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Evaluating mandatory parent education for divorcing couples with children

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EVALUATING MANDATORY PARENT EDUCATION FOR DIVORCING COUPLES WITH CHILDREN

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Evaluating Parent Education for Divorcing Couples with Children

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Court-mandated parent education for divorcing parents with children has become a standard practice in recent years. The West Virginia State Legislature voted to mandate parent education programs in all of West Virginia effective January, 2000. Research suggests parental conflict is a major factor contributing to adjustment difficulties reported by children. Generally, parent education programs for divorcing couples with children focus on adjustment issues for parents and children as they navigate a demanding period of family change. A literature review of current parent education programs in the United States revealed programs differ in teaching methods used and curriculum. It is reported in the literature that parent education programs are effective in assisting parents in their adjustment. However, there is a need for comparative analysis of programs to assist in clarifying the issues and factors that may contribute to program efficacy. Current programs in West Virginia vary in levels of instructor/participant interaction. Therefore, a comparative evaluation of five regional programs currently running in West Virginia was conducted. Parents were surveyed immediately before, immediately after, and three months after their parent education class. A comparative analysis measuring parent learning, children's exposure to conflict, and satisfaction was conducted to assess differences in program effectiveness across programs. Results indicated that programs with greater levels of interaction between instructor and participants were more effective.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

Divorce education for divorcing couples with children has gained popularity as a program in combination with divorce mediation. Mediation soared in popularity as an alternative to traditional adjudication in divorce cases during the 1980's. Although mediation has helped improve the process by which parents come to agreement on issues such as custody and visitation, training in co-parental skills during divorce was needed to address the adjustment needs of parents and children. Recently, numbers of mandatory parent education programs dramatically increased. The number of counties and independent cities with court-connected programs for divorcing couples nearly tripled from 541 in 1994 (Blaisure & Geasler, 1996) to 1,516 in 1998 (Blaisure & Geasler, 1999), a 180% increase.

Parent education programs were initiated in West Virginia in 1997 when a pilot program began operating in the WV family law master region associated with the eastern panhandle of West Virginia in the Martinsburg, WV area (Maciorowski, 1997). Since that time, five additional programs have been started. The West Virginia Legislature requested that the current programs in West Virginia be evaluated for the purpose of providing feedback to the Director of Family Law Master Programs who is responsible for the implementation of parent education programs in West Virginia. The date collected by this researcher were used for the present study and for Dr. Anne S. Fishkin's evaluation study and

were incorporated into her formal report to the Administrative Office of the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals (Fishkin, 2000).

Divorce

The U.S. divorce rate in 1990 was 4.7 divorces per 1000 people with approximately 1,182,000 divorces (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Center for Health, 1995). Cox (1993) reported that 40% to 50% of those couples had one or more dependent children. The National Center for Disease Control keeps annual health statistics including data on divorce for the U.S. government. Their data indicates there were approximately 1,163,000 divorces in 1997 with a national divorce rate of 4.3 per 1000 individuals. In comparison to the national rate, the divorce rate in West Virginia was 5.0 per 1000 in 1994 with 9,179 divorces (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Center for Health, 1995). The divorce rate (5.0) and average number of divorces per year (9,094) has remained stable in West Virginia from 1994 to 1997 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Center for Health, 1998).

These numbers do not account for the many individuals affected by divorce such as children, grandparents, relatives, and friends. Irving and Benjamin (1995) speculated that as many as 10 million people are directly or indirectly affected by divorce each year. The likelihood of marriages ending in divorce is also high. The probability of a marriage ending in divorce is between 49% (Frustenberg, 1991) and 65% (Martin & Bumbass, 1989) indicating that on

average more than half of the marriages in the United States will probably end in divorce.

Effects of Divorce on Children

The impact of divorce on children is well documented in professional literature. Children of divorce may experience emotional and behavioral difficulty throughout the lifespan (Wallerstein, 1998a). The quality of parents' ongoing relationship has both direct and indirect long-term consequences on parent-child relationships (Amato, 1993). Research indicates that the ongoing conflict between the divorced parents is the main source of distress for children of divorce. Mismanaged parental conflict is believed to have an adverse impact on the development of children (Emery, 1982).

