The Effect of the *Learning Basket* Approach

On Teen Mothers' Perceptions of the Role of Play in Infant Development

and Their Own Confidence as Learners

PROJECT DEMONSTRATING EXCELLENCE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to measure the effect of a series of 20 parenting sessions using the *Learning Basket* approach and materials on a group of teen mothers who do not see themselves as successful learners. The population was teen mothers who are wards of the state and who are resident in a group home in Chicago.

A Q-sort Survey designed around 8 conceptual constructs and administered before and after the parenting sessions served as the instrument. Other means of collecting data included journal entries, feedback sheets and observation sheets. Each method of collecting data provided additional information that was critical to interpreting results. The intervention consisted of 11 teaching sessions for which a curriculum was developed.

The study focused on 4 mothers who completed the Q-sort Survey in September, remained in the Group Home and attended some of the 20 sessions offered over a nine-month period. In addition these 4 mothers completed a Q-sort Survey after the last parenting session in May, 2002.

Results indicated that a major factor in the effect of the *Learning Basket* parenting sessions on the mothers was frequency of attendance. Other variables that influenced the results included the ability to engage in the interactive teaching/learning strategy, interaction with peers during the sessions, and the establishment of trust with the facilitators.

The following reasons prevent the results of this study from being generalized:

    a.   the sample size is small

b. personal information of the subjects was unavailable because they are wards of the state

c. there was a variance in age and cognitive abilities of the subjects

d. there was fluctuating attendance

Nevertheless, the results can inform future interventions and they do raise significant questions for further research on describing the development of cognitive capacities of the mother while nurturing the optimal development of her young child. The study also reveals the importance of facilitators engaging the learners, modulating a learner's eagerness in a group setting, inspiring regular attendance and gaining trust from the learners through a consistent style of honesty and affirmation.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Multiple researchers (Barnet and Barnet, 1998; Gopnik, Meltzoff, and Kuhl, 1999; Siegel, 1999; Sroufe, 1995) have noted that young children in the first three years of life are in their prime period of learning.   The very young child is dependent on her adult caregivers to nurture her learning potential through affectionate interaction and purposeful play (Sroufe, 1995). The literature suggests several ways that this learning can be compromised (Coleman, 1980; Rutter, 1993).   When the child's caregiver is not a confident learner, the caregiver is not mindful of the need to support and develop her baby's learning potential (Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, McCarton & McCormick, 1998)**.** Musick (1993) and Osofsky, Osofsky and Diamond (1988) have found that parents who do not consider themselves to be confident learners can be easily intimidated by a didactic learning environment.

An additional factor that can contribute to the sense of incompetence of a parent in a learning situation is a teaching strategy that does not acknowledge the cognitive disposition in which the learner is functioning (Belenky et al, 1997; Belenky, Bond, Weinstock, 1997;Wilcox, 1979). If the parent is unable to express thoughts through language or if she assumes that she has no contribution to make to the process of her own thinking and learning she may not be able to engage in a formal learning environment that asks her to relate to abstract concepts and to articulate her thoughts (Belenky et al, 1997; Wilcox, 1979; Taylor, 2000). This

inability can contribute to the formation of a self-image of being an unsuccessful learner (Belenky et al, 1997).

Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, McCarton & McCormick (1998) found that parents who are not confident and successful learners often do not take an active interest in the development of their child's learning potential. Several researchers (Carothers, 1990; Garcia-Coll, 1995;Ladner, 1971; McAdoo, 1981; Scott, 1991) have found that the dynamics of racism within the dominant culture of the United States have an effect on parenting practices of African Americans. Parents who see education as a way out of social and economic plateaus can regard play as a frivolous activity rather than a valued way of learning. Yet classical researchers (Montessori, 1966**;** Parten, 1932**;** Piaget,1967; Smilansky, 1968; Vygotsky, 1930-1935, 1978; Winnicott, 1965, 1967) as well as current researchers (Bruner, 1989; Elkind,1989; Frost, 1992; Lieberman, 1993**;** Ramey, Farren, Campbell, 1979; Sroufe, 1995; Wortham and Reifel, 2000) found that purposeful play that creates a means of enjoyable interaction is the most effective means by which a young child develops his learning potential.

Reaching teen mothers with vital information can be more complex because adolescents have a foot in two worlds; the world of being a child and the world of shouldering adult responsibilities.   These parents are especially vulnerable to feelings of inadequacy (Wechsler, 1998). When they don't have a sense of their own mind, parents can find their children's questions to be stressful (Belenky et al.,1986,1997). At the same time this sense of vulnerability can provide motivation for learning. "Parents and children evolve in tandem. Children encourage the development of

parents as much as parents encourage development of children" (Belenky et al, p. 156, quoting the research of Galinsky, 1981;Gutmann, 1975; and Rossi, 1980).

How can one effectively reach these parents with information that will have a significant effect on their parenting practices? This has been an inquiry for me for over thirty years as I have been involved in parenting education in the United States as well as in Southeast Asia, Latin America and Africa. Following this inquiry in 1997, I began leading a team to develop a learning approach and body of materials that might address this challenge. These materials and approach came to be known as the *Learning Basket.* Although the materials and approach had been piloted with a variety of populations in the United States and Latin America, they had never been the focus of a research study. This is intended as an exploratory study regarding the effect of the *Learning Basket*.

This study focuses on the effect of a series of 20 parenting sessions using the *Learning Basket* approach and materials on a group of teen mothers who do not see themselves as successful learners. The *Learning Basket* approach is an interactive teaching strategy and an integrated teaching and learning system for parents and caregivers whose children are under the age of three years old. This system and strategy has the following intents:

1) to convey to the principle caregiver the importance of play in nurturing a young child's learning.

2) to nurture the learning of the young child through developing the learning potential of the child's principle caregiver, usually the parent

3) to provide an encouraging learning environment for both adults and children so that they might develop their cognitive abilities while gaining confidence in themselves as learners.

 The *Learning Basket* approach aims to create a practice of interactive play between the caregiver and young child, and it is delivered in a series of parenting sessions using a curriculum that is customized to meet the needs of the particular group of parents and young children who are participating in the sessions. This customization process includes core materials that are combined differently to address the learning needs, native language and interest of the participating group. The following is a list of the core materials:

      1. *Play to Learn* Activity Book

      2. *Parents are Teachers* Conversation Manual

      3. *Reflective Moments* Journal

      4. A basket containing 18 categories of objects for use in interactive

           play with infants and toddlers.

To meet the learning needs of the teen parents participating in this study, an additional journal entitled *All About Me* and a curriculum of 11 presentations, role plays and hand outs was developed. In addition to the materials, the *Learning Basket* approach employs a research-based interactive teaching/learning approach that will later be described in detail.

      In exploring the effect of the *Learning Basket* approach on teen mothers who do not see themselves as successful learners, I intend to focus on the effect of the approach in the following areas:

      1) the mother's perception of the value of play in nurturing the development
         of the child's learning potential

      2) the development of the mother's confidence as a learner.

I also understand that the development of this learning confidence has to do with cognitive disposition. Epistemological positions provide a foundation for growth and development for both parent and child. However because of the complexity of cognitive development and my inability to locate an appropriate instrument to incorporate into this study, cognitive capacity will be mentioned, but will not be one of the measures of effect.

In conducting this study I used a Q-sort Survey, which I designed around eight conceptual constructs relating to the role of play, learning confidence, attachment and teen culture. For interpreting the effect of the series of 20 *Learning Basket* sessions that formed the intervention, I considered the following 6 constructs:

I. *Cultural Values Relative to Play with Objects*

II. *Play and Relationships: Mother/Child Dyad*

III. *Role of Play in Learning*

IV. *Learning Confidence:Learning History*

V. *Learning Confidence: Learning Style*

VI. *Learning Confidence: Role as Parent*

I discarded the construct dealing with attachment because of the complexity of the issue and the limitations of the setting; and I used the information from the construct dealing with *Teen Culture* to inform the curriculum content and the facilitators' teaching style.

The subjects of this study are four teen mothers who were residents in the Group Home when the study began in September, 2001 and who remained in the

home through May, 2002, when the study concluded. These four mothers participated with other mothers in the home in the series of parenting sessions. They were distinct from the other 14 mothers in that they participated in the pre and post Q-sort Survey. It was not possible to focus on the effect of the sessions on the other mothers because they either came after the initial Q-sort Survey was administered or they left the home before the completion of the series and the administration of the final Q-sort Survey.

This study will measure the effect of a series of 20 parenting sessions using the *Learning Basket* approach and materials with 4 teen mothers who did not see themselves as successful learners. In conducting the study I will give consideration to the mothers' frequency of attendance, as well as their mode of participation. In order to interpret the results of the Q-sort Survey I will depend on additional information that our team gathered through observation sheets, feedback forms and journal entries.

Because of the small sample, the confidential nature of information regarding wards of the state, the variance in age and the cognitive abilities of the subjects as well as the fluctuating attendance, the results of this study cannot be generalized. However, the study can have significant implications for future research and for delivery of *Learning Basket* sessions and other curricula aimed at influencing the behavior of teen parents who live in group home settings.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historically, those who have studied the development of one's potential to think, reason and express one's thoughts through language have provided a means by which educators can describe a developmental progression in cognitive development that can be applied to adults and adolescents as well as to infants and young children .

Those who have studied cognitive development (Belenky et al., 1997; Fowler, 1981; Gilligan, 1982; Kegan,1982; Kohlberg, 1981;Piaget, 1962; Perry, 1970; Wilcox, 1979) have described epistemological positions that have been interpreted in the past to be developmental and sequential, but such interpretations are now being called into question (Berk, 2003; Berk, 2003; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000). Whether or not these capacities are described as stages, epistemological positions, or cognitive dispositions, researchers have found that the transition from one capacity to another is gradual, and might take many years because moving from one capacity to another requires an internal reorganization or restructuring of perceptions and understandings. Wilcox (1979), Vygotsky (1930/1990) and Berk (2003) point out that development takes place as a result of interaction between mental structure and stimulation from the environment. Development from one cognitive capacity to another is not automatic. "Restructuring happens as a result of external stimulation through encountering experience or inconsistencies that call into

question how a person perceives or explains something. These points of 'conflict' present invitation to a more complex way of seeing something" (Wilcox, 1979 p. 80). Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) have described this process as "gradual, cumulative and continuous" (p. 29).

Jean Piaget (1954/1967) made a contribution to the understanding of how play with objects enables a learner to move from concrete to abstract thinking as he described 4 "stages" of development. Recently his "stage" theory has been called into question as too sequential and perhaps mechanical (Bjorklund, 2000; Flavell, Miller, and Miller, 2002). In spite of these criticisms, Berk (2003) points out that Piaget's theory offers "a useful road map of cognitive development" by offering milestones that aid in understanding cognitive, emotional, social and moral development (Berk, 2003, p.250).

Bjorklund (2000) notes that virtually all experts agree that a young child's cognition is not as stair-step-like as Piaget described, but Berk (2003) notes that there is not yet consensus on how general or specific cognitive development actually is. While this debate ensues, it is useful to describe Piaget's stages as a point of reference because they continue to influence the current discussion.

Much has been written to describe the four stages that Piaget named Stage I: *Sensori Motor*, Stage II: *Pre-operational*, Stage III: *Concrete Operations*, and Stage IV: *Formal Operations*. Wilcox (1979) simplified the complexity by naming essential cognitive capacities of each stage. The *Sensori-Motor Stage* is characterized by "acting on objects"; the *Pre-operational Stage*, as "Naming/imitating concrete objects and immediate relationships; *Concrete Operations* is a stage in which logical

connections are able to be formed; *Formal Operations* is the stage in which one is able to "think abstractly and to 'think about thinking'" (pp.27-104).

In Stage I: the *Sensori Motor* period, a learner, usually a baby, understands herself to be the center of the universe. Her immediate needs direct her action. She is not aware of those who have needs that are not her own. In this stage the baby is developing the concept of "object constancy", assuming that when something is not present that it ceases to exist (Wilcox, 1979, p. 29). Wilcox elaborates on Piaget (1967) saying that the child is first attached to himself (egocentric perspective), and when he interacts with people and objects, he can become attached to both the people and the objects. Winnicott (1965) wrote on this same dynamic as he described the role of "transitional objects"(p 123). As a result of his research Case (1992) modified the definition of stage to be a "less tightly knit concept; one in which related competencies develop over an extended period, depending on both brain development and experience" (Berk, 2003, p.250).

Bronson (2000) and Kopp (2000) point out that an infant or toddler who has the benefit of a supportive learning environment and the continuity of relationships of affection enters confidently into the process of cognitive development. Adolescents, on the other hand, who have not had the benefit of such an environment, might still be working through challenges to move beyond concrete and immediate thinking (Ausubel,1954; Bronson, 2000; Kopp, 2000). Goleman (1995) points out that emotional needs can compromise intellectual development, and as a result, adolescents who have not had a supportive environment in which to develop in their early years, will have cognitive capacities that are not as evolved as those who have

been well supported in their social and emotional development in their early years (Belenky et al., 1986, 1997; Felkner, 1974).

The progression of cognitive development for young children described by Berk (2003), Bjorklund (2000), Case (1992), Piaget (1967), Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), and Vygotsky (1930-35/1978) provide various frameworks as points of reference. Those who have described cognitive development for adolescents and women provide additional frameworks.

For over thirty years Perry's (1970) landmark research on the development of an older adolescent's cognition has served as point of reference in describing how an adolescent learns. That the subjects of Perry's study were male freshmen at Harvard University did not diminish the influence of this work (Taylor, 2000). Perry described movement through a series of four major cognitive dispositions in thinking, which can be described generally as moving from more absolute to more relativistic.

Perry (1970) described these dispositions as *Dualism*, *Multiplicity*, *Relativism* and *Commitment*. Taylor, Marienau and Fiddler (2000) provided a succinct and clear description of each of Perry's dispositions. *Dualism* looks to external authorities as sources of knowing and truth and "divides meaning into two realms: "Good versus Bad, Right vs. Wrong" (p.343). In the stage of *Multiplicity*, the thinker comes to realize that there are many perceptions and perspectives that can be in dialogue with one another. All are valid. Relativism is the stage in which the thinker accepts that there are no absolutes, it depends. "Knowledge is qualitative, dependent on contexts" (Taylor et al.,p. 343). The final disposition in this scheme is *Commitment*. Authority rests with the individual, who decides knowledge and truth in the midst of relativism.

In describing the progression of thinking in these dispositions Perry also described modes of regression or retreat. He described, *Escape* as a choice within the awareness of *Multiplicity*. In the midst of ambiguity and multiple perspectives, a thinker can avoid forming a position, committing to a perspective, or deciding a truth. Perry described *Retreat* as "avoidance of complexity and ambivalence by regression to *Dualism* colored by hatred of otherness" (Taylor et al., p.343). Perry also mentioned that by *temporizing* one could postpone moving from one disposition to another "for a year or more" (Taylor et al.,p. 343).

Although sufficiently rich and complex, this framework was not complete in the eyes of several of Perry's students, who were eager to launch a research project that focused on women and which would include subjects from a variety of economic, racial, cultural and social strata. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) launched a research project that involved interviewing 135 women. These women ranged in age from 14 to 60 years old, and lived in both rural and urban settings. Thirty-three per cent of those interviewed were clients in social service agencies. As a result of this study, Belenky et al. (1986, 1997) developed a different framework through which to view ways of knowing.

The result of their work which is described in the book, *Womens' Ways of Knowing* (1986,1997) is a description of *epistemological positions* which the researchers reframed as *strategies for knowing* (Belenky et al, 1997, p 3). Among themselves the authors did not agree that these positions or strategies are developmental or sequential. Taylor et al (2000) described them as a "repertoire of knowing strategies to choose among in response to different situations" (p. 345).

Taylor et al noted "more fully developed individuals have a broader repertoire of knowing strategies to choose from" (p.345). This assumes that there is some developmental progression which the authors described as "moving from more simple to complex ways of viewing oneself and the world" (Taylor et al., 2000, p. 345).

Belenky et al. (1986,1997) described these strategies in detail. The five strategies are I. *Silence*, II. *Received Knowing*, III. *Subjective Knowing*, IV. *Procedural Knowing* and V. *Constructed Knowing* (pp. 2-3).

Silence, though described as one of these positions is not a strategy, but rather a result of a deficit in the social support system around a learner (Belenky, Bond, Weinstock, 1997). Those in this position consider themselves as without anything to say in an exchange of ideas. Through past negative experience or cultural patterns they do not consider themselves as learners. A learner in this epistemological position has undeveloped representational thought; she is limited to thinking in the present and the actual rather than in the imaginary, metaphorical or the past and future tenses. Sometimes the expression of this position takes the form of sitting in a learning situation and having nothing to say; or conversely talking frenetically in an attempt to draw attention to oneself, or using language as a weapon to separate and diminish people rather than to empower and connect with them (Belenky et al.,1996).

The strategy of *Received Knowing* corresponds to what Perry described as *Dualism* (Taylor et al 2000). The assumption of this strategy is that knowledge and authority rest with someone else. The major differences in Perry's *Dualism* and Belenky et al.'s *Received Knowing*, is that there is an emphasis on "either-or" thinking in Perry, and learners in the stage of *Dualism* identify and strive to become

those who have authoritarian knowledge. The assumption of those operating out of the understanding of *Received Knowing* is that someone else is in charge; there is no personal identification with that person. Women in this position do not imagine that one day they will be in the position of being an authority or expert (Belenky, 1986, 1997).

