parenting Educator credentialing (North Carolina and Connecticut).





# National interest/actions

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From the National Council on Family Relations came a means to Certify Family Life Educators across the country. Parenting Education was one of 10 categories, though it was reasoned that to serve parents in families, all areas were relevant to PE.



# Powell & Cassidy's contribution

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In their book on Family Life Education, Powell & Cassidy (2007) have described competencies for all 10 areas including the competencies needed for Parenting Educators to fulfill their diverse roles.



## Powell & Cassidy (2007) note:

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there was a movement from seeing PE's as the

- **expert** with all the information and answers to seeing them also as...
- a **collaborator** where both PE's and parents worked on goals and agendas to
- a **facilitator** providing a perspective for parents, guiding the process but with parents deciding on topics and goals.



# Paradigm shift

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- As a result of the **Family Support Movement** of the 1980's there was this increased emphasis on:
- **facilitating** parental empowerment
- and learning not only about development but about the **multiple systems** in which parents were embedded.



# Programs emerging from the Family Support Movement:

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- We saw the Family Development Credential out of Cornell in New York focusing more on preparation for family support.
- The Wisconsin core competencies (see handout) also reflect family support components.



# Increased focus

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Preceding and developing along with the family support movement has been the increased focus on:

- the **growth and development** of mothers and of fathers,
- **cultural competence** and
- parents as **adult learners**



# Our work today

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- As we meet today to identify core competencies of parenting educators, we acknowledge these past developments in our field as well as **new issues** impacting our work.



# Some new topics

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Some of the newer topics being addressed by North Carolina PEN e.g. include:

- Family Life Coaching
- Family, Media & Technology
- Financial Literacy
- Gerontology/Grandparenting
- Incarcerated Parent Training





# Internationally

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- The Parenting Education and Support program in the United Kingdom also benefited from all this earlier work in the field and reflects a comprehensive approach to a list of knowledge, skills and dispositions, including an interest in impacting public policy on behalf of parents and families.



## Recent U.S. developments

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- In Louisiana a core competence committee of **professionals from diverse backgrounds** serving parents and families through direct service, research, etc. reviewed other programs, built their list from the Texas core knowledge framework, invited NPEN to work with LA professionals and then presented their core competencies in their state.



# Louisiana presentation

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- For more info on how NPEN worked with Louisiana please refer to Dr. Betty Cooke's presentation at their conference on core competencies:  
<http://www.lapen.org/site20.php>



# New York State

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- New York State has been working on a framework for certifying parenting educators. In their state they were concerned about the stigma of parenting education associated with being mandated by the courts.
- They are also working to build more uniform standards nationally.



# Learning from these processes

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To summarize,

- some systems originated in schools of education,
- some in parenting and family education departments and cooperative extension
- some are part of comprehensive life long learning systems,



## Learning (cont.)

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- some come out of programs for at risk populations,
- some come more from a prevention and health perspective,
- some are part of home visiting models e.g. (Parents as Teachers)
- others from a community development focus.



# Focus of this forum

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- And yet there are many areas where consensus is present.
- We hope to build on that consensus at this forum.

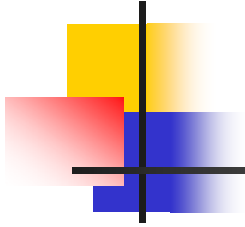


# In identifying PE competencies others looked to parents

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- Holden(1983) followed parents around a supermarket and questioned them as to their strategies. His theory of meta-parenting (Holden & Hawk, 2003) building in part on information from his observations of parents, focuses on skills of anticipating, assessing, problem-solving and reflecting.





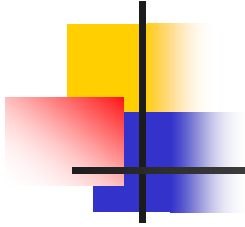
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- Heath in her early work observed nursing mothers and learned from them how parenting educators could support new mothers.
  - Her focus on supporting parents as the “lead partner” in a relationship is consistent with the collaborator and facilitator roles described earlier.



## Heath (2006) suggested that:

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“...focusing on the parents' lead role provides professionals with a different paradigm from which to work. The paradigm is no longer telling parents what they should do. Rather, it is asking of professionals, “How can I help parents to become more confident about the decisions they are making and to feel more competent in their ability to carry them out?”



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- In reviewing the lists of competencies identified nationally and internationally, it is clear these **observations** of parents by theorists, researchers and practitioners have also impacted the content and processes identified in competent parenting education and support.



## Learning from programs:

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Overall in looking at all these initiatives we find 11 reoccurring core areas. The chart in your materials will allow you to see where programs have consensus and where some focus their attention.