Divorce Mediation

Mediation and parent education have been established as effective programs that assist divorcing couples and families in managing their lives during divorce (Irving & Benjamin, 1995). A review of the mediation literature is included in this study because of the significant impact the mediation literature has had on the development of parent education. They share the same goals of improving adjustment to divorce for all members of the family. Each has a role in improving communication and shaping behavioral responses.

As an alternative form of dispute resolution, mediation is a service by which a neutral, third party individual assists parents in identifying their needs and interests in the general areas of post-divorce settlement including custody and visitation. It has gained in popularity and usage over the past 20 years. Since the

1980's, research conducted in mediation has generally confirmed that it is a more effective means to reach an agreement and it produces more mutually satisfying results than traditional litigation (Kelly, 1996).

Empirical research in mediation has produced significant positive outcomes that have contributed to a professional environment of enthusiasm and optimism (Irving & Benjamin, 1995). In a review of empirical research in divorce mediation, Clement and Schwebel (1993) reported several general differences for participants in divorce mediation versus traditional litigation. Persons who choose mediation are more satisfied with agreements. They cooperate more easily and reach settlements more quickly. They comply more often with settlement agreements. Fewer cases return to court for further litigation. They save time and money. Mediation has also been found to be associated with better psychological adjustment after divorce, decreases in patterns of parental conflict, decreases in depression among participants, and resolution of feelings for the former spouse (Benjamin & Irving, 1995; Kelly, 1996; Kitzmann & Emery, 1994).

Among existing studies there are methodological differences among existing evaluation studies, making it difficult to draw comparisons. For example, differences across established programs exist. These include theoretical models used, number of sessions, mediator credentials, and the mandatory versus voluntary status of programs. Also, vast differences in populations, methodologies, and measures exist in the empirical literature (Kelly, 1996). Although cross-study comparability is limited, the collective majority of studies

indicate mediation produces positive results. Thus, confidence in mediation practices has increased as consistently positive outcomes have been reached though different methodological means. (Benjamin & Irving, 1995).

Clement and Schwebel (1993) reported a research agenda that divided future research in divorce mediation into three categories: content of meditation, participants in mediation, and process of mediation. They reported that research in content of mediation might include the focus of mediation, the specificity and flexibility of agreements, and type of custody agreements. Empirical studies assessing participant factors might assess the role and satisfaction of mediators, presence of children, attorneys, significant others, and the divorcing parties themselves. Research in mediation process might include fairness and equity with respect to individual differences, cost and benefit analysis, changing legal issues, and outcomes for parents and children. Therefore, parent education was identified as an increasingly popular program associated with divorce mediation, recognized as a significant intervention.

Divorce Education for Parents

Salem, Schepard, and Schlissel (1996) reported that parent education programs are constructed to educate parents about the difficulties associated with separation and divorce and to teach them how to improve the experience for their children and themselves. Parent education curricula include parent-focused, child-focused, and court-focused information. The expected outcome is that parents will actively cope more effectively with the increased interpersonal conflict and personal distress associated with their attempt to co-parent

effectively. The skills parents learn are expected to help them protect their children from experiencing unnecessary distress. Parents can learn to communicate more effectively with their ex-spouse while modeling effective communication to children (Slezak & Swift, 1996).

The popularity of these education programs for divorcing and separating parents is widespread. Programs are currently active in 49 states (Blaisure & Geasler, 1999). The growing proliferation of these programs is a result of a more widely recognized need for training and intervention for divorcing families to help them reduce the potentialharm to children (Salem, Schepard, & Schlissel, 1996).

Research in Parent Education

How effective are divorce education programs? Parents who receive parent education may be more effective at resolving relational conflicts with their ex-spouses. They may reduce children's exposure to parental conflicts, reduce loyalty conflicts in children, and encourage children to invest in relationships with ex-spouses (Kurkowski, Arbuthnot, & Gordon, 1993). Geasler and Blaisure (1998) stated that the effectiveness of programs vary according to the amount of conflict parents are experiencing, the timing of the parent education program in conjunction with the final divorce hearing, and the content and learning process strategies of the program. Arbuthnot, Kramer, and Gordon (1997) found that parents benefited from divorce education by learning new skills that led to behavioral changes that reduced conflict.