Taylor et al. (2000) drew a connection between Perry's *Multiplicity* and Belenky et al.'s (1986, 1997) *Subjective Knowing* by noting that in both the learner realizes that "my opinion is as good as yours or anyone's" (p. 347). Truth is personal and based on experience" (p. 347-348). The Belenky et al. position of *Subjective Knowing* is developed as a result of interior reflection on personal experience that reveals a learner's inner voice of wisdom. In Perry's state of *Multiplicity* a learner engages in dialogue, listening to the perspective of others, and forming her own perspective (Taylor et al, 2000).

When a learner operates out of the strategy of *Procedural Knowing* she recognizes that there are multiple frameworks for thinking and that each has method and procedure for creating and evaluating knowledge. Belenky, et al (1986, 1997) further described two expressions of this strategy; one which is more rational which they named *Separate*; and one which is more subjective, which they named *Connected*.

The final strategy in this schema is described as *Constructed Knowing*. Using this strategy the learner is able to enter into dialogue, listen to multiple perspectives, voice her perspective, and to be amazed by the emergence of a new insight formerly held by none of those who entered the dialogue. This is the experience of

Constructivist Learning. A result of this experience of learning is a commitment to action or insights of those involved (Kramp & Roth,1987).

Piaget (1967), Perry(1970.) and Belenky et al. (1987, 1997) in describing some sequences of cognitive development and ways of knowing have revealed a journey in thinking from that of depending on knowledge that someone else constructs to including oneself as a co-constructor of knowledge. Wilcox (1979) compared the cognitive capacities described by Piaget (1954/1967,1972) and Kohlberg (1972) and noted that an adolescent can show up in any of the stages described by these researchers. The capacities that they described are not age-defined or age-dependent. "Cognitive development is a long-term process and it is not automatic" (Wilcox, p.80). In Piaget's (1954/1967) and Kohlberg's (1972) point of reference having capacity in one stage assumes having capacity in the stages that developmentally precede it. This developmental sequence has recently, however, been called into question (Berk, 2003; Bjorklund, 2000; Sutherland, 1992).

The development of cognitive capacity is made more complex by the insight that emotional needs can compromise intellectual development (Coleman, 1980; Rutter, 1993). As a result, adolescents who have not had an enriched and secure environment in which to develop as young children, might have cognitive capacities that are not as evolved as those who have been well supported in their emotional and cognitive development in their early years (Belenky et al., 1986; Felkner, 1974).

The Importance of a Learner's Confidence

Researchers agree (Csikszentmilhalyi and Larsen,1984; Gilligan, 1982, 1990; Keh, 1971, 1977; Mead, 1953, 1958; Whiting, 1963) that the process of forming a self-image is central to the development of an adolescent as she moves from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood. "Despite considerable diversity in their methods and their conclusions, all acknowledge the significance of self and identity in directing an individual's life course"(Musick, 1993, p. 63-64).

Adolescent learning needs to be seen in the context of the major developmental challenges that the learner is working through: that is, the formation of self-image and identity and becoming competent, while feeling she belongs (Felker, 1974; Jordan et al, 1991; Miller, 1988; Rutter, 1993)**.** Ausebel (1954) observed that these developmental challenges are similar to that of a 2 year old, but the stakes are distinctly different. The adolescent struggles to demonstrate competence and thereby gain independence or creative interdependence with adults; while the toddler struggles to demonstrate competence and in doing so is socialized into a sense of belonging and dependency on adults.

Unlike the toddler, the adolescent gains much of his self-image as a learner from his experience in formal learning environments such as schools. This self-image is formed by receiving messages from the external environment, which combine with inner messages communicated through self-talk and intuition to create a self image. This self-image is powerful in governing behavior. This self-image can also be changed or modified by messages; and when the self-image changes the person's behavior changes as well. But the process is neither automatic nor instant. It

happens over time and is made more complex by the interplay of values that can protect an existing self-image from being affected (Boulding, 1955). Performance at school is one of the 6 factors that Stanwyck and Felker (1971) and Stanwyck (1972) identify as critical in forming an adolescent's self image. Other factors that they named are behavior, anxiety, appearance, happiness and satisfaction. Malcolm Knowles (1973) pointed out that the formal education system in the United States focuses on teaching content rather than nurturing the potential of the learner. He stated that the emphasis on product rather than process becomes increasingly more pressured as a student progresses from second grade in the system. A student who has problems conforming to the style of the teacher has increased difficulty in learning and often has a negative self-image as a learner.

Discovering how one learns and thinks (processes information) is central to releasing self-directed learning and helping the learner to form a positive self-image (Knowles, 1990). Fortunately today there are several instruments to help learners, facilitators and guides to discern learning styles (McCarthy, 1990), dominant intelligences (Gardner, 1993), and the use of modalities (Markova, 1990) to perceive and process information. These instruments can be user-friendly and can be presented in such a manner that they provide learners with practical ways to approach learning geared to their particular strengths.

The Importance of Play to Learning

In attempting to encourage adolescent parents to nurture the learning potential of their very young children, one needs to strengthen the parent's learning potential

while demonstrating to them the importance of purposeful play as a valid mode of learning, especially for young children.

Parten (1932), Vygotsky (1930-35), Piaget (1967) and Smilansky (1968) have described that in play a young child assimilates information and is guided in accommodating to the rules and patterns of society. She develops the following basic thought processing skills that move from thinking in the concrete to the ability to think in the abstract:

1. exploration

2. manipulation

3. mastery through practice and repetition

4. logical memory

5. problem solving

6. interpretation

7. imagination

8. creativity (divergent thinking)

9. expression of will

In addition to developing thinking skills, a child in play develops intelligences across major domains of development. Each of these domains has its own "operating rules" and sequence of development (Gardner, 1993a). This development is intrinsically dependent upon interaction with adults and other children.

Bornstein and Bruner (1989) pointed out that play that enhances learning provides an abundance of first-hand experiences, the opportunity for interaction with

a supportive caregiver and time for exploring multiple ways of combining objects and completing tasks. Playful activity can also include fantasy play that constructs make-believe worlds. (Bettleheim, 1976; Bruner, 1974; Jenkinson, 1988; Sutton-Smith,1974). Play is an effective medium of learning because it requires involvement and intense focus.

In describing how play nurtures thinking skills Piaget (1967) described two types of knowledge that children develop by playing with objects: *Physical Knowledge* and *Logiomathematical Knowledge*. *Physical Knowledge* is acquired by acting on objects: touching, pushing, poking, squeezing, and dropping them. *Logiomathematical Knowledge* is more complicated. It is created by comparing, finding relationsh*ip* between objects, discovering similarities and differences (Williams and Kamii, 1986). *Logicomathematical* and *Physical Knowledge* depend on each other. *Logicomathematical* interprets the information gained through touch and manipulation. This interpretation maximizes learning and is occasioned by asking questions as children handle objects (Williams and Kamii, 1986).

A child in playing with objects also nurtures multiple domains of development. The cognitive domain, which has to do with the intellect, includes for a young child the development of skills, understandings and awareness that lead to pre-writing, reading and math, as well as fine motor and gross motor coordination.

Piaget (1968) was the first to describe development that is nurtured by play with objects in the cognitive domain. He found that play with objects helps a child to assimilate information and to develop the following abilities and understandings:

1. eye-hand coordination

2. object permanence

3. differentiation of patterns

4. sequencing

5. sorting

6. the recognition and use of language

7. the use of letters and numbers as symbols that point to concretions

8. qualities and quantities

Parten (1932), whose research preceding Piaget described play through the lens of social skill development as she described associative and cooperative play. She noted in her work that through interactive play the child learns to accommodate to the norms, rules and cultural patterns within society. Through social interaction he learns to take cues from others, to respond to their feelings and different perspectives, and to subordinate his impulses. Vygotsky (1930-1935/ 1978) noted that through play a child learns to exercise self control, while developing empathy for others.

In social play a child uses objects as props to help her re-enact the world around her. She uses dolls to create home life, blocks to build houses, and a scarf to dress up like the adults around her. Through this kind of play a child imitates the adult world, encounters problems, and discovers interests and concerns (Smilansky and Shefatya, 1990).

In social play with others a young child learns to voice his ideas and points of view. In house play with his mother, a child might state, "In the egg carton, some of

the eggs are fried and some are scrambled." As he states such an idea, he invites his caregiver to help him learn that an egg does not come cooked in the shell; but rather that a cook decides whether to prepare an egg to be fried or scrambled. Social play provides the child the opportunity to ask questions and thereby nurtures his ability to become an active learner.

In addition to describing the social role of play in a young child's development, Parten (1932) described young children's solitary play. Research done by Smilansky (1968) and Smilansky and Shfatya (1990) elaborated Parten's insights to describe constructive play in which a child is able to create and achieve and build a sense of confidence. In activities that nurture confidence a child learns through repetition as well as risking new experiences. For example when a young child successfully stacks blocks as well as balances them on her head, she can gain a sense of confidence and positive self-esteem. This confidence and self-esteem contribute to a child's ability to initiate action, as well as to problem solve and make choices (Wortham and Reifel, 2000).

In addition to finding that through play young children develop cognitive, social, and personal competence, researchers have found that play develops a child's sense of fantasy and make believe as well. Vygotsky (1930/1990), Smilansky (1968) and Bettleheim (1976) described fantasy, make-believe and symbolic play. Imagination, spiritual connection with the Divine, a yearning for discovery and exploration and a love of experimentation and creativity come naturally for infants and toddlers. Supportive caregivers nurture these dimensions of intelligence and protect them from the functionalism of the practical world.

Without fantasy and imaginative play, a child estranges himself from his inner life and this depletes him. As a consequence, he may later, as an adolescent, come to hate the rational world and escape entirely into a fantasy world, as if to make up for what was lost in childhood (Bettleheim, 1976, p. 65).

Vygotsky noted (1930/1990) that a child's imagination begins to develop before her intellect. Because it is necessary for a child to draw from a wealth of experience in order to link abstract concepts to concretions intellectually, the development of the child's intellect follows the development of her imagination. When intellect and imagination are intertwined, a rich and original texture of thought results (Howes and Matheson, 1992).

"Imagination is the bridge to intuition and sometimes the direct route to inspiration" (Jenkinson, 1988, p. 75). In symbolic and imaginative play a child creates fanciful worlds and explores new ways of combining things and ideas. Vygotsky (1930-1935/ 1978) states that in this form of play a child's imagination changes the function of objects to help create the imagined world. For example, for the child, straws can become magic wands; a quilt can become a flying carpet.

Through the exploration and discovery involved in this style of play, a child develops a repertoire of novel ideas, which become a resource to problem solving in the immediate and later on in life. The capacity to think creatively provides confidence in dealing with ambiguity (Jenkinson, 1988).

It is through fantasy play that a child nurtures intuition. Bettleheim (1976) points out that in fantasy play a child develops an inner life that can help balance the

demands of the rational world. This balance can reduce fear and anxiety and provide a sense of social well-being and self control (Vygotsky, 1930/1990; Bettleheim,1976; Jenkinson, 1988).   Pearce (1997) stated that imagination is a critical element in the formation of intelligence. "Imagination means creating images that are not present to the senses. The whole crux of human intelligence hinges on this ability of mind" (p. 120).

In play infants and toddlers come to know the world and how to live in it; they develop life skills, confidence and a sense of well being. They experiment with "free range thinking" (Jenkinson, 1988, p.51). But in spite of its importance to the development of confident competent individuals, play has been marginalized in our contemporary U.S. society. Play activity has been turned into competition on the one hand and entertainment on the other. Both competition and entertainment have become powerful vehicles for commercialization (Jenkinson, 1988, Postman, 1983, Elkind, 1981).

Knowing the vital role that purposeful play has in the development of a child's learning potential influences how a parent relates to their child as a learner (Fewell, Casal, Glick, Wheeden, and Spiker, 1996). A young parent might not have experienced play as a medium for learning in her own life, and so might think that playing with young children is a frivolous waste of time. Also parents might have experienced the dynamics of poverty, prejudice and racism, and look to education of their children as a critical means of escaping oppression. In doing so they can marginalize or fail to appreciate the benefits of play (Garcia-Coll, 1995).

In addition to the experience of economic poverty, the social dynamics of institutionalized racism within the dominant U.S. culture affect parenting practices. Scott (1991) and McAdoo (1981) described how the dynamics of this form of racism can strip away a teenage mother's self-confidence and sense of hope for herself and her child. These dynamics, which result in prescribed, subservient roles; a negative self-image and low self-esteem; constrained study and work opportunities; limited safe, affordable housing; and violent neighborhoods influence culturally specific child-rearing practices (Garcia-Coll, 1995). Nurturing of children is intertwined with work and study routines. Physical punishment and directive language is aimed at creating obedience to caregivers (Carothers, 1990).   At the same time, "Because black parents recognize that their children must learn to deal with institutional racism and personal discrimination; black children are encouraged to test absolute rules and absolute authority"(Young, 1974, p.74). Learning is seen as a serious activity. Play can be seen as frivolous and silly (Garcia-Coll, 1995).

In attempting to positively affect these parents through a series of parenting sessions, previous research suggests that a teaching strategy and curriculum that acknowledge a parent's cognitive capacities, her self-image as a learner, and her perception of play as a valid medium for learning would effect the impact of the strategies and the curriculum.

Teaching Strategy

Piaget (1967), Perry(1970), and Belenky et al. (1986, 1997) in describing the stages of cognitive development have revealed a journey in thinking from that of

depending on knowledge that someone else constructs to including oneself as a co-constructor of knowledge. Wilcox (1979) compared the developmental stages described by Piaget (1954/1967,1972) and Kohlberg (1972) and noted that an adolescent can show up in any of the stages described by these researchers. The stage is not age-defined or age-dependent. Because of this developmental process, having capacity in one stage assumes having capacity in the stages that developmentally precede it. The emotional support that an adolescent experiences can greatly influence her ability to develop from one cognitive stage to another (Belenky et al, 1986; Felkner, 1974; Goleman, 1995; Sroufe, 1995).

Carl Rogers (1961) in describing the challenge of supporting the development of learning stated that "We cannot teach another person directly; we can only facilitate his learning"(p. 32). Rogers, after developing his philosophy of *client centered* therapy conceptualized *student-centered teaching*, and pioneered a humanist philosophy of learning. This approach values personal development and self-actualization of the learner and is consistent with other psychological models of development (Erikson, 1959; Maslow, 1968). In this model of teaching and learning, which has come to be known as a humanistic approach, helping the learner develop voice and self-direction are primary values (Taylor, 1987; Taylor et al., 2000).

In addition this approach requires that the teacher or guide focus on the learning style and interests of the student, while taking into account her cognitive capacity. The result of this approach can be what Rogers (1961) described as "a change in the organization of the self"(p. 395), and what Boulding (1955) described

as a shift of self-image. These foundational changes can occasion a reorganization of the student's self-understanding as a learner.

Powell (1996) stated that it is this kind of deep change that is essential if a parent is to be able to engage confidently in parenting sessions that ask them to "digest and integrate new perspectives on parenting with existing beliefs and practices" (p1). As much as it is beneficial for a student to undergo this *reorganization of the self*, Rogers (1961) also pointed out that unless the learner feels safe enough to risk, he will actively resist this process.

Given this need to feel safe in order to engage in learning, the humanistic approach to teaching and learning can be especially well suited to the needs of adolescent mothers who are wards of the state. The research of Belenky et al. (1986, 1997) revealed that the majority of those women whose thinking came from the position of *Silenced* were from lower economic classes or those who had had a history of abuse in their lives. The authors indicated that finding a way for these parents to gain their voice and their confidence is essential for the healthy growth and development of their young children. Belenky, Bond, Weinstock (1997) found that parents who did not see themselves as thinkers and learners were much less aware of their children's thinking processes than those parents who were confident in thinking and learning. Belenky et al. (1997) stated boldly that for women who in their own lives have been victims of abuse, it is essential that "they gain their own voice and develop an awareness of their own minds if they are to cease being perpetuators or victims of family violence, passing down patterns from one generation to the next" (p.163).

Understanding that learning involves "a change in organization of self",

Rogers (1961) stated that this change "tends to be resisted through denial or distortion

of symbolization"(Knowles, 1973, p. 33).

Rogers (1961) also stated the following:

The structure and organization of self appears to become more rigid under

threat; and to relax its boundaries when completely free from threat.

Experience which is perceived as inconsistent with the self can only be

assimilated if the current organization of self is relaxed and expanded to

include [that which is inconsistent]" (p. 156).

Taylor (1995) pointed out that some learners fear that they will lose their

familiar identity and patterns of relationship that have become comfortable. Adding

to this fear is the possibility that if a woman makes the decision to step out of

constricting patterns and to move into learning and growth, she can be discouraged by

friends and family members who are threatened by the change that her decision will

occasion (Taylor, 1995).