# Eleven core areas:

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- Lifespan development-child and parent development
  - Family relationships/dynamics
  - Guidance and nurturing
  - Family diversity
  - School/child care relationships
  - Community relationships
  - Health and safety
  - Professional practice/adult education methods
  - Assessment and evaluation
  - Public and organizational policies, ethics, laws



## Some issues to discuss

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Should we require some basic core knowledge in all recognition systems? In some recognition systems a PE's level of expertise in parenting education and support rises as one accumulates experience, training or information **in no particular order** in terms of content but on a **need to know basis** depending on current work.



# Other questions for deliberation

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If trained in using a curriculum, is that all a PE may need to know OR is there a need to:

- understand how parents think
- understand how they filter information through their feelings, beliefs and values
- understand how to consider context and
- how to adapt to the unique needs of particular parents ?



# Novice to Expert

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- Skills like adaptation to various situations, audiences, expectations and needs takes an experienced parenting educator rather than a novice. Please refer to DePaul's School for New Learning and Campbell & Palm's(2004) novice to expert handouts in your materials.





# Basic vs. Advanced

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- One of the issues facing us today is how do different States, professions and programs in fact decide which competencies are needed for all those who serve parents and families and which might be specific to more advanced practitioners?



# Wisconsin Initiative

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- Wisconsin's Professional Development Initiative

<http://wctf.state.wi.us/home/CoreCompetencies/CoreCompetenciesDS.doc>

has identified core competencies for all and then for advanced workers in the field of family support. (see handout)



## Wisconsin (cont.)

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- One might use their materials as one exercise or way to think about which competencies should be found in all persons working with parents and which reserved for advanced workers.



# Assessing competence

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- Another challenging task is **how to assess competence**. While a number of methods to assess knowledge exist, it is harder to assess performance and skills considering that much of parenting education with diverse parents becomes more of an art than a science.



# Conclusions

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- While we face some challenges in terms of managing the large number of competencies involved for all levels of PE expertise and the lack of funds to institute credentialing or recognition systems in some places, we do know that there is an interest/need in doing so and in achieving more consensus.



# Applications

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- When we return we will use a variety of case studies and reference a few lists of knowledge, attitudes and skills and in small group work form some consensus as to core competencies for all who work with parents.



# Thank you

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- Dana McDermott can be reached at DePaul University at 312-362-5111 or [dmcderm2@depaul.edu](mailto:dmcderm2@depaul.edu).
- I welcome your feedback.
- Feel free to access free parenting materials on the Sage website for my book at: <http://www.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.nav?prodId=Book228935#tabview=samples>



## Additional links

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- Louisiana PEN

<http://www.lapen.org/uploads/AugustCoreCompFinal.pdf>

- MN Educator License

[www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/arule/8710/3100.html](http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/arule/8710/3100.html)





## Additional links

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- MN Standards of Effective Practice  
[www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/arule/8710/2000.html](http://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/arule/8710/2000.html)
- Minnesota Parent Education Core Curriculum Framework and Indicators for Parenting Education Programs  
<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ci/programs/fyc/docs/PECCFI-Document-6-8.pdf>



## Additional links:

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- North Carolina Parenting Education Credential (4-levels) - [www.ncpen.org/credential.html](http://www.ncpen.org/credential.html)
- Texas –Professional Development Recognition System (4 steps) - [www.cpe.unt.edu/dev\\_recognition.php](http://www.cpe.unt.edu/dev_recognition.php)



## Additional links

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- Connecticut Parenting Educators Network <http://ctpen.org/>
- For more information on the Parents as Teachers Core Competencies please contact the National Office -Karen Guskin  
[karen.guskin@parentsasteachers.org](mailto:karen.guskin@parentsasteachers.org)



## Additional links

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New York State Parenting Education Partnership

<http://www.ccf.state.ny.us/initiatives/FamSuppRelate/FamSuppPEP.htm>

- <http://www.slideshare.net/NYSPEP/proposed-content-process-and-tiered-levels>

- Strengthening Families

<http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net/index.php/about>



## References

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Campbell, D. & Palm, G. (2004). *Group Parenting Education*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Heath, H. (2006). Parenting: A theory of competence. *Child Welfare, 85*(5), 749-766.

Holden, G. (1983). Avoiding conflict: Mothers as tacticians in the supermarket. *Child Development, 54*, 233-240.



# References

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- Holden, G., & Hawk, C. (2003). Meta-parenting in the journey of child rearing: A cognitive mechanism for change. In L. Kuczynski (Ed.), *Handbook of dynamics in parent-child relations* (pp. 189–210). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Powell, L. & Cassidy, D. (2007). *Family life education*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.