Due to methodological differences in outcome studies of parent education, it is difficult to generalize results of research to the larger population. For example, there are program differences in content, teaching methods used, and length of the class. As in mediation, differences include theoretical models used, number of sessions, instructor credentials, and the mandatory versus voluntary status of programs. Also, vast differences in research methodologies and measures exist in the empirical literature. Arbuthnot et al (1997) called attention to the differences in established programs and noted the need to compare programs with each other to determine the most effective content and method of instruction.

The programs in West Virginia vary in curricula and level of interaction between instructors and participants. The request for formal evaluation from the West Virginia Supreme Court of appeals, the collaboration with Dr. Anne Fishkin, Marshall University Graduate College, and the request for comparative evaluation in the literature review have resulted in the current study.

Definition of Terms

Child Custody Mediation – problem-solving process in which a third party professional assists divorcing parents resolving differences related to the custody of their children.

Clinical Summary Findings – Publications that are summaries of published literature with accompanying clinical opinions.

Family Mediation – problem-solving process in which a third party professional assists families involved in a proceeding to assist in resolving differences between the parties.

Information-based parent education – parent education program based primarily on lecture (information) with minimal interaction between instructor and participants.

Mediation – problem-solving process in which a third party professional assists parties in resolving differences between the parties.

Problem-Solving Mediation Approach – mediation strategy that emphasizes the resolution of significant differences between the parties in working toward agreements, requiring clarification of values and feelings.

Research Findings – publications that are based on empirical studies.

Settlement-Oriented Mediation Approach – mediation strategy that emphasizes the goal of reaching agreement with less clarification of underlying issues.

Skills-based parent education – parent education program emphasizing the importance of effective conflict resolution and communication skills in the co-parental relationship with a significant level of interaction between instructor and participants.

Summary

It has been established that ongoing parent conflict is detrimental to the development of children of divorce. While divorce custody mediation helped provide a means for parents to resolve visitation and custody issues through

collaboration, additional training in co-parenting skills is now widely accepted and believed to improve parents' and children's adjustment to divorce. It is believed that divorce education programs can improve parental communication, increase parents' co-parenting knowledge and skills, reduce ongoing parental conflict, and reduce children's exposure to parental conflict, which may contribute to improved coping and adjustment for all in the family.

Although divorce education programs are generally similar, they vary on specific topics emphasized and teaching strategies used. It is believed that programs that focus on learning skills while providing opportunities for learning through active involvement such as practicing skills and role playing are more effective than programs that focus on information (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996; Arbuthnot, Kramer, & Gordon, 1997; Kramer, Arbuthnot, Gordon, Rousis, & Hoza, 1998).

Five independent and concurrent mandatory divorce education programs in West Virginia were evaluated in this study. The requirement that divorcing parents attend a mandatory parent education class was passed into West Virginia law on March 14, 1998, WV Senate Bill Number 752, Chapter 48, Article 2. The parent education programs in West Virginia varied in curricula and level of interaction between instructor and participants. Four of the programs use published program materials available and used nationally. The fifth program was developed by local professionals (Messing, 1999). This outcome study contained one independent variable (Group) indicative of each of the five divorce education programs and three dependent variables: participant learning, children's

exposure to ongoing parental conflict, and participant reactions. Parents were surveyed immediately before, immediately after, and three months after their parent education class. A statistical analysis was completed to assess differences between the five programs surveyed. The results were provided to Dr. Anne Fishkin who provided a formal summary report to the Administrative Office of the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals (Fishkin, 2000).