The dynamics that Rogers (1961), Knowles (1973) and Taylor (1995) have

described suggest a challenge to create an environment that feels safe to the learner so

that she can risk entering into the learning process. Cyril O.Houle's (1961) described

three basic motivations for adults to engage in learning: 1) to achieve personal goals;

2) to make social contact and form relationships; 3) to learn the subject matter being

offered. With these various motivations in mind, the facilitator of humanistic

learning is challenged to create what Kegan (1982) has described as a *holding*

environment in the learning setting (p.190-191). Daloz (1987) elaborated on this idea

in saying that once the environment is established, one can "provide tools and encourage habits of mind to promote risk-taking and self-direction" (p. 90).

D.W. Winnicott (1965) was first to elaborate on the concept of establishing a *holding environment* as he described the forming of a relationship between caregiver and infant. John Bowlby (1982) described the concept of a holding environment as he described establishing a *secure base* as he articulated the phases of forming healthy attachment between infant and caregiver.

Daloz (1987) pointed out that the humanistic approach to learning is relationship-based. It depends on forming positive and trust-filled relationships between facilitators and learners. If the environment is to feel safe, trust must also be developed among learners. This trust is developed through healthy interaction. In a group in which individuals have suffered abuse, the establishment of this trust is difficult. The emotional wounding that is the result of abuse at the hands of others, shows up as fundamental distrust of interaction with others (Goleman, 1995). Given that in a humanistic approach to learning, the facilitator's main concern is the growth of the learner; the challenge to form trust-filled relationships and to establish a safe learning environment can overshadow the curriculum content.

In concert with the concern for enabling the learner to feel safe and finding ways for her to develop confidence in expressing her thoughts and opinions, is the concern for presenting curriculum content that will strengthen the positive parenting skills of adolescent parents. Research (Abelson, 1986) points to the fact that parents modify their understandings and beliefs about parenting very reluctantly because these beliefs and understandings are rooted in core beliefs and cultural values.

Okagaki and Divecha (1994) noted that "these beliefs and values about parenting are influenced by the characteristics of the child and the parents' own developmental history, psychological stability, and marital state as well as their age and gender" (pp. 35-67).

Because of this reluctance it is important to meet the parents where they are in their attitudes, practices, beliefs and understandings and to form a respectful teaching-learning relationship over time. Norman-Murch and Wollenburg (1999) describe a partnership relationship with the parent. In addition, the length and intensity of a parenting program matters. Heinecke, Beckwith and Thompson (1988) reviewed outcome studies of 20 intervention programs focused on parenting, and concluded that "more pervasive and sustained effects are likely to be realized when the intervention includes 11 or more contacts over a least a three-month period" (p.120).

This review of literature indicates that in order to provide the optimal learning environment for the very young child, it is necessary to affect the learning potential of the chief caregiver, usually the parent. Strategies that are likely to have an effect are: (a) engaging the parent in a series of learning sessions that take into account her cognitive capacities (b) her image of herself as a learner, and (c) her perception of the role of play in nurturing the learning potential of the young child. In addition, awareness of the parents' learning styles, previous understandings and perceptions and willingness to engage in a formal learning setting are likely to have an effect also. The style of the learning guide or facilitator is important, as is the teaching/learning strategy that she employs.

In the next chapter I will describe the methodology that I used to carry out the study with the teen parents using the *Learning Basket* approach.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Introductory Description

This study was designed to address the research question, **"**What is the effect of a series of 20 parenting sessions using the *Learning Basket* approach and materials on a group of teen mothers who do not see themselves as successful learners?"

This question was addressed by implementation of the *Learning Basket* approach in a Group Home with 4 teenage mothers who are wards of the state. The intervention included 20 two-hour parenting sessions using the *Learning Basket* materials. Three of the sessions were devoted to information gathering and forming relationship with the mothers; eleven sessions included presenting parenting information, and six sessions were devoted to individual make-up work that included filling out journal sheets. The 20 sessions were offered over a 9-month period.

A Q-sort survey (Stephenson, 1953; Waters, Noyes, Vaughn, & Ricks, 1985) served as the main source of pre and post-intervention information regarding the potential impact of the intervention. A Q-sort instrument used was based on the Attachment Q sort developed by Waters & Deane (1985). McKeown and Thomas (1988) note:

"Q method typically employs small numbers of respondents and the in-depth study of single cases is not uncommon" (p. 11).

"Q methodology would seem to hold special promise for those seeking to make more intelligible and rigorous the study of human subjectivity. Subjectivity, in the lexicon of Q methodology, means nothing more than a person's communication of his or her point of view" (p. 12).

I chose the Q-sort as a primary instrument for this study because I was interested in the change of subjective attitudes toward themselves as learner and perceptions about the role of play in nurturing learning that might be a result of mothers participating in the series of *Learning Basket* sessions. I wanted an instrument that is appropriate for research on a small sample. The other means that we used to collect information to complement data gathered by the Q-Sort survey were *Parent Observation Sheets*, on which the two facilitators and one observer recorded data during each session; and a series of journal sheets and feedback forms that parents filled out during each session. I will describe the *Parent Observation Sheet*, the *All About Me* journal sheets, and *Reflective Moments* feedback sheets in this chapter in the section on Instrumentation, and examples of each are located in Appendix B, pp. 2- 8.

This study was carried out in a group home for adolescent mothers who are wards of the state (referred to in the narrative as the Group Home). The Group Home is owned and operated by a not-for-profit agency, and is one in a network of such facilities in Chicago. I chose this population as the focus of this study because the Director of the Group Home provided the following information: Of the eleven mothers that were in the Home in September, 2001, four had attended 10 or more schools; seven had attended at least seven schools. One of these mothers had attended 13 schools before entering the ninth grade. Eight of the mothers were at least one

grade level behind, and two were three grade levels behind. In their reading, of the six records available, four mothers were four grade levels behind. Verbal I.Q. scores revealed that 6 of the 10 records available showed a score of 80 and below, with one having a verbal IQ of 58. The Director of the Group Home made this information available to me for use in a funding proposal. Because the young women are wards of the state, I was not able to obtain their individual records for the purpose of this study. However from this information it seemed likely that these mothers would not perceive themselves as successful learners.

Of the 11 teen mothers and their infants who were assigned to the Group Home in September, 2001; four remained in May 2002. Departures resulted from three factors: 1) Two mothers successfully made a transition to independent living; 2) Three mothers were re-assigned to another facility; 3) Two mothers ran away. During the year seven mothers who were not residents of the home in September, 2001 became residents and participated in the parenting program. They were too late to take the pre-session Q-Sort Survey that would indicate their perceptions before the *Learning Basket* series of 11 teaching sessions. Attendance at the parenting sessions was strictly voluntary.

This study measures the effect of a series of 20 parenting sessions using the *Learning Basket* approach and materials on 4 teen mothers who do not see themselves as successful learners. These mothers were present in the Group Home in September, 2001 when the pre-session Q-sort surveys were administered and also present in the Group Home at the end of May, 2002 when the post-session surveys were administered. My research design and consent form were reviewed by my committee,

which served as my IRB. All subjects signed *Advised Consent Forms*, which I based on the standard form which was provided to me by the Union Institute and University, but which I modified to be understood by a participant having a fourth grade reading level. This form can be found in Appendix B**,** p. 1.

The Subjects and the Setting

This study was carried out with 4 teen mothers who participated in the *Learning Basket* sessions along with other teen mothers in a residential Group Home for wards of the state. This Group Home was undergoing a change of ownership and management, as well as a dramatic turnover of staff. As a result, there was an atmosphere of confusion that was illustrated to us by the staff of the Group Home consistently forgetting that we were offering the *Learning Basket* sessions every other Wednesday evening. They frequently had other plans for the mothers. This turnover and confusion within the staff accounted for some of the scattered attendance of the young mothers.

The focus of the study is on the four, rather than the 18 who attended the sessions because of the changing population of residents within the Group Home. These four were the only mothers who were resident in the home when the study began in September, 2001 and who were also resident in the home when the post Q Sort was administered in May, 2002.

Because law protects the rights of wards of the state, it was not possible for me to gain access to school records or psychological counseling records that might provide a more complete picture of the four mothers in this study. The information

used for this study is what I gathered from interviews with staff members of the Group Home, the *Parent Observations Sheets*, the *All About Me* journal sheets, the *Refective Moments* feedback sheets and from the Q-Sort Survey that we administered before and after the series of 11 *Learning Basket* sessions with the four mothers.

Participants

I will briefly describe the four mothers who are the focus of this study based on the information that I gathered and on my experience with each.

In September, 2001, Sue was an 18 year old African American mother. When Sue began the program her child was 3 months old, and she celebrated his first birthday in June, 2002, when the program ended. At the age of 16, Sue was taken into the custody of the state. She was first placed in a detention home. This Group Home was her second placement.

Eliana was a 20 year old Anglo-Hispanic high school junior with a two and a half year old son when she began the program in September, 2001. She and her sister were taken out of an abusive home situation 3 and one half years prior to this time to come under the care of the state. In returning to the Group Home on September 4, 2001 after having been "on run" for several months, Eliana brought her two and a half year old back to the care of the Group Home Day Care Center.

Tiwana was a 16 years old African American mother when she entered the program. Her daughter was 2 months old. According to a program manager at the Group Home, she was taken from her birth family when she was 14 years old , and she had had twenty-four placements in the past two years. Throughout the year she

attended an alternative high school as a ninth grader, and as part of this program she

had a mentor.

Amanda, an African American, entered the program in September, 2001 when

she was 14. She had been at the Group Home for 3 months, and her daughter was 4

months old. This was her first placement in a group home. She had completed the 8th

grade**.** She expressed an interest in attending a large public high school, and she stated

that she needed tutoring help in all subjects.

The Intervention

Overview

Since 1997 I have led a team in the development of The *Learning Basket*

approach as a resource for learning for parents of infants and toddlers. The approach

is focused on the role of play in the development of learning and literacy with infants

and toddlers and their adult caregivers. The materials involved in this approach are a

basket of 18 simple objects, 11 of which are handmade; the *Play to Learn* activity

book which describes over 150 developmentally appropriate activities using the

objects to nurture learning and development; and the *Parents are Teachers* literacy

manual, which contains 16 line drawings depicting parenting issues and an

accompanying conversation format. For this intervention, in addition to these

standard materials, Camille Turner, my research assistant, and I developed a journal

entitled *All About Me,* which we used in tandem with the other *Learning Basket*

materials. I will describe these journal sheets and provide examples as I describe the

lesson plan used for each session. The intervention consisted of 20 two-hour

parenting sessions using *Learning Basket* materials offered in a series over a 9 month period.   In addition to the other materials that we used, The *Reflective Moments* feedback sheets provided a means of gathering comments about the information presented and the mothers' perceptions of their participation in each session. I will describe these sheets as I describe the other materials that we used in the 11 teaching sessions and I will describe their function in information gathering in the Instrumentation Section.

The Facilitators

Camille Turner and I facilitated the series of *Learning Basket* sessions, developed the curriculum, and conducted the research. I have 33 years experience in training and program development. My responsibility was project coordination, and the development of the 11 lessons that appear in Appendix C, pp. 1-64. Camille is a recent graduate of Northwestern University. She has worked as a volunteer in after-school programs. As a 23-year-old African American college graduate, Camille's role in this project was to develop the journaling exercises, to maintain records, and to interface with the participants as a role model. An Americorps volunteer, Andrea Gladney, aided us in data collection. Andrea is an African American mother of a nine-year-old daughter, and she also served as a role model of an attentive parent. Andrea often brought her daughter to the *Learning Basket* sessions. Family Educators from the Group Home cared for the children of the resident mothers during the *Learning Basket* sessions until the children were called in for playtime. When staffing permitted, these Family Educators attended the sessions as passive observers.

The Q-Sort Procedure

Before the intervention, we carried out the Q-sort Survey as a pre-session measure with each of the 11 teenage parents who were resident in the Group Home in September, 2001. The Q-sort consisted of 100 statements in 8 categories that were put on laminated cards. We administered the Q-sort one week before the beginning of the 20 group sessions and immediately following the last session. To introduce each mother to the methodology, I asked her to look at a *practice set* of laminated cards that held statements related to general topics. Examples of these statements are:

I like Italian food.

I like getting to know new people.

I wish I could live in the country

I get into arguments with people.

I asked each mother, at the beginning of the first time of administering the Q-sort, to read each of the statements in the *practice set* of cards, and I answered each, asking her to put the card in the appropriate basket labeled 1) *Hardly ever*, 2) *Sometimes* , 3) *Alot*, and 4) *Almost Always*. After this orientation exercise, I then introduced the *principle set* of Q-sort statements. I asked each mother to hold the cards and to read each aloud before she put each in the basket that most closely described what she thought.

After the sorting session, Camille recorded the responses on a record sheet which also held personal information. Each mother filled out the record sheet with

her name and age; the name and address of the father of her baby; the grade completed in school for both mother and father; the baby's name, birth date and birth weight, and several words that each mother decided that would describe herself and her baby. In addition each mother answered the following interview questions, which we asked verbally:

1. What school are you going to now?

2. Do you have a library card?

3. What subjects would interest you in a parenting class?

4. In what subjects, if any, do you need help in tutoring?

I repeated the Q-sort process after nine months with the four mothers who had done the Q-sort survey in September and after we had offered 20 parenting group sessions using the *Learning Basket* materials.

Other Means of Gathering Information Before the Teaching Sessions

As an additional means of collecting information about what the young mothers' awareness and perceptions were before the intervention, we designed and implemented three two-hour sessions. During these sessions we introduced the materials in the *Learning Basket*, asked the mothers if they would be interested in learning to make any of the hand-made objects in the basket, conducted guided conversations using the *Parents are Teachers* manual, and video taped parents playing with their children. In order to collect written information, we asked the mothers to fill out the following handouts:

1. A chart that asked what a child can do at particular ages (6 month intervals between birth and 24 months and 24 to 36 months).

2. A description of her baby using the first 10 words that came to mind.

3. A list of 5 activities that could be done with a baby with a small cloth ball.

4. A description of how each mother has fun with her baby and how she feels when she is with her baby.

5. A description of how she felt during pregnancy, the first days after the birth of her child; (where appropriate) after the child was a year old and after s/he was two years old.

In addition during the third of these sessions, we asked each mother to imagine that she was a reporter from *Teen People Magazine*, and that she was doing an article on the lives of mothers who are also teenagers. We asked each mother to write down questions to ask in an interview with another teen mother. Then we asked the mothers to interview each other and record both the questions and responses on a hand-out. The information gathered on these handouts appears in the mothers' "All About Me" journals in Appendix B, pp. 9-48. In addition to these handouts we developed an observation sheet (Appendix B, pp. 2-7) which we used during these sessions and throughout the teaching sessions. I will describe this sheet further as I describe the instruments that we used to gather data.

The Teaching Sessions

From information gathered in the 3 data gathering sessions; from information gathered by the Q-sort Surveys and accompanying interviews; and from research regarding the needs of teen parents, Camille and I developed 11 two-hour teaching modules. We facilitated these modules every other Wednesday evening from 6:30 to

8:30 pm at the Group Home over a nine-month period. Andrea Gladney,

accompanied Camille and me at each session. She participated in the sessions and

she helped us fill out the observation sheets. In addition to the initial 3 data

gathering sessions and the 11 teaching sessions and we held 6 make-up sessions that

allowed those who had missed formal teaching sessions to complete their journal

writing and to review information that they had missed in the formal sessions.

The Engagement Strategy as a Component of Intervention

Because in the Group Home protocol, a resident cannot be required to attend

any programs, the staff of the Group Home suggested that we use incentives to

encourage the mothers' participation in the *Learning Basket* sessions. These

incentives were both concrete and abstract:

1) We began the series of sessions by giving each participant an empty *Learning Basket*, and at each session a *Learning Basket* object was given to each participant.

2) Snacks that the mothers suggested were served at each session

3) We took photos of each mother and child and distributed them to the mothers

4) We made videos of mothers playing with their children. Each participant received a copy of her video.

5) At the end of the series each participant received a published copy of the *All About Me* journal that she had written

6) Each participant received a Certificate of Participation for Phase I (September through December), Phase II (January through May) and for the over-all *Learning Basket* program. Each certificate had stars that represented the number of sessions that she had attended.

7) The staff of the Group Home awarded *Incentive Points* to mothers attending the session. These points were consistent with the Group Home's behavior modification system.

The Teaching/Learning Strategy as a Component of Intervention

In delivering the 11 teaching modules we used the *Learning Basket* teaching/learning approach that focused on the development of the individuals within the group. We intended the group sessions to be interactive, involving, and focused in content on the needs and interests of the participants. The philosophy behind the *Learning Basket* teaching strategy is aligned with that described by Norman-Murch and Wollenburg (1999) in which teaching and learning is seen as a process over time. An emotional dimension is woven into the delivery of information. In facilitating the sessions, we tried to see each mother in the context of her life situation. In order to support the development of the learning potential of each mother, we used the insights of *Zone of Proximal Development* (Vygotsky, 1930-35/ 1978) and *scaffolding* (Wood,Bruner,Ross, 1976)**.** In using these approaches, we aimed to acknowledge the full learning potential of the mothers by engaging them in guided conversations, role plays and application exercises that met the learners' skill levels and which supported each in stretching to develop new skills and understandings.

