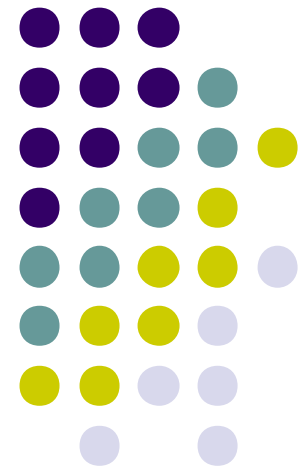


Parent education and support

We may be achieving more than we think.

Judi Apte



Connections and support



The significance of connections between parents cannot be underestimated, particularly when such support is made available to the most isolated parents in the community.

Parents say.....



I ring my mother every week..... We feel sad at the end of the day when we're scolding our children. We feel bad, we phone home. Our parents say it's normal.

There are four of us who all have children. We're always talking about the children – food, formula, (going to the) doctor. Now it's which kindergarten.

I talked to another mother about toilet training – I found her ideas helpful. (A parent's ideas) put less stress on you.

Apte, J., & Elliott, B. (2003a).

Multiple sources of learning



- Formal, informal learning and incidental learning
- One of the reasons that isolation is associated with vulnerability for children is that isolated parents do not have access to the ongoing, rich, incidental learning experiences that are available to families with close ties to extended families, friends and their community.



Incidental learning

Learning that is not planned or intentional - it occurs incidentally to an activity of life:

- Conversations and chat
- Learning through experiencing different things
- Observing
- Social environment – expectations and norms
- Trial and error, approximations in behaviours

Embedded learning



As we are immersed in an experience we learn so indirectly that people describe it as a process of learning by ‘osmosis’.

We feel things, we observe things, we adapt our actions to shifts in the environment and learn ways to respond.

We usually do not identify that we are learning. We are living, we are doing; the learning is implicit or hidden in the actual experience.

View of knowledge and learning



Learning involves much more than an interaction with an extant body of knowledge; learning is all around us, it shapes and helps create our lives - who we are, what we do.

(Boud, Cohen & Walker 1993: p. 1)

Framework for planning



1. How is this parent learning currently?

2. What is this parent learning currently?

Question 1. How is this parent learning currently?



- What are the formal + informal + incidental sources?
 - How are they learning through their networks:
 - what is the amount of contact?
 - are the contacts varied?
 - what is the intensity of the contact?

Question 2. What is this parent learning currently?



- What are they learning about this child?
- What are they learning about themselves as parents?
- What are they learning about ways to care for this child?
- What are the consequences of this learning?
- What aspects of the learning are useful?
- What aspects are mis-educative?

Framework for designing initiatives



- Elaborating current frames of reference – extending them, enriching them
- Learning additional frames of reference
- Transforming current frames of reference

Transformative learning



A transformation theory of adult learning would have as its central focus understanding the nature of these meaning perspectives and how they can be changed to allow exciting new possibilities for realising meaning and values. (Mezirow 1990: xv)

Transformative learning and parent education



- Some women outlined a major change in their lives (First & Way 1995). These outcomes were in addition to learning specific parenting skills and having the opportunity to meet other parents
- “Yeah. It was turnaround point for me.... That’s like what this class was for me. I caught this branch and it made me realise that I do want to do something with my life and I do want to raise my kids.”



- The program enabled them “to begin to question their basic beliefs and assumptions about fundamental parenting issues such as problem solving, communication and discipline patterns”.
- They developed “new ways of thinking about their lives”, especially in sensing that they could have some control in their lives, as they learned to solve problems in a more pro-active way.

First thoughts about key factors in programs



- Ideas/ strategies for parenting that invite a more pro-active parental identity
- Interrupting ‘taken for granted’ assumptions
- Respecting parents’ desires for both continuity and change



- Learning activities or experiences that evoke particular actions:
... but if you have enough experiences where you are more like this than that, then you might end up being more like this (Peter Slattery in Apte 2003b).
- Group interactions that enable people to move beyond polarised discourses.



Transformative learning may be occurring incidentally:

Beliefs do not need to be encoded in words. They may be encoded in repetitive interactions... (Mezirow 2000: p. 5).

The group can co-create an emerging narrative which carries different knowledges of self and of ways of being in the world.

(Apte 2003c)



Framework for evaluation

- Identify the incidental learning as well as the learning related to the program content – via conversations, experiences, observation, trial and error
- Identify the embedded learning that is ‘hidden’ in the experiences/ interactions



Identify the transformative learning as well as the learning of knowledge and skills:

- Shifts in assumptions/ frames of reference
- Emerging knowledge of self/ parental identity.



References

- Apte, J., & Elliott, B. (2003a). *Providing information, education and support to families – understanding parent needs*. Sydney: The Cabinet Office, NSW.
- Apte, J. (2003b). *The facilitation of transformative learning: A study of the working knowledge of adult educators*. Doctoral thesis. Sydney: University of Technology Sydney.
- Apte, J. (2003c). 'A Narrative Approach to Transformative Learning'. In *Proceedings of the 43rd Annual National Conference*. Australia: Adult Learning Australia.
- Boud D, Cohen R & Walker D (eds) (1993) *Using Experience for Learning* SRHE and Open University Press, UK
- First J & Way W (1995). 'Parent education outcomes: Insights into transformative learning' in *Family Relations*, vol. 44, issue 1, pp 104-110.
- Mezirow J (1990), 'How Critical Reflection Triggers Transformative Learning' in Mezirow J & Associates, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood*, Jossey-Bass, USA.