Research Questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

Are there differences in participant learning across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

Are there differences in reports of parental conflict across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Research Question 3 (RQ3)

When comparing parents' reports of parental conflict they exposed their children to over the past three months with their predictions of parental conflict they will expose their children to over the next three months, are there differences across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Research Question 4 (RQ4)

When comparing (a) parents' reports of parental conflict they expose their children to over the past three months with (b) their predictions of parental conflict they will expose their children to over the next three months, and (c) their

report three months after the class of parental conflict since the parent education class, are there differences across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Research Question 5 (RQ5)

Are there differences in parents' reactions to the programs (satisfaction, perceived usefulness, improvement of communication skills, and satisfaction with amount of information provided) across the five parent education programs surveyed?

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

The following review of the literature presents a summary of the divorce process, the effects of divorce on parents and children, and mediation and divorce education literature. The literature review contains publications that are based on empirical research (research findings) and publications that are summaries of published literature containing clinical opinions (clinical summaries). The literature review provides the foundation for the development of this study.

Divorce

The incidence of divorce in the United States was steadily increasing for three decades and began to stabilize in the nineties at about 4.7 per 1000 individuals per year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Center for Health, 1995). There were approximately 1,163,000 divorces in the United States in 1997. As stated earlier, in comparison to the national rate, the divorce rate in West Virginia was 5.0 per 1000 in 1994 with 9,179 total divorces in the state. Since 1994, the annual number of divorces in West Virginia was 9,393 (1995), 8,034 (1996), 9,607 (1997) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/National Center for Health, 1998). A brief history of the development of national trends in interventions for divorcing couples is presented in the rest of this section.

Brown (1982) and Fineman (1988) provided summaries of the historical development of court related issues in divorce. Historically, one person in the marriage was technically blamed for the divorce. The courts, usually in favor of

the mother, settled the custody and visitation issues quickly. A shift to no-fault divorce laws in the 1970's meant one person in the marriage did not technically have to be blamed for the divorce. This liberal change may have inadvertently paved the way for broader acceptance of mediation and divorce education in divorce proceedings. When courts adopted a more tolerant position with respect to divorce, there was an increase in parents' requests to exercise their rights in providing input to custody decisions.

Irving and Benjamin (1995) reported in a clinical summary that during the 1980's, the climate in divorce courts shifted from caution and skepticism with respect to divorce mediation to overwhelming acceptance. Today, the general public is more accepting of divorce and knowledgeable of the impact of separation and divorce. Thus, interventions such as mediation have become widely accepted, assisting divorcing couples in making decisions related to custody and visitation. In the 1990's, public acceptance of divorce interventions and parents requests for additional education have led to new laws requiring the completion of a divorce education session before the final divorce hearing.

The courts appear to be convinced that these programs improve the divorce experience for families as reported in recent surveys (Blaisure & Geasler, 1996, Blaisure & Geasler, 1999). Kelly (2000) reported in a review of a decade divorce research that the two major factors that have led to the acceptance of nonadversarial and educational approaches are the significant body of empirical research on children's adjustment and divorce and the widespread

acknowledgement of the existing deficits in the adversarial system for helping families cope with divorce.

Effects of Divorce on Parents

The basic legal process of divorce remains consistent across counties and states. First, one spouse files a petition for divorce. Next, their spouse is served notice of the filed petition. A temporary hearing may then be held to deal with immediate problems such as temporary custody and freezing of assets. Parties then submit written depositions and proposals for settlements. Settlement documents indicating agreements related to custody of children, visitation, support payments, and division of net worth including property, cash, and material assets are then filed with the court. Finally, a hearing is held in court before a judge to settle differences and finalize the divorce. Erickson (1988) summarized these steps in formal divorce processes as enormously stressful for divorcing parents. Meetings are often emotionally charged and couples frequently have difficulty coming to agreement on issues. The ongoing and cumulative stress of these procedures as well as separation and divorce can lead to emotional instability, behavioral problems and physical illness.

In a summary of the literature, Irving and Benjamin (1995) described the psychological impact of divorce and divided the divorce process into three phases: the decision to divorce, the marital separation, and the litigation/family court processes. The first stage is associated with increasing marital discord and interpersonal conflict. The second stage is the physical separation of the couple. The third stage begins when the legal process of divorce described above is

formally initiated. All three stages can be stressful for the couples as they attempt to adjust to new changes and demands. Court-mandated divorce education can provide assistance, support, and direction to parents as they begin to co-parent their children in stage three.