Using the *Learning Basket* teaching strategy we saw each group session as a gathering of learners, able to learn from one another and forming what Malcolm Knowles (1973, 1990) described as a *learning community*. To catalyze and sustain this approach, we used a variety of techniques such as group discussion, simulations, problem-solving activities, case studies and small team exercises. Our intent in using this strategy was to enable each mother to become aware of her habits as a learner and

as a parent, and to become open to learning new parenting practices and learning strategies. In taking this approach to guiding the *Learning Basket* parenting sessions, we were inspired by the writing of Paolo Freire (1968), to see each learner as competent in being able to reason as well as to solve problems.

We designed the content of the curriculum for the eleven teaching sessions based on the needs that the young mothers expressed in their Q-sort surveys, interviews and in the three preliminary data gathering sessions, as well as around research in the field. In the Q Sort survey the majority of the mothers who participated indicated that they understood the value of play, but observing them playing with their young children, we noted that the majority of the mothers used harsh directive language as they played with their children.   When asked to list what an infant and toddler can usually do at different levels of development under the categories of "General Abilities", "Body Movement", "Vocalizing", "Feeding", "Socializing" and "Other", all of the mothers could list activities for the age of their own child, but not for children who were 6 to 24 months older or younger. In answer to the interview question, "As a parent, where do you need help?" Six of the 11 mothers interviewed responded, "In dealing with stress and anger." In response to the question (that was posed as part of a "Dear Abby" letter), "I'm confused about the mental development of a baby and when they begin to learn. Can you please explain to me how a baby's brain develops after they are born?" None of the mothers responded with a description of how the brain develops.

On the basis of this information, we included brain development, the importance of language, and dealing with stress and anger in the list of teaching

modules to be offered. On observing how the mothers dealt with behavior issues

throughout the sessions, we developed two modules on guiding behavior and on

attachment. All of these modules are included in Appendix C, pp. 1-64.

In designing the eleven teaching modules we embedded values and objectives

in a lesson plan framework that I will later describe in detail. These values and

objectives are the following:

1. To occasion reflection with these young mothers in order for them to discover their
   personal positive qualities, as well as value and meaning in life

2. To emphasize , draw upon, and develop their strengths

3. To share expanded images of what is possible for them to achieve in life.

4. To emphasize practical skill development.

5. To co-develop and consistently re-enforce with the mothers norms around
   respectful behavior (respect for self and others).

6. To provide for participants' individualized care and attention in order to develop
   trust-filled relationships.

7. To draw values, style and curriculum content from the depth and wisdom of
   African American and other relationship-based cultures.

 8. To nurture in these mothers the ability to use language to express thoughts,
   feelings, and ideas.

The Lesson Plan Framework

We used the *Learning Basket* lesson plan to promote participation, enable

interaction, and to provide consistency. Daloz (1987) had the insight that the

framework of a lesson itself can be powerful in promoting development. This is the

intent of the *Learning Basket* lesson plan. McKeachie's insight (1980) that students

who have anxiety about learning need structure where there are clear expectations,

specific assignments, prepared material, and short achievable tasks, confirms the lesson framework of the *Learning Basket* approach.

This framework has 5 major parts: Introduction , Guided Conversation, Presentation, Playtime, and Reflection. I will describe the function of each and what we did in each part in this intervention.

Introduction: In the first segment of the lesson we established the learning climate by rehearsing the plan and timeframe of each section of the lesson plan. During this part of the session, we asked the participants to create and then review *Expectations for Creating a Respectful Learning Environment.* Also in this section we asked the participants to do journaling, using handouts with writing prompts. We compiled these sheets throughout the year to create an *All About Me* personal journal, which we photocopied and bound for each participant. In this journal each mother wrote about her past experiences, what she cared about, and her hopes for the future. One of these sheets, focused on the past included the following writing prompt:

> "Take some time and think about your life to date. Write down how you have gotten where you are (In detail), discussing anything you feel that is relevant to your situation. Be sure to include achievements, obstacles, successes, and disappointments" (Journal Sheet 1-14-02).

All of these journal sheets are provided in Appendix B, pp. 9-48. The introduction section of the lesson lasted roughly 20 minutes. By asking the mothers to use the journal sheets, we initiated each session with reflective

practice. Musick (1993) has written on the value of journal writing for adolescents, saying that it provides a means of telling their stories, and thinking through their ideas before talking and acting. This was our intent in introducing journaling.

Guided Conversation: In this second section of the lesson plan we used the *Parents are Teachers* literacy manual as a focus for guided conversations. The manual contains line drawings that depict issues related to parenting. We used these line drawings as focal points for guided conversations, which have the potential to draw out the voice and ideas of the participants. In guiding these conversations we aimed to create a respectful environment in which all of the mothers might share their experiences and ideas without fear of being ridiculed or criticized. For the first 5 teaching sessions I led the conversations. In the sixth session and in each subsequent session, after the protocol of respect had been established, I asked for a volunteer mother to guide the conversation. The mother who guided the conversation used the questions provided in the manual. The questions in the *Parents are Teachers* manual follow Freire's (1968) insight of moving down levels of consciousness. The first questions, "What do you notice in this picture? What emotions are the parents expressing?" are usually simple for the participants in the group to answer. The questions that follow ask the participants to think about and relate their own experience. "Where have you experienced something like this?" Finally participants are asked to become

critical thinkers and problem solvers by responding to questions like, "What problem do you see here?" and "What might be some solutions? What advice would you give to these parents?"

The conversation that comes forward from the reflection on the line drawings in the *Parents are Teachers* manual have the potential to include the sharing of the parents' personal experiences. The intent of the conversation aligns with Musick's insight (1993) that it is important for teen parents to share their experiences and ideas and to have the experience of being heard. In this intervention, we used the journal writing and the guided conversation as structural ways of inviting participants out of the thinking position of *Silenced*, which is described by Belenky et al. (1986,1997). We did this by providing a safe forum for the mothers to begin to articulate their thoughts and experiences using written and spoken language.

The Presentation: For this section of the lesson plan, we used written handouts with simply stated information, role-plays, simulations and guided reflective conversations focused on the handout information. We created this curriculum, which appears in Appendix C, pp. 1-64 to introduce the participants to new information regarding child development and parenting. Daloz (1987) describes the importance of role-plays, pointing out that they provide a way for the facilitator to "mirror the behavior of the learner, and for the learner to look at herself with humor and discern what shifts are needed"(p. 235). Godbey (1978) points out that the more senses that are

involved in the learning experience, the more intense and lasting will be the learning experience. With this in mind our presentations used costume props, noise makers, music, opportunities for movement, and touch as well as reading and talking.

The role-plays that we used centered around the behavior of two mothers: *Frieda Forgetful* and *Connie Constant,* dramatized initially by the facilitators. The presentation was always prefaced by the explanation that each of us is a combination of these two types of mothers. Daloz (1987) points out that in the role-play it is important that the role model leads the learner to appreciate the worth in herself. For this reason and because playing a role engages multiple senses and has the potential to have a lasting effect (Godbey, 1978), we invited participants in the group session to play the role of *Connie Constant*, but never the role of *Frieda Forgetful*. In each role-play *Frieda* was pre-occupied with herself, her boyfriends and her need for entertainment. The care for her baby was an after-thought, and often she blamed her baby *Julia* for her boredom and restlessness. In contrast, *Connie* found ways of caring for herself while giving maximum attention to her baby. In assuming the role of *Connie*, parents were able to provide the positive example and take on the role of teaching the facilitators, who assumed the role of *Frieda.*

We followed each role play with reflective conversation in which we asked for participants in the group to discern what problems were being illustrated, and what alternative actions on the part of the mothers would be more effective. Paolo Friere (1968) pointed to the importance of developing

the reasoning and problem solving abilities of learners. This was our intent in following each role-play with a reflective conversation. In addition to the conversation, we integrated Marakova's (1990, 1992) insights on including multiple modalities by distributing hand-outs and using wall visuals to accompany the role plays and to engage visual learners.

For this intervention, we developed 11 modules to be used in the teaching sessions. The subject matter for these modules was based research regarding the needs of teen parents as well as on the needs and interests that the mothers expressed in the Q Sort Survey, the interviews and in the three information-gathering sessions. The following is a list of the modules that we developed.

1. How a Baby's Brain Develops

2. The Pruning of the Brain Cells

3. Brain Development and Play

4. Brain Development and Language

5. Brain Development and the Role of Play Review

6. A Child Learns at Their Own Pace

7. Falling in Love with Our Young Children

8. Sometimes We Don't Love Our Babies

9. Guiding A Young Child's Behavior

10. Techniques for Orchestrating Behavior

11. Handling Stress

The focus on guiding behavior and appropriate expectations were included based on studies by DeLissovoy (1973) and Field (1980). These studies indicate teen parents are more likely to use physical punishment with their infants when the babies fail to meet developmental expectations. Other studies (Musick, 1993; Osofsky and Ware, 1994) indicate that teen parents are more likely to use hostile techniques like spanking, teasing, pinching and shaming to punish behavior.

Many adolescents give the appearance of having little tolerance for their children's developmentally appropriate demands or attempts to explore and assert themselves. They tend to speak very critically and negatively to their children, handle them roughly, and terrorize them one moment and smother them with kisses the next (Musick, 1993, p183).
We included the subject of sometimes not loving our babies to acknowledge that there are times when a parent's personal needs, irritation, anger and stress direct the mistreatment of young children.

We included the focus on language as a result of observing the parents interacting with their children during the play sessions within the *Learning Basket* sessions. During the play times in each session we noticed that the majority of the parents were silent or used directive language rather than praising their children and using question-asking to stimulate their child's thinking. Studies (Field, 1981; Osofsky, Osofsky, and Diamond, 1988) indicate that adolescent mothers spend less time than adult parents talking to their babies. "Whatever the cause, the fact that teen mothers vocalize less and

offer less stimulation in general to their infants may be key factors in these children's later depressed cognitive functioning" (Musick, 1993, p. 182).

In each teaching session, by including information on how talking to a baby helps to develop her brain, by demonstrating ways of helpfully talking to a baby in role plays, and by prompting the mothers to talk to the child during the play sessions, we hoped to encourage the parents to use supportive language with their babies. The hand-out that we distributed as part of this presentation shared the following tips on how to teach a baby to speak:

A. Imitate the sounds the baby makes

B. Use a friendly tone. This is called "parentese".

C. Look at your child while talking to him.

D. Use positive words and names to describe the baby.

E. Explain to the baby what is happening around her.

F. Ask questions rather than always giving directions. This will

help the child think.

G. Talk to the baby as you play and as you go from place to place

H. Praising your baby teaches her to praise herself and others.

We included the topics focused on brain development and play to make popular research on these subjects available to the teen mothers in terms they could understand. For example in the module "How a Baby's Brain Develops" we created two wall visuals, each having a large circle containing many dots. Some of these dots were located within heart shapes that appeared

within the circle. We explained to the mothers that these circles represented the brains of two babies. The dots represented the brain cells, called *neurons*. The hearts represented the emotional centers of the brain, in which many of the brain cells are located. We asked for a volunteer to stand by the first wall visual and to observe the first role play in which the character, *Frieda Forgetful* acted out her distraction and neglect of her child, *Julia*. We asked the volunteer mother to make a line that connected the dots (or brain cells) within the hearts (or emotional centers) every time she saw *Frieda* express a nurturing action toward her baby. At the end of the role-play we noted the number of connections (or synapses) that were formed in baby *Julia's* brain as a result of having received caring interaction. We repeated this process focused on the role-play of *Connie Constant* caring for her baby, *Amanda*. In the reflective conversation following the role-plays we raised the question, "What is the difference in the number of connections formed in the brains of *Julia* and *Amanda*? Given that these connections enhance the learning potential of a young child, how might *Julia's* options for learning be different from those of *Amanda*? How did *Frieda's* actions affect her baby? What advice would you give her for doing better?" In the hand-out which we distributed, we described the point of the role play in the following two sentences:

> Affectionate interaction that is enhanced by play, nurtures the
> development of brain connections in the emotional centers of the
> baby's brain. This interaction involves speaking to the baby, gently

touching the baby, showing the baby your face and fingers, and

helping the baby explore tastes, textures and objects (Parenting

Curriculum Lesson I, p.2).

In the module entitled "Brain Development and Play", we emphasized the

importance of how a baby feels to her success in learning. In the role play we

referred back to the visuals showing the hearts (or emotional centers) and the

connections (or synapses) between the brain cells. In the hand-out we

included the following advice for ways to play with a baby that will enable

him to feel good about himself while he is developing skills and

understandings:

    A. Use a friendly tone of voice

    B. Ask questions that help the child problem solve as he plays

    C. Follow the child's interests and leads

    D. Give positive feedback using voice tone, words and facial

       expressions

We included the topic of "Handling Stress" in response to the mothers'

request for learning how to find time for themselves as well as give time and

attention to their babies. In this module we asked the mothers to list 4 things

that made them feel exhausted and 4 things that made them feel sad. We

provided them with a handout on which to write their lists. Then we asked

them to list 4 things that they like to do to have healthy and safe fun, 4 things

that they like to do to relax, and 4 things that they do to deal with their

frustration and anger. We then distributed a handout that had a list of 8 major

causes of stress, and a space to add two other causes. We asked the mothers

to check off on the handout the items on the list that are a part of their daily

lives. Among the items listed were "Eating a lot of sugar; not getting

exercise; being worried and not having someone to talk to about those

worries; and not taking time for yourself." There was also a list of

suggestions on what to do to relieve stress. We demonstrated some of

practical actions such as stress relieving body movements. Then we asked

each mother to create a weekly time design in which they would make time

for themselves. Each showed their time design, and we talked about practical

actions to make time for themselves possible within each day and throughout

the week.

The module on stress and all of the other teaching modules that we

created and used are included in their entirety in Appendix C, pp. 1-64.

Play time: Within the flow of the parenting sessions that we conducted, we

created a time for mothers to play with their children. We prefaced this

section of the lesson with a small presentation. In this presentation, we

demonstrated the use of one of the objects in the *Learning Basket* using the

Play to Learn activity book. Once we established a respectful learning

environment in which a mother would not be ridiculed for stepping forward

to take a leadership role, we asked mothers to volunteer to make this

presentation. After the mothers saw how the learning object was used, they received the object to use in play with their children. Family Educators from the Group Home brought the children into the room where we were doing the parenting session. Andrea, Camille and I each observed three or four mothers as they played with their children using the object that we had distributed and the activity from the *Play to Learn* book that focused on the object and that was appropriate for the age and interest of their child. At times we prompted them to follow their child's interests, to set up an enabling environment for play, to talk to the child during play, and to support the child to be successful in problem solving.

In doing this observation and prompting, we noticed behaviors that were consistent with the findings of Musick (1993) that adolescent parent's play with their infants tends to be rougher, more physical and less reciprocal than the play of adult parents with their children. "The greater physicality may derive from her perception of the infant as a toy, something to be played with when and how it suits her without regard to how it feels (to the child)" (Musick, 1993, p. 183). The guided playtime served as a focused observation time for us to note a parent's behavior in play with her child and the child's response. For the mothers this time served as practice for times for when the mothers would be alone playing with their children.

Time for Reflection and Feedback: At the end of each Learning Basket parenting session we provided an opportunity for participants to reflect and

note their reflections in the *Reflective Moments Journal*. This journal contains writing prompts geared to reflecting on the learner's experience and the content of the session. Some of the statements focus on how the learner participated, for example "In this session I volunteered to ………; I spoke up often, frequently, never." Other statements ask for a description of the participants' feelings: "In the session today I felt confident, exhausted, proud, angry etc." Other statements focus on the content; "Something that I learned that I will use at home; Changes that I would suggest." The *Reflective Moments* journal sheet is found in Appendix B, p. 8.

There are multiple functions of this reflective time and these journal sheets. First, the sheets provided valuable feedback for us as facilitators about the participant and the lesson. Second, they served as a means of data gathering for the program evaluation. Third, having an opportunity to reflect provided for the mothers an opportunity for growth. Taylor and Marienau (1995) pointed out that reflection of this kind makes self-assessment possible and allows the participant to practice expressing her opinions.

> Getting her voice out on paper helps her build her confidence toward expressing herself verbally. Self-assessment can also shift ones' perspective from assuming knowledge and information always come from the teacher, to realizing learning and direction can come from within. As their voices grow stronger and clearer, the speakers do also (Taylor and Marienau, 1995, p.27).

The Style and Techniques used by the Facilitator(s)

In facilitating the *Learning Basket* parenting sessions we employed very specific   techniques that were as important to encouraging learning according to researchers in the fields of adult and adolescent learning (Belenky et al, 1986, 1997; Freire, 1968; Rogers, 1961; Taylor and Marienau,1995) as any of the information or skills that we intended to transfer:

> 1) We aimed to gear each session to the interest of the students in the understanding that curiosity provides foundational motivation.
>
> 2) In each sessions we posed problems, asking the learners to come up with solutions, and we aimed to listen attentively to their responses. In doing so we hoped to communicate that we considered each to be a thinker and a learner.
>
> 3) Through question asking, we intended to draw out the learner's voice and to elaborate on her thoughts. We recorded those thoughts on flip chart paper, so that they were visible to the learner as well as to the group.
>
> 4) We intended to provide a clear structure for each learning session, so that the learners could experience consistency and continuity.
>
> 5) We encouraged learners to establish, rehearse and accomplish goals
>
> 6) We supported the learners to be decision-makers; and encouraged them to discover that decisions are not often between what is absolutely right or absolutely wrong**.**
>
> 7) We tried to create a learning environment that would feel safe and which might encourage risk and growth.
>
> 8) We used tentative language so that the learners might not be intimidated by the certainty of the facilitator. An example of this language would be: "It seems to me that the baby is tired, what do you think?" rather than "That baby is tired."

9) We used "organic language" such as *encourage ,nurture, guide* rather than directive and mechanical language such as *building skills; shaping behavior, pushing students to learn.*

10) At every point we tried to communicate positive messages to the mothers with the intent of helping them to develop a positive self-images as learners.

11) In order to gain the respect of these young mothers, we tried to be consistent in our style and approach. We aimed to fulfill every commitment that we made to them.

Rogers (1961) and Belenky et al. (1986, 1997) have described the task of the facilitator as that of guiding the learner toward new awareness and deeper consciousness. Belenky et al. (1997) use the metaphor of giving birth to describe the task. "Midwife teachers' support their students' thinking, but they do not do the students' thinking for them or expect the students to think as they do. They assist in the emergence of consciousness. They encourage the students to think in their own active voices"(p. 218).

To fulfill this expectation, the facilitator teacher might play many roles: presenter, listener, animator, ally, co-learner (Taylor and Marienau, 1995). Whatever the role being played, it is essential that the facilitator believe in the genuine capacity of the learners and not be patronizing nor condescending (Freire, 1968). The facilitator is a guide on a path to development, and she beckons the learners to risk, always ready to provide safety nets and support. She encourages the learner to draw upon her own resources, and refrains from rescuing the learner before she makes genuine breakthroughs (Freire, 1968; Taylor and Marienau, 1995).

In guiding the learning of those who have not traditionally been successful in school, a foundational intent of the facilitator is to enable the learner to "undo the feeling of being stupid"(Taylor and Marienau, 1995, p. 70).

Q-sort survey:

The Q-sort survey that I designed contained 100 statements printed on laminated cards, which I asked each participant to sort according to four choices:

1) *Hardly ever* 2) *Sometimes* 3) *A lot* 4) *Almost always.*

I selected the Q-sort as a foundational research instrument because it has been widely used in studying change of attitudes and is used with small samples. William Stephenson, a psychologist and physicist, first described the Q methodology in The Study of Behavior (1953b). In this work Stephenson described the psychometric principles and statistical foundations of the approach, which he had pioneered since 1932. The Q methodology has been used in a variety of studies focused on such topics as political campaign strategy (Gopian and Brown, 1989); religion and politics in Brazil (Peritore, 1990); examining a theory of justice (Poole and Steuernagel, 1989); medical decision making (Bartels, 1990); and parents' and teachers' conceptions of giftedness versus talent (Dobbs, 1991) among many other topics. I patterned the Q-sort which I designed after the Attachment Q-sort developed by Waters & Deane (1985), which was designed to study security and social competence in a sample of African-American children attending Head Start.

The Q-sort procedure is nested in the Q research methodology, which is distinct from the more common inferential statistical research methodology in the following ways:

1. Q methodology is focused on revealing changes within an individual rather than comparing the responses of a group of individuals to another group of individuals.

2. Responses come directly from the subjects, rather than from observers. There are no right or wrong responses (Brown, 1993).

3. The interest of the Q methodology is in seeing similarities and differences in "vectors of thought", which are subjective and can change over time (Brown, 1991, p. 3).

4. McKeown and Thomas (1988) point out that the Q-sort has an intrinsic validity because the subject models her own point of view.

The major concern of Q methodology is not with how many people believe such-and-such, but with why and how they believe what they do" (p. 45). The Q-sort is designed for use with small numbers of subjects rather than with large samples. Brown (1991) points out that the focus of Q methodology is on quality rather than on quantity. " In principle as well as practice, single cases can be the focus of significant research and the most powerful statistical mechanics are in the background, sufficiently so as to go relatively unnoticed by the users of Q who are disinterested in its mathematical substructure (p.2).

5. Because subjects reveal their own frame of reference through the Q-sort process, "the validity and reliability tests so central to conventional scaling in mainstream attitude research are simply unessential within the psychometric framework of Q methodology" (McKeown and Thomas, 1988, p. 45).

Brown (1991) describes the uniqueness of the Q-sort:

[it is an instrument that is]simple to the point of elegance, well fortified with

mathematics, increasingly supported by computer software programs, and

grounded in modern philosophical and scientific principles. And it has a

wealth of exemplary applications to help show the way. The qualitative

analyst would be hard pressed to find a more adequate methodological

ally (p. 28).

I chose the Q-sort for this study because the purpose of my study was to

measure the effect of a series of 20 parenting sessions using the *Learning Basket*

approach and materials on a group of teen mothers who do not see themselves as

successful learners. Because the majority of the mothers in my study were attending

alternative high schools, or had dropped out of school, I wanted the instrument that I

used for the dependent measure to be easily approached and executed by this sample

rather than a paper and pencil survey which might be reminiscent of school. Because

the Q-sort depends on sorting cards rather than using paper and pencil to write

responses, I intended the medium to appear simple and encouraging rather than

complex and deflating to the respondents.

The Q-Sort Design

McKeown and Thomas (1988) point out that the statements to be used in a Q-

sort can be designed in a deductive or inductive method. A deductive design is based

on hypothetical or theoretical considerations, and can promote theory testing by

incorporating hypothetical considerations into the design of the statements. In

addition the statements can be focused on a series of factors that the researcher

determines to be central to determining a shift of attitudes, values or beliefs of the

subjects who are central to the study.

I designed the Q-sort instrument that we used for this study around eight major conceptual constructs found in the literature to be of significance to optimal parenting and the challenges faced by adolescent mothers, and which are addressed in the design and content of the *Learning Basket* sessions: (I) *Cultural Values Relative to Play with Objects* (Piaget, 1967;Vygotsky, 1930-35, 1978; Garcia-Coll, 1993); **(II)** *Play and Relationships: Mother/Child Dyad* (Vygotsky, 1930-35,1978; Bruner,1986); (III) *Role of Play in Learning* (Piaget, 1967;Vygotsky, 1930-35, 1978; Bruner,1986) (IV). *Learning Confidence: Learning History* (Levine, 2002; Belenky et al, 1986,1997); (V).*Learning Confidence: Learning Style* (McCarthy,1987; Marakova, 1990, 1992; (VI). *Learning Confidence: Role as Parent* (Scott, 1991); (VII). *Play and Relationships:Attachment* (Bowlby, 1969,1982; Main, 1982; Ainsworth,1969); and (VIII) *Teen Culture* (Kaplan,1997; Ladner, 1971; Musick, 1993).

Six of the categories of the Q-sort instrument, (I) *Cultural Values Relative to Play with Objects*; II).*Play and Relationships: Mother/Child Dyad* ; (III) *Role of Play in Learning*; IV)*Learning Confidence:Learning History;* V) *Learning Confidence: Learning Style;* (VI) *Learning Confidence: Role as Parent*; informed the two variables of the framework of my study: 1) the parents' perception of the role of play in nurturing a young child's learning and (2) the parents' confidence as a learner. Because of their importance to this study, I gave the categories of *Learning Confidence:Learning Style* and *Learning Confidence:Learning History* a double emphasis. The Q-sort category (VII) *Play and Relationships:Attachment* contained information on infant-parent attachment; and category (VIII) *Teen Culture* focused on identification with various aspects of teen culture. The data related to attachment

were not considered for this study because of the complexity of the situation, and the data in the category on Teen Culture was used as process information and helped inform the teaching/learning strategy that we employed in the parenting sessions.

I designed 10 short statements in each category, choosing vocabulary that would be understandable to a person with a 4th grade reading level. Each statement was numbered and statements from each category were systematically interspersed throughout the deck of cards, so that the respondent could experience variety in the subject matter of the statements. I put each statement on a 3"x 3" card, which I had laminated. The resultant deck of cards had 100 statements.

In order to discern whether a respondent was consistent in her responses, I designed two pairs of statements in each category to express the opposite attitude or belief. Examples of such statements are:

8. I think playing with my child is not a waste of time.

88. I think playing with my child is a waste of time.

2. I feel like I am my baby's best teacher.

62. I feel like I am not my baby's best teacher.

(Q-sort statements appear in Appendix A, pp. 1-48)

In designing the response options in the forced choice framework of the Q-sort, I decided to offer four options and to include no absolutes. In making this choice, I was hoping to eliminate automatic answers that favored a middle ground or absolute certainty. I wanted each mother to sort through ambiguity and be as discreet as possible in expressing her attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. The choices that I

offered to the respondents were: 1) *Hardly ever* 2) *Sometimes* 3) *A lot* 4) *Almost always*

Description of other Means of Collecting Information

In addition to the Q-sort Survey we designed and used journal sheets, an observation sheet, and a participant feedback sheet as additional means of collecting information. In designing these forms, I was concerned that we would be able to triangulate the Q Sort with other information. Under my guidance my associate, Camille Turner, designed journal pages with prompts for each mother to fill out as part of the teaching sessions. These journal sheets on which the mothers expressed their attitudes, perceptions, hopes and opinions in their own words provided insights into each mothers' ways of thinking, her self-image and her ability to use language to express her thoughts. One of these journal sheets focused on the theme of family and asked the following:

"What does family mean to you?" "What do you consider a family?" "What have you learned about the meaning of family from your past?" "Do you want your family to be different? How?"

The following list includes the subject focus of the journal sheets:

1. How do you have fun with your baby?
2. Selecting favorite photos of you and your baby
3. My favorite things.
4. About my baby
5. I as a parent and young adult
6. Looking at my life
7. The first days of my pregnancy and after the birth of my baby
8. My memories of play
9. Thinking about my life to date

10. Thinking about my future
11. Thinking about the choices that I make
12. People that I admire
13. My family
14.Focus on me
15.What is important to me
16. My career
17. My thoughts
18. These words describe me
19. These pictures describe me

 Andrea Gladney, Camille Turner and I as *Learning Basket* facilitators filled

out *Observation Sheets* on each of the mothers in each of the sessions. Before using

the *Observation Sheets*, the three of us established norms for filling them out. Each

of us focused on the behavior of one, two or three mothers during each session. We

participated fully in the sessions and took brief notes to help us remember behaviors

to note on the sheets after the session. Each of us presented the *Observation Sheet* that

we had completed to the other two observers to check if we were in agreement with

what we had noted.   We observed different mothers throughout the series of sessions.

The *Observation Sheet* was designed around the following categories:

1) *Leadership and Learning Confidence* referred to showing initiative,

volunteering for roles in the session, and being self-reflective in one's

remarks (Musick, 1993; Taylor and Marienau, 1995).

 2) *Development as a Learner* referenced the categories developed by

(Belenky et al, 1986, 1997). These categories are *Silenced*, *Dualistic*

Thinking, *Procedural Thinking*, and *Constructivist Thinking.* I also included

the category *Shared Dialogue* or *Multiplicity* from Perry (1970). Under this

category we looked for the mother's willingness and ability to express her

thoughts, listen to the thoughts of others, blend her thoughts with those of others, and to be self-reflective about her own learning process.

3) *Parent and Child Relationship*, referred to the mother's attitude toward the baby expressed in her words and body language, her responsive action to the child's needs; and the actions the mother took to help regulate the baby's emotions (Sroufe, 1995).

4) *Parent Playing with Child*, referred to the style in which the parent played with the child. Observers in this category noted whether the parent dominated or encouraged the child in play through actions and use of language (Sroufe, 1995).

5) *Child with Parent*, referred to the action of the child in relationship to the parent. In this category the observer noted the baby's response to the mother, expressed in body language, vocalization and gestures (Sroufe, 1995).

The *Observation Sheet* is found in Appendix B, pp. 2-7.

As an additional way of gathering data, we asked the mothers to fill out feedback forms called *Reflective Moments* at the end of each session. These forms contained statements and writing prompts related to the mother's participation in each session and feedback about the session. Examples of these prompts are: "Today in the group session I volunteered to do something for the group". "When I was

participating in the group today, I mostly felt a) proud b) bored c) playful etc." ;

"What was difficult for me was…."; "Something that I learned today was….";

"Something in the session that I would change is……". These sheets provided an

additional means for us to have information that included the mothers' ways of using

words to convey their thinking.

Interviews with staff members of the Group Home and the Day Care Center

also provided information. These interviews included the following questions:

1. How long has this mother been in the Group Home?

2. Is this her first group home placement?

3. At what age was she taken from her birth parents?

4. How many placements has she had?

5. What school does she attend, if any?

6. What kind of reports (in general) does she receive from her
   teachers?

7. What special needs does she have?

8. What general relationship does she take to her child?

Because these mothers are wards of the state, their private records are protected, so

staff members could only answer in generalities.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to measure the effect of a series of 20 parenting

sessions using the *Learning Basket* approach and materials on a group of teen

mothers who do not see themselves as successful learners.

To conduct this study I developed an intervention that included delivering a series of parenting sessions using the *Learning Basket* approach over a nine-month period. The four parents and their children attended the sessions as part of a group that included other mothers who were resident for various lengths of time at the Group Home. I developed a Q-sort Survey as the principle standardized referenced instrument that is especially honed to determine difference in individuals, and I administered this instrument a week before conducting the first group session and immediately following the last of the sessions.

In addition, with the assistance of my associate, Camille Turner, I developed three other means of collecting information to aid in the interpretation of the Q-sort. These were a series of journal sheets, a participant feedback sheet, and an observation sheet. I also interviewed staff members of the Group Home, and each mother participated in a short interview after initially doing the Q-sort survey. As the intervention, I developed 20 parenting sessions that we delivered over a nine-month period. For eleven of these sessions I used the materials from the *Learning Basket* approach and combined them with a presentation curriculum that we developed to meet the needs of the learners as we determined them through the Q-sort Survey, interviews, and relevant research. The teaching strategy that we used intended to elicit the thinking of the young mothers, and to develop their confidence as learners. In the following chapter I will describe the results of the Q-sort survey.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to measure the effect of a series of 20 parenting sessions using the *Learning Basket* approach and materials on a group of teen mothers who do not see themselves as successful learners.

I was drawn to study this sample because of the information that I obtained from the Director of the Group Home that indicated that those living in the home had not been successful in their schooling experience. I wanted to find out how I might effectively communicate vital information regarding parenting and playful interaction to those who might not see themselves as effective learners.

To do this I designed the Q-sort instrument that we used for this study around eight major conceptual constructs found in the literature to be of significance to optimal parenting and the challenges faced by adolescent mothers, and which are addressed in the design and content of the *Learning Basket* sessions:

I) Cultural Values Relative to Play with Objects

II) Play and Relationships

III) The Role of Play in Learning

IV) Learning Confidence: Learning History

V) Learning Confidence: Learning Style

VI) Learning Confidence: Perception of Role as Parent

VII) Play and Attachment

VIII) Teen Culture

The Q-sort construct of (VII) *Play and Attachment* contained information on infant-parent attachment; and the category (VIII) *Teen Culture* focused on identification with various aspects of teen culture**.** I did not consider the data related to attachment because of the complexity of the situation; and we used the data in the category on Teen Culture as process information to help inform the teaching/learning strategy that we employed in the parenting sessions.

In addition to the Q-sort survey, I also kept record of attendance in order to detect the effect of frequency on a shift in attitude or perception. I present this record in Table 1 that compares the attendance of all four mothers.

Table 1: Attendance September through December						
Sessions 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sue x	x	x	x	x	-	-
Eliana x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Tiwana x	x	x	-	x	x	x
Amanda x	x	-	x	-	-	-

Note: In this table X indicates attendance and
– indicates absence.

Table 1a: Attendance January through May												
Sessions	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Sue	-	x	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	-
Eliana	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	-
Tiwana	-	x	x	x	-	-	x	-	-	-	-	x	-
Amanda	-	-	-	-	-	-	x	x	x	x	-	x	x

Note: In this table X indicates attendance and – indicates absence.

Eliana and Tiwana had the highest attendance rate; Eliana attended 19 of 20 sessions and Tiwana attended 11. Tiwana's attendance was most frequent at the beginning of the series. Amanda attended 9 sessions, with most frequency at the end of the series. Sue attended 7 sessions with most frequency at the beginning of the series.

In this chapter I present comparison tables under the topics of the six conceptual constructs that are the focus of my study:

I) Cultural Values Relative to Play with Objects

II) Play and Relationships

III) The Role of Play in Learning

IV) Leadership and Confidence: Learning History

V) Leadership and Confidence: Learning Style

VI) Leadership and Confidence: Perception of Role as Parent

The results for each conceptual construct are presented and displayed in tables in terms of each girl's response for that topic. The actual statements in the Q-sort survey and each mother's response in both the pre and post survey appear in

Appendix A, pp. 1-48. The statements appear in descending order according to the amount of difference in response. In this presentation and in the tables that follow, each of the constructs described in Tables 2-25 was scored as follows:

1 = Hardly ever
2 = Sometimes
3 = A lot
4 = Almost always

In this study, I was looking for any change as an indication of the effect of the *Learning Basket* sessions on the mothers. Generally an increase in the rating (moving from a response of 1 to a response of 4) is considered positive. However, because the Q-sort survey was constructed with both positive and negative statements in order to control for automatic responses, I have used the following indications to mark exceptions:

* = a negative change in score that is a positive result

= a positive change in score that is a negative result

Within each construct there are statements that provide exceptions to this scoring system. As I present each construct, I will describe these exceptions.