Effects of Divorce on Children

Delaney (1995) reported in a clinical summary that as many as 40% of all children in the United States will spend time in a single parent family after a separation or divorce. Most children exhibit some emotional instability and behavior change during a divorce. Anger, resentment, anxiety, depression and guilt are the most common affective reactions at this time. Immediately following the divorce, children grieving the loss of the intact family may respond with noncompliance, aggression, and acting out at home, in school, and in social settings. Many children who change residences also experience disruption in their social relationships. Lowery and Settle (1985) reported in a research publication that divorce impacts children at all ages and developmental stages. Generally, two to six-year olds tend to become frightened, confused and blame themselves. They have a greater need for physical contact. They fear punishment and rejection and they have difficulty expressing feelings. Seven to eight-year olds have more intense feelings of sadness, fear and anxiety. In addition to the preceding effects, nine to ten-year olds experience more intense feelings of loneliness and conflicts of loyalty to parents. Adolescents experience a wide range of emotional and behavioral difficulties. Additionally, they are often

confused and apprehensive about potential changes in their relationships to their parents.

In a clinical summary, Delaney (1995) outlined potential reactions to divorce by developmental stage. Reactions range from overtly intense sadness and anger to more subtle and indirect effects such as restlessness or proneness to physical injury (Table 1). It should be noted that some divorces result in a better living environment for children. For example, Heatherington, Stanley-Hagen, and Anderson (1989) reported in a research finding that when divorce causes an end to ongoing emotional, physical, sexual, or verbal abuse, the removal of children from these types of environments increases their safety while reducing hostility, acting out, and depression.

In a recently published book, Wallerstein (1998a) reported in a summary of divorce research that research in the area of children of divorce has demonstrated that children are at risk at several points over time during the divorce and subsequent adjustment period. These high-risk points include family circumstances previous to the divorce, the time of the break-up, the time of the divorce, the time after the divorce in a single-parent family, and the possible reintegration into a new family system. Additionally, as children of divorce mature, they may have difficulty in relationships requiring serious commitment. Although failures to cope with the unique anxieties inherent at these stages can contribute to psychological problems, it should be noted that many children successfully navigate through these difficulties. "But whether a child succeeds or fails, the child of divorce confronts a set of special and difficult psychological

Table 1

Potential Reactions to Divorce by Developmental Stage

Developmental Stage	Potential Reactions
Early infancy: Birth to six months	excessive crying, fretfulness disturbances in sleeping, eating, and digestion apathy, lethargy failure to gain weight and thrive
Later infancy: Six-18 months	same as above but including: signs of attachment problems, such as fearful reactions or indifference to a parent delayed motor or speech development night terrors* regressive behavior* (*May be related to child's perceived abandonment by a parent with whom the child has bonded).
Toddler: 18 months to three years	regression developmental lags in speech, play, and motor skills severe, persistent separation fears excessive masturbation overly aggressive play frequent and severe temper tantrums.

Preschooler: Three to five years	eating, sleeping problems withdrawal, depression prolonged crying after leaving one parent delayed toilet training, resistance to toilet training regression, extreme dependency intensified fears overly aggressive behavior with parents, siblings, and peers overly compliant behavior irritable, demanding
Early school age: Six to eight years	Open grieving, concern and longing for the absent parent, replacement fears, reconciliation fantasies, precipitous deterioration in schoolwork.
Later school age: Eight to 11 years	Increased moodiness, aggression, tantrums, and depression anxiety, restlessness, and hyperactivity diminished school performance deterioration of peer relationships denying any problems, “everything is fine” intense anger at one parent

	overburdened children – being the confidante for the parent(s) vulnerability to coercion from parents to engage in marital conflict injury prone, severe emotional reaction to minor injuries or blunted response to pain delinquency
Teenager: 12 through 18 years	very vulnerable uncontrollable anger, violence toward a parent intense, sustained feelings of loss, low self-esteem powerlessness, depression suicidal thoughts and feelings of hopelessness substance abuse promiscuity withdrawal from family, coupled with antisocial activities/involvement or social isolation poor school performance, truancy turning one parent against the other

	judgmental about parents' behavior and actions
	delinquency
	anxiety about future as adult, concern with own potential for marital future
	positive: impressive ability to grow in maturity and independence

Note. From "Divorce Mediation and Children's Adjustment to Parental Divorce" by S. E. Delaney, 1995, Pediatric Nursing, 21(5), p. 435.

challenges superimposed on the normative challenges of growing up. Divorce challenges the entire trajectory of childhood" (p. 74, Wallerstein, 1998a). It should be noted that Wallerstein's opinions may be based on her own research in which data was collected from her own clients and that this may have influenced her results. Coontz (1998) reported in a response to Wallerstein's research that the applicability of Dr Wallerstein's results may have been compromised by methodological problems.

The harmful effects of divorce on children are less dependent on the act of divorce itself than factors related to the divorce. In a meta-analysis, Amato (1993) identified five factors that most commonly influence children's adjustment to divorce: inter-parental conflict, adjustment skills of the children's custodial parents, parenting skills of the children's custodial parents, extent of involvement of custodial parents, financial hardship, and stress associated with transitions. Inter-parental conflict can be characterized as increased disagreements with lack of clear resolution. Lack of resolution of ongoing marital conflict is often associated with ineffective communication. Frustration levels increase as parents feel they cannot be heard and/or understood. Additionally, feelings of resentment toward the ex-spouse may contribute to destructive and/or counterproductive interactions.

In a summary of empirical literature in the area of divorce and children, Amato (1993) summarized additional issues. Children often model the coping skills and communication styles of their parents. When parents are not coping effectively with divorce, their behavior can negatively influence their children's

confidence and ability to cope. Additionally, a marked decrease in the quality of a child's relationship with one parent can lead to poor self-concept, guilt, loneliness, and distress. Financial hardships can also influence children's adjustment. Fewer monetary privileges can result in anger and resentment, as children perceive they are "paying a price" for their parents' problems. Finally, when stress associated with transitions is not acknowledged or addressed, children may become increasingly confused, fearful of their future, and/or depressed.

Emery (1982) and Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996) reported in research findings that it is important to note that co-parental conflict is the primary contributor to children's suffering, anxiety, and maladjustment after divorce. Gately and Schwebel (1992) reported in a research finding that children from a sample of divorced families with low levels of ongoing conflict had higher levels of maturity, empathy, and self-esteem than a sample of children from intact families with high levels of conflict. Lamb and Sternberg (1997) reported an empirical study that the psychological status of parents during separation and divorce, the extent of conflict between them, and the financial circumstances during and after divorce are significant contributing factors to children's adjustment. In a review of a decade of research in children's adjustment and divorce, Kelly (2000) reported in a clinical summary that the most important predictors of child adjustment are the intensity and frequency of parental conflict its manner of resolution.

Mediation and Divorce Education Literature

A review of the literature in mediation is an important component to this review for several reasons. The field of mediation has contributed to the development of parent education programs. Many of the components of mediation such as clarification of values and putting the children first are consistent with the principles of parent education. At the time of the present study, mediation was required only in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia (Maciorowski, 1997). However, all programs in the study addressed a mediation component, which emphasized the value of co-parental decision-making during divorce. For these reasons, a brief review of mediation literature is included. The review contains brief summaries of both clinically based and empirically based publications that have contributed to the practice of mediation.

Several published summaries of professional opinions are briefly summarized in this section. Parents are in the best position to create meaningful visitation and custody decisions affecting their children (Payne & Overend, 1990). Parents have a unique opportunity to retain control over the decision process through court-connected divorce mediation. McIsaac (1991) criticized mandatory mediation, stating that models of mediation do not allow individuals, particularly women to be heard. She argued that changes in divorce laws, which have led to mandatory mediation programs, have done women and other minorities a disservice. For example, in time limited sessions, mediation fails to address the emotional injuries and fault issues present in the majority of divorces. This failure may send a message that injurious behavior is tolerable. However,

Saposnek (1992) reported that mandatory mediation is a more hopeful and humanistic option than the adversarial litigation process in resolving child custody disputes.