Four Mothers' Results: Play/Cultural Values

The objective of this construct is to describe the possible shift in cultural values that govern the perception of the importance of play in nurturing the development of a young child's intelligence that might occur as a result of the intervention. The statements included in this construct are based on the research of , Garcia-Coll (1993); Piaget (1954, 1967); Rogoff (1990); and Vygotsky (1930-1935/ 1978).

I decided that this construct was important to include, recognizing that some of the values of minority cultures are different than those of the dominant U.S. culture. These values, although different from the dominant culture, influence the behavior of parents in their relationship to play with their children (Garcia-Coll, 1993), and we might then expect to see these mothers who all represent minority cultures not valuing play as a medium for learning for their young children.

In this construct the response that indicates the highest level of awareness regarding the importance of play to learning is 4 (*Almost always*). One exception to this is in the following statements, where this highest level is indicated by a 1 (*Hardly ever*).

11. I think that my baby will begin to learn when he/she goes to school.

21. When child is with adults, I think tht it is important for him to sit quietly.

51. I think my baby learns a lot from T.V.

Another exception is in the following statements that ask the respondent to recognize that a response depends on a varying situation. The positive response is 2 (*Sometimes*).

1. I think it is dangerous to put my baby on the floor to play.

41. I think it is better to read books to my baby than to play with him/her.

81. I'm afraid that when I put my baby on the floor she will get dirty.

In this construct Eliana was the only mother to show a change of response in more statements than not. This change was positive in 5 of 6 changed responses. In Sue's responses there was an equal number of stable and changed responses. Four of five of her changed responses were positive. Tiwana and Amanda's responses were

more stable than changed. Three of 3 of Tiwana's changes were positive, while 2 of

three of Amanda's changes were positive.

In this construct there was one statement to which all four respondents

registered positive change. That statement is the following:

> 21. When my child is with adults, I think that it is important for him to sit
>   quietly

There was a change of response of 3 of 4 mothers to the following statement:

> 91. When my child is with adults, I think that it is important for her to play
>   actively.

This statement is opposite in meaning to statement #21; and all mothers except

Tiwana were consistent in their responses. Similarly there was a change of response

of 3 of 4 mothers to statement # 51: I think my baby learns a lot from T.V.   With

Eliana and Tiwana the change is positive; while with Amanda the change is negative.

In this construct overall there was more stability than change. However , in

examining the pre-intervention responses, I have found that all of the mothers held

few culturally-ingrained beliefs that disvalued the role of play in a young child's

development. Eighteen of their 23 responses that remained stable were positive.

Tables 2-5:
 Four Mothers' Results: Play/Cultural Values

Table 2:				Table 3:			
SUE: PLAY				ELIANA: Play			
Cultural Values				Cultural Values			
No	Pre	Post	Dif	No	Pre	Post	Dif
21	4	1	-3*	41	2	4	+2#
71	1	4	+3	91	1	3	+2
91	1	3	+2	21	4	3	-1*
11	2	1	-1*	31	1	2	+1
81	1	2	+1#	51	4	3	-1*
1	2	2	0	81	3	2	-1*
31	1	1	0	1	2	2	0
41	2	2	0	11	3	3	0
51	1	1	0	61	1	1	0
61	1	1	0	71	1	1	0

Table 4:			
TIWANA: Play			
Cultural Values			
No	Pre	Post	Dif
21	2	1	-1*
41	3	2	-1*
51	2	1	-1*
1	2	2	0
11	1	1	0
31	2	2	0
61	1	1	0
71	1	1	0
81	2	2	0
91	2	2	0

Table 5:			
AMANDA: Play			
Cultural Values			
No	Pre	Post	Dif
21	2	1	-1*
51	1	2	+1#
91	2	3	+1
1	2	2	0
11	1	1	0
31	1	1	0
41	2	2	0
61	1	1	0
71	1	1	0
81	1	1	0

Four Mothers' Results :Play/ Parent-Child Relationship

This construct was designed to address some of the issues that have emerged from research regarding mother-child relationship and the mother's understandings about the effect of playing with the baby and responding to his needs (Garcia-Coll, 1993; Rogoff, 1990; Sroufe, 1996; Vygotsky, 1930-35,/ 1978).

In this construct the response that indicates most sensitivity to the baby's needs is 4 (*Almost always*), except in the following statement, where that response is 1 (*Hardly ever*).

77. I don't do many things to have fun with my baby

Another exception to that of 4 (*Almost always*), is the following statement, where the response that acknowledges the complexity of daily situations is 2 (*Sometimes*).

47. My baby stresses me out.

In this case a response of 1 (*Hardly ever*) or 4 (*Almost always*) does not acknowledge the variability of circumstance.

In this construct Eliana was the only mother who showed an equal amount of stability and change in her responses. Of the 5 responses that showed change, 3 of the changes were positive and 2 were negative.

The other 3 mothers showed more stability than change. Sue changed in one response, and that change was negative. Tiwana changed in 3 responses, and 2 of the three changes were positive. Amanda changed in 4 responses, and 3 of the 4 were positive.

In the construct as a whole there were two statements to which 2 of the four mothers responded differently in the pre and post survey. To the following statement:

7. I think picking my baby up when he/she cries will spoil him/her

Eliana's change in response was positive; while Tiwana's change was negative. To statement #37, "I know what to do when my baby is sad," Eliana's change was negative, while Amanda's change was positive.

In this construct as a whole there was more stability than change in the mothers' responses. More than half of the mothers' unchanged responses (17 of 27) were positive.

Tables 6-9:

Four Mothers' Results:Play/ Parent-Child Relationship

Table 6:				Table 7:			
SUE: PLAY				ELIANA: Play			
Relationships				Relationships			
Parent-Child				Parent-Child			
No	Pre	Post	Dif	No	Pre	Post	Dif
87	3	4	+1#	27	4	2	-2
7	1	1	0	7	2	1	-1*
17	4	4	0	37	4	3	-1
27	4	4	0	47	2	1	-1*
37	4	4	0	77	2	1	-1*
47	1	1	0	17	3	3	0
57	4	4	0	57	3	3	0
67	1	1	0	67	1	1	0
77	1	1	0	87	3	3	0
97	1	1	0	97	1	1	0

Table 8:

TIWANA: Play

Relationship

Parent/Child

No	Pre	Post	Dif
7	1	2	+1#
87	4	3	-1
97	1	2	+1
17	4	4	0
27	4	4	0
37	3	3	0
47	2	2	0
57	3	3	0
67	1	1	0
77	2	2	0

Table 9:

AMANDA: Play

Relationship

Parent/Child

No	Pre	Post	Dif
27	2	4	+2
17	4	3	-1
37	2	3	+1
57	2	3	+1
7	1	1	0
47	2	2	0
67	1	1	0
77	1	1	0
87	3	3	0
97	1	1	0

Four Mothers' Results: Play/Role in Learning

Because the value of the role of play in learning is often not acknowledged in cultures that have been economically depressed (Garcia-Coll, 1995), I considered it important to include this construct. I wanted to detect if these mothers, who represented minority cultures, but not necessarily economically depressed families took exception to popular understandings and practices described by Garcia-Coll (1995).

In this construct the response that indicates most understanding of the role of play to learning was 4 (*Almost always*), except in the following responses, where that response was 1 (*Hardly ever*):

38. I don't think my baby needs toys to learn

48. I think play is silly.

58. I want to play with my child but I don't have time.

78. I don't think playing is a way to learn.

88. I think playing with my child is a waste of time

In addition to these exceptions, there were statements in this category that were stated negatively. In order to disagree with the statement, the subject needed to respond with another negative (1. *Hardly ever*). The following statements hold this pattern:

8. I think playing with my child is not a waste of time

18. I don't know how to play with my baby.

38. I don't think my baby needs toys to learn.

58. I want to play with my child but I don't have time.

68. I don't think playing brings me closer to my child

78. I don't think playing is a way to learn

In this construct all four mothers showed more stability than change in their responses. Eliana and Amanda showed positive change, and the change that Sue and Tiwana showed was equally positive and negative. Eliana had three responses that changed and all three were positive. Amanda had four changed responses and all four were positive. Sue had two responses that changed; one being positive, and the other negative. Tiwana had 4 changed responses; two were positive and two were negative.

In the construct as a whole in two statements there was positive change in the response of 3 of the 4 mothers. These statements were the following:

8. I think playing with my child is not a waste of time.

98. I think my baby needs toys to learn.

In this construct there were 3 statements to which there was a change in the response of 2 of the 4 mothers. To the following statement the change of response was positive for Eliana and Amanda.

48. I think play is silly

To the following statement, the change of response was negative for both Sue and Tiwana:

38. I don't think my baby needs toys to learn.

This change, which is inconsistent with their responses to statement 98, is probably due to the fact that it is stated negatively and requires the negative response *1) Hardly ever* to have positive meaning.

To the following statement, Tiwana's change was negative and Amanda's positive:

58. I want to play with my child but I don't have time.

In this construct 23 of the 27 of the mothers' unchanged responses were positive.

Tables D1-D4:
Comparison of Four Mothers in the Arena of Play: Role in Learning

Table 10:			
SUE: Play			
Role in Learning			
No	Pre	Post	Dif
8	1	4	+3
38	1	3	+2#
18	1	1	0
28	4	4	0
48	1	1	0
58	1	1	0
68	1	1	0
78	1	1	0
88	1	1	0
98	1	1	0

Table 11:			
ELIANA: Play			
Role in Learning			
No	Pre	Post	Dif
48	3	1	-2*
78	2	1	-1*
98	2	3	+1
8	1	1	0
18	1	1	0
28	3	3	0
38	2	2	0
58	2	2	0
68	1	1	0
88	1	1	0

Table 12:			
TIWANA: Play			
Role in Learning			
No	Pre	Post	Dif
8	1	4	+3
38	1	2	+1#
58	1	2	+1#
98	1	2	+1
18	1	1	0
28	4	4	0
48	1	1	0
68	1	1	0
78	1	1	0
88	1	1	0

Table13:			
AMANDA: Play			
Role in Learning			
No	Pre	Post	Dif
8	3	4	+1
48	2	1	-1*
58	2	1	-1*
98	1	2	+1
18	1	1	0
28	4	4	0
38	1	1	0
68	1	1	0
78	1	1	0
88	1	1	0

Four Mothers' Results: Learning Confidence/ Learning History

This construct was designed to reveal a participant's attitude to their learning experience in school, which I included as a counterpoint to the construct on *Learning Styles*. Senge (1990), Marakova (1990, 1992) and Knowles (1973) have pointed out that schools in the United States are organized around the value of control rather than the value of learning. I wanted to see if the mothers' school experience had left them with a sense of confidence in their ability to learn.

Unlike the previous constructs in which there is an answer that indicates more comprehension of the construct, in this construct and that on *Learning Styles*, I was looking for a changed answer, which might indicate more self-awareness. Marakova (1990) and McCarthy (1987) point out that a learner's greater self-awareness can lead to greater self-confidence in directing one's own learning.

In this construct Eliana and Amanda had more change than stability in their responses. Sue and Tiwana have more stability than change. Both Eliana and Amanda had change in 11 of 20 responses. Sue had a change in 8 of 20 responses, while Tiwana changed in 7 of 20 responses.

In the construct as a whole there are 4 statements which changed for 3 of four mothers. For Sue, Eliana and Amanda, there was a change in the following statements:

5. I am not satisfied with what I have done in school so far.

55. In most classes I am bored.

In the following statements there was a change in response from Eliana, Tiwana and

Amanda:

46. I have made presentations to a small group.

76. The idea of standing in front of a group and leading them makes me
nervous.

Tables 14-17: Four Mothers Results: Learning Confidence/ Learning History

Table 14:					Table15:			
SUE: Learning/Confidence					ELIANA: Learning/Confidence			
Learning History					Learning History			
No	Pre	Post	Dif		No	Pre	Post	Dif
15	2	4	+2		36	1	3	+2
25	4	2	-2		5	1	2	+1
16	2	1	-1*		25	1	2	+1
5	2	3	+1		26	2	3	+1
35	1	2	+1		35	2	3	+1
45	1	2	+1		45	1	2	+1
55	2	1	-1*		46	2	3	+1
85	2	1	-1		55	1	2	+1
26	2	2	0		76	3	4	+1
6	4	4	0		86	3	4	+1
36	2	2	0		96	3	2	-1
46	1	1	0		6	3	3	0
56	2	2	0		15	3	3	0
65	2	2	0		16	2	2	0
66	1	1	0		56	3	3	0
75	1	1	0		65	3	3	0
76	2	2	0		66	1	1	0
86	2	2	0		75	2	2	0
95	3	3	0		85	3	3	0
96	2	2	0		95	3	3	0

Table 16:					Table 17:			
TIWANA: Learning Conf					AMANDA: Learning Conf			
Learning History					Learning History			
No	Pre	Post	Dif		No	Pre	Post	Dif
95	4	2	-2*		85	3	1	-2*
56	4	2	-2*		5	1	2	+1
96	4	2	-2*		15	3	2	-1*
15	2	3	+1		26	2	1	-1*
46	2	1	-1*		36	1	2	+1
66	1	2	+1		46	3	2	-1*
76	1	2	+1		55	2	3	+1
5	2	2	0		56	2	1	-1*
6	3	3	0		65	3	2	-1
16	2	2	0		76	3	2	-1*
25	2	2	0		86	4	3	-1*
26	2	2	0		6	3	3	0
35	2	2	0		16	2	2	0
36	4	4	0		25	2	2	0
45	2	2	0		35	2	2	0
55	2	2	0		45	1	1	0
65	3	3	0		66	1	1	0
75	2	2	0		75	2	2	0
85	2	2	0		95	3	3	0
86	4	4	0		96	2	2	0

Four Mothers' Results: Learning Confidence/ Learning Style

The construct of Leadership and Confidence: Learning Style has been demonstrated in the research of Kolb (1984), Levine (2002, 1996, 1992), McCarthy (1987), Myers (1981)**,** and Marakova (1990, 1992) to be important in releasing the potential of the learner. McCarthy (1987) points out that every learning style is equally valuable and that growth in the learner happens as she self-consciously interacts with the learning process.

The design of this construct within the Q-sort is built around the understanding that what determines a person's Learning Style are a variety of ways of perceiving and processing information. Myers (1981) described the difference in processing modes as *Extroversion* and *Introversion.* In my Q-sort survey the following statements describe an *Extrovert* processing style:

4. I like to ask questions.

13. I learn best by listening and discussing.

43. I learn best by being told what to do.

53. I like to have clear instructions when given an assignment.

74. I learn best when I read and study with others.

The following statements describe an *Introvert* processing style.

14. When people talk a lot, I lose the point.

23. I like to do things my way.

33. I learn best when I read and study on my own.

83. I don't like to follow instructions.

93. I don't like to ask questions.

Marakova (1990, 1992) described a different framework of processing information when she described the use of the modalities (visual, auditory and kinesthetic) as the primary means of processing information. In her work she describes *Visual Processors, Auditory Processors, and Kinesthetic Processors.* In my Q-sort I designed the following statement to detect *Visual Processors*:

3. I find graphs and pictures useful in learning.

34. I learn best by watching and observing others.

54. I need to see a picture in order to get it.

I designed the following statements to detect *Auditory Processors*:

4. I like to ask questions.

13. I learn best by listening and discussing.

73. I prefer hearing a lecture instead of doing a project.

93. I don't like to ask questions.

The following statements were designed to discover *Kinesthetic Processors*.

63. When I do things with my hands, I learn best.

64. I like to try something out and then ask questions.

94. I have to try something out before I understand how to do it.

David Kolb (1984) and Bernice McCarthy (1987) combined the concepts of perceiving information in different ways with distinct ways of processing information to describe 4 different Learning Styles. These are described by Kolb (1984) with the following terms: 1) Divergers 2) Assimilators 3) Convergers 4) Accommodators

The following statements in the Q-sort were designed to detect learners who could be described as *Divergers*:

    4. I like to ask questions.

   93. I don't like to ask questions

Statements that were designed to discover *Assimilators* were the following:

   24. I learn best when I can read and hear lots of facts and information.

   73. I prefer hearing a lecture instead of doing a project.

I designed the following statements to detect learners that Kolb described as *Convergers*:

   44. I am interested in information if it connects with something practical.

   64. I like to try something out and then ask questions.

The following statements in the Q-sort were designed to discover the *Accomodators*. I find this name as a descriptor to be very misleading in describing a learner who McCarthy (1987) describes as one who is intuitive, creative and prone to action, and who often challenges complacency and disregards authority.

   23. I like to do things my way.

   84. Being exact drives me crazy.

Because research has revealed it is a greater self-awareness of one's learning style that strengthens the confidence of the learner, in the Q-sort I have scored a change between pre and post responses to be positive.

In this construct Tiwana, and Amanda showed more change than stability. Sue and Eliana showed more stability than change. Sue and Eliana each show change

in 9 out of 20 responses. Amanda shows change in 11 out of twenty responses, and Tiwana shows the most change, having 13 changed responses out of twenty.