A review of the empirical literature in mediation revealed many differences in mediation programs: court-based versus private sector mediation services, demographics of client groups, model of mediation utilized, local statutes and mandates dictating divorce processes, and mediator credentials and training. Benjamin and Irving (1995) reported in a review of the literature that differences in mediation programs make it difficult to generalize results of empirical studies. As the uniqueness of individual programs becomes evident, comparability of programs and generalization of results of studies are compromised. However, Kelly (1996) reported in a review of the literature that the consistently positive outcomes in the literature indicate that mediation, family mediation, and child custody mediation produce satisfying and meaningful results.

Empirical studies in mediation process focus on what is occurring in the mediation sessions. Successful mediators tend to be active in the mediation process. They help clients clarify the facts surrounding the interests of the children and each parent while assisting them to reach an agreement (Benjamin & Irvin, 1995). Communication skills of the mediators and participants appear to be predictors for successful negotiation. In sessions where clients and mediators demonstrated good communication skills, frequency of agreements reached (agreement rate) increased (Slaikeu, Culler, Pearson, & Theonnes, 1985).

Effective communication skills were identified as active listening, allowing participants to express their views, exploring the facts, clarifying interests, and avoiding sidetracking (Donahue, Drake, & Roberto, 1994; Messing, 1993). Paquin (1990) evaluated mediators' perceptions of couples communication styles and found that increased agreement rates were associated with clients' communication competence as evidenced by fewer rates of interruption, stating feelings, use of "I" statements, and altering proposals.

There are clinical models of mediation in the professional literature. Mediation models provide specific stages such as orientation, gathering factual information, defining important issues, discussing the importance of fairness, defining spousal and children's needs, and developing options that meet those needs (Erickson & Erickson, 1988). Strategies that promote successful outcomes of mediated agreements are based on an assumption that parents are capable of commitment to co-parental interventions (Payne, 1990). Some mediators are settlement oriented while others focus more on problem solving. In the problem solving approach, mediators are willing to address the underlying conflicts that manifest themselves in the parties' disagreements. Irving and Benjamin (1992) reported that the problem solving approach has produced more durable agreements than the settlement-oriented approach and that parents are more satisfied with agreements reached through a problem solving approach.

Benjamin and Irving (1995) reported in a review of the literature that two conclusions can be drawn from process studies. First, although mediator styles differ, successful mediators are actively involved in mediating agreements. They

bring an expectation for agreement through a structured process. Yet, they are flexible enough to allow participants to be creative and express themselves appropriately. Second, the mediation setting has a strong correlation with mediator stylistic differences. In court-based systems, mediators typically work with fewer sessions. Time constraints require participants to reach an agreement in a comparatively short amount of time, requiring mediators to focus on facts. Private mediation sessions are not bound by the same time constraints. With the freedom afforded through alleviation of time constraints, couples are able to address and often resolve some of the underlying conflicts.

Many predictors for success in mediation have been identified by empirical research in the literature: relevance of dispute content, willingness to compromise, acceptance of the end of the marriage, limited number of disputes, equal financial status, and emotional stability (Camplair & Stolberg, 1990; Emery & Wymer, 1987; Irving & Benjamin, 1992; Kelly, 1989). Cannata, and Ricci (1991) reported that couples with less education and income were more likely to find court-based processes helpful and to value mediation services less.

Other outcome studies have evaluated agreement rate, gender differences, costs, co-parental relations, follow-up, and client satisfaction (Benjamin & Irvin, 1995). Complete agreements are reportedly reached between 40 and 60 percent of the time. Partial agreements are reached between 10 and 20 percent (Benjamin & Irving, 1995). Parents who mediate are more likely to reach agreement than persons who litigate their differences, they are likely to reach agreement in fewer meetings, agreements are more comprehensive, and they are more likely to

incorporate shared parenting responsibilities (Emery & Wyer, 1987). Pearson (1991) found that mediation is less expensive than other means of dispute resolution because of the need for fewer meetings.