In this construct as a whole there was one statement for which the responses of all four mothers changed. This statement follows:

44. I am interested in information if it connects with something practical.

There were two statements for which there was a change of response by 3 mothers. Sue, Tiwana and Amanda all changed their responses for the following statement:

54. I need to see a picture in order to get it.

For the following statement, Sue, Eliana and Tiwana changed their responses:

4. I like to ask questions.

Tables 18-21: Four Mothers: Learning Confidence/ Learning Style

Table 18:					Table 19 :			
SUE: Learning Conf					ELIANA:Learning Conf			
Learning Style					Learning Style			

No	Pre	Post	Dif		No	Pre	Post	Dif
23	2	4	+2		14	4	2	-2*
4	4	2	-2*		64	4	2	-2*
44	2	4	+2		73	2	4	+2
3	2	3	+1		94	2	4	+2
13	3	4	+1		4	3	4	+1
33	3	2	-1		43	2	3	+1
34	2	3	+1		44	3	2	+1
54	1	2	+1		53	4	3	+1
63	1	2	+1		93	1	2	+1
14	2	2	0		54	2	2	0
24	3	3	0		63	3	3	0
43	1	1	0		3	3	3	0
53	4	4	0		13	3	3	0
64	2	2	0		23	2	2	0
73	1	1	0		24	3	3	0
74	2	2	0		33	2	2	0
83	1	1	0		34	3	3	0
84	1	1	0		74	3	3	0
93	1	1	0		83	1	1	0
94	1	1	0		84	2	2	0

Table 20:

TIWANA: Learning Conf

Learning Style

No	Pre	Post	Dif
44	4	2	-2*
3	2	3	+1
4	4	3	-1*
24	4	3	-1*
34	4	3	-1*
43	2	1	-1*
54	3	2	-1*
63	3	2	-1*
64	3	2	-1*
73	2	3	+1
83	2	1	-1+
84	4	3	-1+
94	3	2	-1+
13	4	4	0
14	2	2	0
23	2	2	0
33	3	3	0
53	4	4	0
74	3	3	0
93	2	2	0

Table 21:

AMANDA:LearningConf

Learning Style

No	Pre	Post	Dif
44	1	3	+2
94	4	2	-2*
13	3	2	-1*
23	2	3	+1
33	2	3	+1
43	2	1	-1*
53	4	3	-1*
54	2	1	-1*
73	2	3	+1
83	2	3	+1
84	2	3	+1
3	3	3	0
4	2	2	0
14	2	2	0
24	4	4	0
34	2	2	0
63	2	2	0
64	2	2	0
74	2	2	0
93	1	1	0

Four Mothers' Results: LearningConfidence/ Role as Parent

This construct within the Q-sort was designed to reveal a participant's self-understanding and confidence based on research regarding adolescent parenting (Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, McCarton & McCormick ,1998; Crockenberg, 1987; Furstenberg, 1983;Musick, 1993). In this construct the scoring pattern differs from the other constructs because, based on the research the most informed responses are *2) Sometimes* and *3) A lot* rather than *4) Almost always* or *1) Hardly ever*. The mid-ground response rather than the extreme shows most comprehension because the response of *2) Sometimes* and *3) A lot* acknowledge the value of having other people in addition to the mother creatively interacting with the young child. It is a sign of emerging trust and maturity for a teen parent to acknowledge her need for help (Musick, 1993). This preference is evident in responses to the following sample of statements from this category:

2. I feel like I am my baby's best teacher.

82. I think I'm the one to teach my child right from wrong

In this construct Eliana and Amanda had changed responses, and Sue and Tiwana had stable responses. Eliana changed in 8 of 10 statements, and 7 of the 8 were positive. Amanda changed in 7 of 10 responses. Five of the 7 changes were positive. Sue changed in 4 of 10 responses, and 1 of the 4 changes was positive. Tiwana changed in 3 of 10 responses and 1 of the 3 changes was positive.

In the construct as a whole Sue, Eliana and Amanda showed a change of response in 3 statements. In the following statement, all three showed a negative change:

12. I think I don't need help from an older woman to raise my child. This negative change might be attributed to the fact that the statement is negative and must be answered with a negative (1.*Hardly ever*) to have positive meaning. This statement might not have been understandable to all three mothers.

In answer to the following statement, three of four mothers showed a positive change in response:

82. I think I'm the one to teach my child right from wrong.

To the following statement Eliana and Amanda had a positive changed response, while Sue had a negative change:

2. I feel like I am my baby's best teacher.

Tables 22-25: Comparison of the Four Mothers: Learning/Confidence; Role as Parent

Table 22:

SUE:

Learning/Conf

Perception/ParentRole

No	Pre	Post	Dif
12	2	4	+2#
2	3	4	+1#
82	4	3	-1*
32	3	4	+1#
22	1	1	0
42	4	4	0
52	4	4	0
62	1	1	0
72	1	1	0
92	1	1	0

Table 23:

ELIANA:

Learning/Conf

Perception Parent Role

No	Pre	Post	Dif
52	4	2	-2*
2	4	3	-1*
12	2	1	-1
32	4	3	-1*
42	4	3	-1*
72	1	2	+1
82	4	3	-1*
92	4	3	-1*
22	1	1	0
62	1	1	0

Table 24:				Table 25:			
TIWANA:				AMANDA:			
Learning/Conf				Learning/Confidence			
Perception Parent Role				Perception Parent Role			
No	Pre	Post	Dif	No	Pre	Post	Dif
22	4	1	-3	32	4	2	-2*
42	3	4	+1#	22	1	2	+1
92	3	2	-1*	2	4	3	-1*
2	4	4	0	12	2	1	-1
12	1	1	0	62	2	1	-1
32	4	4	0	72	4	3	-1*
52	4	4	0	82	2	3	+1
62	1	1	0	42	3	3	0
72	2	2	0	52	2	2	0
82	3	3	0	92	2	2	0

In this chapter I have presented the results of my study by comparing the pre and post responses of the four mothers in each of the 6 conceptual constructs that I considered in the Q-sort Survey. In Chapter 5, which follows, I will discuss these results by interpreting the effect of the *Learning Basket* sessions and the on each mother as well as their over-all effect.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The focus of my study is the research question: "What is the effect of a series of parenting sessions using the *Learning Basket* materials on adolescent mothers who are wards of the state and who live in a group home? In this chapter I will discuss the results of the Q-sort survey interpreted with additional information that was gathered in the study. The focus will be on the effect of the sessions on each of the four mothers who are the subjects of my study as well as the overall effect of the *Learning Basket* parenting series. This effect will be interpreted through the six conceptual constructs around which the Q-sort is organized, because it is these constructs that the *Learning Basket* series is designed to address. These conceptual constructs are the following:

I) Cultural Values Relative to Play with Objects

II) Play and Relationships

III) The Role of Play in Learning

IV) Leadership and Confidence: Learning History

V) Leadership and Confidence: Learning Style

VI) Leadership and Confidence: Perception of Role as Parent

 I will be correlating information gathered from the attendance record, from the *All About Me* journal sheets, the *Reflective Moments* feedback sheets and the *Participant Observation s*heets with the Q-sort results in order to come to my conclusions.

Effect of the Sessions on the Four Mothers

The results can be described in terms of the effect that the sessions had on each one of the mothers. For each the effect is different.

SUE

Throughout the year Sue attended 7 Learning Basket sessions out of 20 that were offered. She attended 5 of 7 sessions offered between September and December; and 2 of 13 sessions offered between January and May. This record reveals a pattern of dropping out. It is interesting that after missing 9 sessions; Sue rejoined the group for the next to the last session, but not for the graduation or completion session.

From the Q-sort results I was looking for what effect, or change the Learning Basket sessions had on the answers that the mothers gave in the final Q-sort survey. Therefore I was looking for a change in response to reveal that the series of sessions had had some effect. A comparison of the pre-sessions Q-sort and the post-session Q-sort with Sue reveals more stability than change in her responses in 5 of the 6 conceptual constructs. In the remaining construct she shows an equal amount of stability and change in her responses.

In the construct *Play:Cultural Values,* Sue has an equal number of stable and changed responses. Of the changed responses, 4 are positive and one is negative. In *Play: Parent/Child Relationship* Sue has one changed response and that change is negative. In *Play: Role in Learning,* Sue has two changed responses; one being positive and one being negative. In *Learning Confidence: Learning History*, Sue had

a change in 8 of 20 responses. In this construct all change is interpreted as positive. In *Learning Confidence: Learning Style*, again all change is interpreted as positive. However in this category, Sue showed change in 9 of 20 responses. In the construct *Learning Confidence: Perception of Parent Role*, Sue showed change in 4 of 10 responses; however 3 of the 4 changes were negative.

These results reveal that the series of Learning Basket sessions had little or no effect on Sue's perceptions of the value of play in learning and on her confidence as a learner and as a parent. Sue's attendance pattern indicates one reason that the sessions had little effect, but additional sources of information reveal factors that led to her dropping out.

In four of the five *Reflective Moments* feedback sheets that she turned in Sue mentioned that the sessions were too long. According to observation notes, in 3 of the 7 sessions she attended, she sat apart from the group; she came late, or stayed for only a portion of the session. Observers also noted that Sue loved having her picture taken during the sessions. From time to time in the sessions Sue initiated conflicts with other moms; particularly with Tiwana. Observation notes indicate that in 5 of 7 group sessions that she attended, she used harassing language, talked frenetically, and called attention to herself.

In the Learning Basket sessions, observers noted that Sue enjoyed the role-plays, and on a couple of occasions she volunteered to play the role of the positive mom. Observers note that she engaged in the group conversations, but the majority of her responses were laced with comments that drew attention to herself, rather than offered her thinking. In an observation sheet a Learning Basket facilitator noted,

"what is difficult for her is following group discussions, paying attention, staying on track and committing to the activities of the group".

This information, the attendance pattern, and the Q-sort results seem to indicate that Sue was drawn to the group, but could not effectively engage in the learning process. Houle (1961) described one of the chief motivations for adult learners being an opportunity to join a group, and thereby to meet their need for social connections. Sue might have been drawn to the group sessions for social interaction, but she found it impossible to engage in the teaching/learning strategy that we implemented because it required of her focus, attention and reflective thinking. In the sessions that she attended, Sue seemed to be coping to engage.

ELIANA

In sharp contrast to Sue, Eliana attended 19 of the 20 sessions offered. She missed the final session because she secured a job that had a conflicting schedule with the session. After establishing a perfect attendance record from September through December by attending 7 out of 7 sessions, Eliana reported to me that it was her personal goal to maintain perfect attendance. She attended one session when she had the flu; and attended several sessions when she was experiencing sickness due to a second pregnancy. Observers noted that Eliana's mood fluctuated, but she was always present.

This steady attendance might be the chief reason that the *Learning Basket* sessions had a significant impact on Eliana's perceptions about the role of play in a child's development and on her perceptions about herself as a learner and as a parent.

In the Q-sort Eliana showed more change than stability in 3 of the 6 constructs. And in a fourth construct, *Play: Relationship of Parent and Child*, she showed an equal amount of change and stability.

In the construct *Play: Cultural Values* Eliana showed more change than stability, having change in 6 of 10 responses. Of those 6 changes, 5 were positive. In *Play: Relationship of Parent to Child*, there were an equal number of changed and stable responses. Three of the 5 changed responses were positive; two were negative. In *Play: Role in Learning*, Eliana had 3 changed responses and all were positive. In the three constructs that deal with *Learning Confidence*, Eliana showed change in two out of three. In *Learning Confidence: Learning History*, her response changed in 11 of 20 responses. In this construct all changes are interpreted as positive. This interpretation is also true of *Learning Confidence: Learning Style*, where Eliana had more stability than change, by having 11 stable responses and 9 changed. In the construct of *Learning Confidence: Role as Parent*, Eliana showed change in 8 of 10 responses. Seven of the 8 changes were positive.

Additional information reveals that Eliana, not only attended the sessions, but was engaged in the learning process. In each session volunteering for support roles during the session seemed to give Eliana great pleasure. In the first session she volunteered to create a snack list and to help clean up after the session. In 10 sessions she volunteered to guide the group conversation. In 18 of 20 sessions she helped to read the hand-outs. Observers noted that she was intent about the session time frame, noting in each session if the facilitators were keeping pace with the lesson plan. Eliana completed the photo study, which was part of the journal exercise. She took

multiple photos of her child, and wrote a caption under each. Eliana completed the video taping session as well.

Her comments in the *Reflective Moments* session feedback sheets indicate that she enjoyed the interactive learning strategy. To the statement on the feedback form, "When I was participating in the group today, I mostly felt……", Eliana circled "proud" and "playful" on 7 of the 8 sheets on record. Judging from what she wrote on her feedback sheets, the Learning Basket sessions provided for Eliana a sense of accomplishment and an experience of joy. In response to the question, "Something I liked about the session was……" she wrote, "the food and good outspoken people who help us on how to do good with [are] child" ; "always learn new thing[s] every week"; "having fun, knowing a lot about thing[s] that I never kn[o]ew."

This additional information, Eliana's attendance pattern, and the results of the Q-sort seem to indicate that Eliana actively engaged in the learning process with frequency, and as a result, there were significant changes in her perception of the role of play in learning and in her confidence as a learner and as a parent. Eliana continued to struggle with written English but she gained confidence in expressing her ideas. This is made evident in the Q-sort responses in the categories of *Learning Style* and *Learning History*. This conclusion is supported by comments on the *Observation Sheets* that note that she gained confidence in expressing her ideas verbally. In 10 out of 11 *Observation Sheets* on record the observer noted that Eliana "Shared ideas in group conversation" and "Listened to the responses of others." In 5 of the 11 sheets the observer noted that she "asked questions to gain information"; and "when challenged she could express her opinion with confidence." In 3 of the 11

sheets on record the observer noted, "her comments built on the ideas of others."

These notes strongly suggest that by actively participating in 19 sessions over 9

months, Eliana experienced significant growth in her ability to learn and in her self-

understand as a learner and an effective parent.

TIWANA

Tiwana attended 11 of the 20 Learning Basket sessions over a 9 month period;

6 of 7 sessions from September through December and 5 of 13 sessions from January

through June. From January through June her attendance was sporadic, attending 3

sessions, then skipping a session; attending another session, and then skipping 4

weeks before attending the next to last session offered. She missed the concluding

"graduation" session. This pattern suggests that the *Learning Basket* sessions had

become a part of Tiwana's regular routine at the first part of the school year; but after

January this was not true.

Tiwana's results on the Q-sort reveal that the *Learning Basket* sessions had

limited immediate effect on Tiwana's perception of the role of play and on her self-

understanding and confidence as a learner and a parent. She showed change in one

construct and stability in five.

In *Play: Cultural Values*, Tiwana changed 3 of 10 of her responses, and all 3

changes were positive. In *Play: Relationship of Parent to Child* there were 3 changes

out of 10 responses and, again, all three changes were positive. In *Play: Role in*

Learning, there are changes in 4 of 10 responses and 2 of the 4 changes are positive.

In *Learning Confidence: Learning History* any change is interpreted as positive. In

this construct there were 7 changes out of 20 responses. The greatest amount of change for Tiwana happened in the construct *Learning Confidence: Learning Style*, where any change is positive. In this construct Tiwana had 13 changed responses out of twenty. This suggests that Tiwana was becoming more aware of herself as a learner. In the construct *Learning Confidence: Perception of Role as Parent*, Tiwana had a shift in 3 of 10 responses; one shift was positive and two were negative.

Reference to additional information gathered helps clarify and add complexity to the patterns revealed in Tiwana's Q-sort. *Observation Sheets* noted that she was eager to express her ideas, and that she enjoyed doing role-plays in front of the group. In addition, observers noted that she played well with her baby. Her own journal entries and notes on the *Reflective Moments* feedback sheets indicate that she was interested in the content and form of the lessons. On 3 sheets she noted that what she appreciated most about the session was that it was organized. On another sheet Tiwana wrote that what she liked about the lessons was "the fun"; "they are understandable" and "it was fun and creative." She also wrote, "I appreciated the time we put to learn about things," and "I really learn[ed] about me and my baby's feeling inside." Observers noted that during the sessions from September through December, Tiwana took great care to fill out her journal sheets. She wrote in grammatically correct sentences over 50% of the time. She also commented that the facilitators were "patient".   On 6 of the 9 feedback sheets, in answer to the prompt, "When I was participating in the group today I mostly felt….." Tiwana answered, "Playful".

During the sessions she seemed to love the role-plays, and loved giving advice to the character *Frieda Forgetful*. She volunteered 4 of 6 sessions during the sessions from September through December to play the part of the model mother, *Connie Constant*. She initiated leading a conversation by spontaneously voicing the questions in the *Parents are Teachers* manual. In seven of eleven sessions she eagerly volunteered to read the handouts aloud.

These comments and observations seem to indicate that Tiwana was fully engaged in the sessions and the learning approach; especially in the first part of the school year. It therefore raises a question as to why her attendance became so sporadic in the second part of the school year. *Observation Sheets*, *All About Me* journal sheets, and the *Reflective Moments* feedback sheets provide additional information about her style of participation and the effect that it had on the other mothers. *Observation Sheets* noted that in 4 of 11 sessions she spoke frenetically and used language to draw attention to herself. In the observation notes observers commented that Tiwana was anxious to answer questions and what seemed difficult for her was accepting someone else's answering. On 6 of the 7 feedback sheets from the sessions in the first part of the school year, Tiwana mentioned that she had spoken up often and that she had offered her opinions often (from a choice of 'never', 'sometimes', 'often'). On January 23 observers noted that Tiwana got into an argument with Sue, after making fun of Sue for being pregnant. It was necessary for a Family Educator from the Group Home to drag both of the mothers out of the room. Tiwana later apologized and re-entered the class, but after this incident, she did not attend the sessions regularly.

This information suggests that Tiwana was engaged in learning, but her need to be in the spotlight alienated her from the other mothers. When being in front of the group was not an every-session option, she grew bored and found it difficult to engage in learning. Marakova (1990, 1992) has described how learners use modalities differently to process information. She points out that those who use the kinesthetic modality to assimilate information need to physically move in order to keep attentive to learning. Tiwana might be a learner who processes best when on her feet. This would explain her eagerness to be in the role plays and her boredom when she was not engaged in this way. This information might indicate that Tiwana became frustrated and felt shut out by her peers. Feeling this frustration, might have blocked her from regularly attending the sessions. When she dropped out, the effect of the *Learning Basket* sessions on her perceptions was diminished.

AMANDA

Amanda attended 9 *Learning Basket* sessions over 9 months: 3 sessions from September through December, and 6 sessions from January through June. She did not attend 9 consecutive sessions. Her attendance was most consistent at the end of the school year, and she was present at the graduation. Even with this sporadic attendance pattern Amanda's results indicate change in 3 of the 6 constructs; equal to the amount of change in the results of Eliana, who attended every session.

On the Q-sort in the constructs having to do with the perception of play, Amanda's results are more stable than changed. In *Play: Cultural Values*, she had three changed responses out of 10 and all 3 were positive. In *Play: Relationship of*

Parent to Child she had four changed responses out of ten; three being positive and 1 being negative. In *Play: Role in Learning*, she had four changes out of 10 and all 4 were positive. The dramatic change that Amanda demonstrated was in the constructs having to do with *Learning Confidence*. In *Learning Confidence: Learning History*, a construct in which all changed responses are viewed as positive, Amanda shifted in 11 out of 20 responses. In *Learning Confidence: Learning Style*, another construct in which all change is viewed as positive, she shifted in 11 out of 20 responses. In *Learning Confidence: Perception of Parents's Role*, Amanda shifted in 7 out of 10 responses and five of the 7 changes were positive.

From the Q-sort data it appears that the *Learning Basket* sessions had a strong effect on Amanda, and it is the supporting information that begins to illuminate why that happened in spite of her irregular attendance. When Amanda began the program she was a new resident at the Group Home. She had no previous experience in living with a foster family or in an institution. Her answers on the pre-session Q-sort survey indicate that she might have been performing for us as the *outsider interviewers and facilitators* that Miles and Huberman (1994) describe. In their description of "outsider influence" the authors note that "insiders will switch to an on-stage role or a 'special person' and craft responses to be amenable to the researcher and to protect their self-interests while figuring out the role of outsiders" (p.265). This effect is most obvious with Amanda in her responses in the construct *Learning Confidence: Perception of Parent Role*. In this construct the most informed responses are 2 (*Sometimes*) or 3 (A lot) rather than the extremes of 4 (*Almost always*) or 1 (*Hardly ever*). In this construct movement away from the extremes acknowledges that a

parent needs to trust and rely on others rather than to strive to be totally self-sufficient in her parenting role. In 5 of 7 changed responses, Amanda made this shift. This pattern suggests that in the post series Q-sort survey that Amanda was more willing to acknowledge dependence on others, and that perhaps she had become more trusting of us as outsiders and was therefore willing to be candid in her responses.

Amanda's Journal entries and notes on the *Reflective Moments* feedback sheets help to explain her long absence from the group sessions. Amanda was bothered by the interpersonal dynamics in the group. In her *Reflective Moments* feedback sheets in answer to the question: "What was difficult for me was" she comments "the outrage and disrespect"; "application and respect"; "the conflict that proceeded in the group". In response to the statement, "Something in the session that I would change is", she wrote, "The people in the group and the time"; " less conflict and lesser time limit". In response to the journal writing prompt, "Describe what you enjoy", Amanda responded, "I enjoy when me and my baby go upstair[t]s and play in peace."

Judging from her journal entries and responses on the feedback sheets, Amanda was interested in the content of the sessions. In a journal entry in response to the prompt "Something that I learned today was": she wrote, "Not to spa[n]k[e] your child for dis[c]i[a]p[l]ine because its not helpful." In spite of her attentiveness to the content, Amanda was irritated with and distracted by the harsh behavior of some of the other participants in the group. An observer noted on a observation sheet that Amanda had said "We are disrespecting these ladies." She dropped out after attending three of the first 4 sessions, and stayed away until after the holidays. Her

dropping the *Learning Basket* sessions coincided with her dropping out of school, or refusing to attend the school that was not her first choice.

In spite of her sporadic attendance, the Q-sort indicates that Amanda had significant shifts in her attitude as a learner, and that she became more honest in her responses about being a parent. Both changes might indicate that she became more trusting of us as facilitators and interviewers and more realistic about the demands of being a parent.

Results Compared

The 4 mothers entered the program in very different places in their perceptions of the role of play and in their confidence as learners and as parents. The *Observation Sheets* and the Q sort results indicate that Sue was unable to connect with the teaching/learning strategy, but that the three other mothers were able to engage. Tiwana, showed the least amount of change in the Q-sort results, but from evidence in other material, at the beginning of the series of sessions she was most connected with the material and the learning process. She became frustrated with the interpersonal dynamics in the group, and for the most part dropped out of the second half of the series of sessions.

 If she had been able to sustain her participation, Tiwana might have developed dramatically in her ability to think abstractly and to express her ideas. She might have been able to gain more awareness about how she learns best and the effect that she has on others. According to the observation notes and her feedback sheets, it

was Tiwana's tendency to dominate the group that alienated her, and perhaps caused her to drop out.

The Q-sort results indicate that an equal amount of change happened with Amanda as with Eliana, even though she attended half as many sessions. The determining factor for this change seems to be that Amanda developed trust in Camille and me as facilitators and interviewers. Her answers on the post Q-sort interview seem to be honest and authentic; a contrast from her answers in the pre-interview, which seemed to be an attempt to come up with "correct" answers.

The steadiest growth, however, was evident in Eliana. The observation notes, feedback sheets and journal notes support the Q- sort results. Eliana is not as articulate as Tiwana or Amanda in her feedback sheets and journal entries, but the Q-sort results show that she gained steady growth and confidence in herself as a parent and as a learner through her participation in the *Learning Basket* sessions.

The Overall Effect

Examining the mothers' changed responses to the Q-sort Survey as a group, it is possible to determine the overall effect of the series of *Learning Basket* parenting sessions. I had anticipated that the sessions would change the mothers' perceptions of the value of the role of play in the development of their young children, because I had assumed that these mothers would hold some of the cultural beliefs that Garcia-Coll (1995) and Carothers (1990) had described. Contrary to this assumption, from their response on the pre-intervention Q-sort Survey, these mothers valued the role of play in the development of their infants and in the nurturing of relationship between

mother and child. Consequently, the *Learning Basket* sessions might have re-enforced the mothers' perceptions about the role of play; they did not change them.

However, the mothers' changed response to two statements indicate that there was a small change of perception relative to the role of play. All four mothers after the intervention stated that it was not important for young children to sit quietly in the presence of adults. This change might indicate that during the *Learning Basket* sessions, all four mothers learned that a child learns through exploration and movement, and that it is more important for adults to flex to the needs of infants than to expect them to flex to the style of adults. To another statement three of four mothers changed their responses stating in the post Q-sort that they think that their babies need toys to learn. This might indicate that as a result of the *Learning Basket* sessions the majority of the mothers learned the value of play with objects in the nurturing of their young childrens' intelligence.

In addition to measuring the effect of the series of *Learning Basket* parenting sessions through the parents' perception of the role of play in the development of a young child, I was measuring the effect of the series of sessions on the parents' perception of themselves as learners. This included their awareness of their learning history in school, their learning style and their role as a parent. Based on changed responses on the post-session Q-sort Survey, the series of sessions had significant effect. On the following 3 statements in the construct *Learning Confidence: Learning History*, 3 of the 4 mothers changed their response:

    5. I am not satisfied with what I have done in school so far.

55. In most classes I am bored.

46. I have made presentations to a small group.

76. The idea of standing in front of a group and leading them makes me nervous.

These changes might indicate that the mothers gained the awareness that their schooling experience is only a part of their learning experience.

In the construct *Learning Confidence: Learning Style,* there was one statement for which the responses of all four mothers changed. This statement follows:

44. I am interested in information if it connects with something practical.

There were two statements for which there was a change of response by 3 mothers.

54. I need to see a picture in order to get it.

4. I like to ask questions.

These changes might indicate that the *Learning Basket* sessions revealed to the mothers that learning can be practical, multi-modal and interactive.

In the construct Learning Confidence: Role as Parent there was a positive change in the response of 3 of the 4 mothers to the following statement:

82. I think I'm the one to teach my child right from wrong.

This change in the responses of all two of the three was from a more absolute response of 4) *Almost always* to *3) Alot* , a response that acknowledges confidence but interdependency on others. The remaining mother shifted from a response of 2) *Sometimes* to 3) *A lot* , a shift that indicates a gain in self-confidence. These shifts might indicate that the *Learning Basket* series instilled an understanding in the majority of mothers that it is alright to depend on others' help in raising a young child.

Limitations of the Study

This study measures the effect of a series of 20 parenting sessions using the *Learning Basket* approach and materials on a group of teen mothers who do not see themselves as successful learners. The results of the study can be generalized only with great caution due to the following:

    a. the small sample size

    b. the confidential nature of personal background information of the subjects who are wards of the state

    c. the variance in age and cognitive abilities of the subjects

    d. the fluctuating attendance of the subjects

However, the study does provide information that can be used to inform the delivery of the *Learning Basket* sessions as well as a basis of formulating new questions that lead to further research. In addition, this study can inform the delivery of other kinds of parenting classes with this population.

Implications

The *Learning Basket* teaching approach and materials are designed to engage hard-to-reach parents. Sue's response to the sessions might indicate that in order to engage parents who struggle to engage in the teaching strategy, facilitators need to arrange one-on-one sessions. These sessions could be geared to the cognitive capacities and immediate interest of the parent. The challenge would be to genuinely engage the parent as a learner. Eliana's response to the teaching/learning strategy

was exemplary, and the effect of the sessions was significant. Tiwana's results point

to the need to find ways to help an overly eager participant to modulate her

enthusiasm and pace her participation so as to allow for the participation of others.

Tiwana's experience indicates the power of peer pressure and provides a note of

caution to facilitators of interactive learning to make sure that one participant's

enthusiasm does not preclude the engagement of others. Amanda's disgust with the

behavior of her peers, which distracted her from fully entering into the interactive

learning process seems to indicate that group sessions need to be complemented with

individual sessions that can address each mother's interest, learning style, and

cognitive capacity. The fact that Amanda returned after a long absence and that over

time she established trust in the facilitators indicates that it is important to continue to

conduct sessions in spite of fluctuating attendance and for the facilitators to maintain

a consistent style of honesty and affirmation.

Further Research

In working with those who have lost their confidence in thinking and learning,

I am fascinated by what it takes to gain confidence and voice in the learning process.

In conducting this study I lacked an instrument that could effectively measure the

mothers' cognitive capacities as they participated in the *Learning Basket* sessions,

although we were able to informally note behavior that might contribute to the

interpretation of such an instrument.

The work that has been done to date describing cognitive capacities (Berk,

2003; Bjorklund, 2000; Case, 1992, 1998; Piaget, 1967; Perry, 1970; Belenky et al,

1986, 1997; Taylor et al, 2000) describes a transformation in one's potential to think and enter into thoughtful dialogue with others. These descriptions, along with those of Maslow (1968) and Rogers (1961) provide a potential roadmap for nurturing and measuring depth change in one's learning potential.

For a parent to be attentive to nurturing her child's learning potential, it is important that she see herself as an effective learner (Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, McCarton & McCormick (1998); Field,1981; Osofsky et al.,1988). *Observation Sheets* noting Sue's behavior in the sessions might indicate that Sue remained in the epistemological position that Belenky et al. (1986, 1997) described as *Silenced*; ie, she didn't use words as a means of expressing her thinking. Sue might be one of the adolescents that researchers (Ausubel, 1954; Belenky et al., 1986, 1997; Flekner, 1974) have described as those who have not had the benefit of a nurturing environment in their early years. The lack of such an environment could delay Sue's natural cognitive development. Research using an instrument for measuring or indicating cognitive disposition could reveal why Sue seemed to be coping to connect with the learning process.

Observation notes strongly suggest that Eliana was able to engage in shared dialogue and therefore might be moving beyond the learning positions that Belenky et al. (1986, 1997) described as *Silenced* and *Received Knowledge* to being able to be comfortable with *Subjective Knowing* and to enter into shared dialogue, which Perry (1970) would describe as *Multiplicity*. Eliana might also be developing what Maslow (1968) described as *self-actualization* or what Rogers described as a "change in the organization of self" (1961, p. 132); and what Taylor (1987) and Taylor et al. (2000)

described as *gaining voice and self-direction*. But without an appropriate instrument to measure these changes, this is only conjecture on my part. Further research could confirm or negate this conjecture.

There are several hints that might indicate that Tiwana is at a threshold in the development of her thinking between what Piaget (1954/1967) described as moving from *Concrete Operations* (thinking logically) to *Formal Operations* (thinking abstractly): 1) She could not make sense of the statements and responses that involved double negatives on the Q-sort. 2) Her interpretation of the question, "What do you want out of your life?" to mean what do you want to eliminate from your life. 3) Her inability to fill out a journal sheet (Appendix B, p. 9) that asked her how she made decisions and anticipated consequences. As the lessons required more reflective thinking, and included less entertainment, Tiwana struggled with how to engage. She dropped her attendance and put her attention elsewhere.

In 5 of 11 observation sheets, observers noted that Tiwana was able to engage in shared dialogue. This included the ability to share ideas, listen to responses of others, ask questions to gain information, and express her ideas with confidence when challenged by others. During her participation in the *Learning Basket* sessions Tiwana demonstrated that she might not be in the epistemological position described by Belenky et al. (1986, 1997) of *Silenced*. She was able to express herself in full (although not grammatically correct) sentences in her journal sheets, and she often noted her feelings. "I really learn[ed] about me and my baby's feeling inside." "What I did with confidence was "write about my baby and me; wrote what I felt." On her feedback sheets she described a broad range of emotions that she felt during the

sessions: "sad, thoughtful, frustrated, proud, exhausted, confident, playful, anxious, bored." These notes might indicate that she is in touch with her interior thoughts and feelings, and might have developed beyond the position that Belenky et al. describe as *Subjective Knowing.*

When Amanda came to the sessions and was not distracted by the behavior of others, observation sheets indicate that she was able to engage in shared dialogue. Her journal entries are in full sentences and are coherent, perhaps indicating that she is comfortable with reflective thinking. In one of her feedback sheets she expressed fascination with a reflective exercise that asked her to think abstractly (Appendix B, p. 9). The same exercise was incomprehensible to Sue and Tiwana. This might indicate that Amanda is moving into the cognitive disposition that Piaget (1967) described as *Formal Operations*, and might be moving toward the epistemological position that Belenky et al. (1986, 1997) describe as *Procedural Knowledge*.

Those who have studied the cognitive disposition of infants and toddlers (Piaget, 1965; Vygotsky,1930-1935; Winnicott,1965) have provided roadmaps that might also describe the cognitive growth of adolescents. Goleman (1995), Siegel (1999), Sroufe (1995) and Wilcox (1979) have pointed out that optimal cognitive development happens in a supportive, nurturing environment where there is a "continuity of relationships of affection" (Wilcox, 1979, p. 117). Such an environment is not an option for many teenage mothers who are taken away from their birth families to become wards of the state (Johnson, et al., 1988).

Adolescents who have not had the benefit of a nurturing environment, where parents and caregivers have given them focused attention, might continue to be

working through challenges to move beyond concrete and immediate thinking

(Ausubel, 1954; Rutter, 1993; Sutherland, 1992).

For multiple reasons these teen mothers might not see themselves as confident

learners. When this is the case, there can be negative consequences for their young

children. The research of Belenky, Bond, and Weinstock (1997) revealed that parents

who did not see themselves as thinkers and learners were less aware of their

children's thinking processes than those parents who were confident in thinking and

learning.

Research has revealed that a child's potential to learn is most developed

during the first three years (Barnet et al, 1998; Bruner, 1986; Gopnick et al., 1999;

Siegel, 1999; Sroufe, 1995) and that a parent or consistent caregiver has the most

influence in nurturing or compromising that learning process (Klebanov, Brooks-

Gunn, McCarton & McCormick (1998); Field,1981; Osofsky et al,1988). When a

mother gains confidence in herself as a learner, both she and her young child can

benefit. Additional research could focus on cognitive and developmental gains made

by both parent and young child.

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