Kelly and Duryee (1992) surveyed 184 individuals who participated in mediation to assess gender differences in mediation. Women rated the mediation experience as more favorable than men did. Women believe their rights are better represented in mediation sessions while men believe their rights are better represented in traditional litigation. Irving and Benjamin (1995) summarized follow-up studies in mediation literature, reporting that couples who mediated were more likely to comply with the agreements which were established, there were greater positive behavior changes over time after the divorce, there were lower relitigation rates, and couples were more satisfied with the agreements reached. In an effort to measure long-term satisfaction of custody agreements, Meirding (1993) surveyed 94 couples that had participated in a private, voluntary mediation program and had successfully reached custody agreements. Results indicated couples believed the mediator was aware of their needs, was unbiased, assisted in generating options, assisted couples in negotiating more reasonably, explained the details of divorce process, and was fair. Bautz and Hill (1991) evaluated differences in agreements reached in mediation versus agreements reached in traditional litigation in areas of child custody, visitation, and child support. Results indicated that couples that participated in divorce mediation were more satisfied with the agreements in all domains. Furthermore, parents

who mediated disputes made more custody decisions and missed fewer child support payments than their counterparts.

Kelly (1991) compared the interactions and perceptions of couples that participated in mediation with couples that participated in traditional litigation. Data was gathered soon after the final order was entered followed by one and two year follow-up. Results indicated that couples who used mediation reported less conflict, more contact, more communication, and a more positive attitude at the final divorce, one year later, but not two years later. This may indicate that although couples learn of the effects of divorce on children and modify their behavior toward their spouse, lasting change may require renewed commitment form divorced couples and additional training as well. Miller and Veltcamp (1995) suggested that mediation sessions alone are not enough. They reported that in addition to mediation, the use of mandatory parent education and traditional outpatient psychological interventions will best meet the needs of parents and children affected by divorce. The use of court-connected parent education will be explored in more detail below.

Divorce Education for Parents

Parent education in this context can be defined as "an organized group of meeting(s) that has an educational rather than counseling or mediation purpose and focuses on the divorce transition for families" (Blaisure & Geasler, 1996, p.25). The general purpose of parent education programs is to help parents and children cope with divorce. Content usually includes information relative to the adjustment of children at all ages to divorce. It also includes the effects of

parental conflict on children, the use of conflict resolution skills, and cooperative parenting skills (Slezak & Swift, 1996). Kelly (2000) summarized the common goals of divorce education programs: educate parents about typical child responses to divorce and separation, alert parents to the detrimental effects of conflict and harmful behaviors on their children, describe positive parenting responses that promote improved coping strategies for their children, focus parents on the importance of a strong continuing relationship with both parents, and describe court-connected processes that parents are likely to experience.

The first court-affiliated parent education programs began in the 1970's. The number of programs increased in the 1980's when divorce mediation programs were expanding rapidly. Salam (1995) reported in a summary of literature that parent education programs emerged as families, social service agencies, public officials, and state and local governments acknowledged that the resolution of family problems in court adversely impacted the quality of child custody agreements. State legislatures and local court administrative districts have written new laws, which have established increasing numbers of mandatory programs (Biondi, 1996). Lee (1997) published a planning strategy to successfully pass divorce education legislation. The strategy included developing a strategic plan, completing research, educating potential supporters, building strong support systems, understanding and working with the political climate, generating publicity from the media, working with legislators, securing the governor's approval, and implementing the new law.

The significant presence of divorce education programs is evident in the results of a recent national survey. A 1998 survey (Blaisure & Geasler, 1999) of 3,118 U.S. counties revealed that divorce education programs existed in 1,516 counties and 49 states. This data represents an increase of 180% since the authors' 1995 survey (Blaisure & Geasler, 1996). Furthermore, these results likely underreport the current numbers of programs as the states continue to pass laws mandating divorce education. West Virginia legislature voted to mandate divorce education in all of West Virginia beginning in January of 2000. Clearly, the popularity of these programs is widespread and increasing.

In court-mandated programs, attendance is required if divorcing parents meet the following general criteria: previously divorced seeking post divorce modifications, newly divorcing with minor children, and cases set for mediation where children are involved. Blaisure and Geasler (1999) reported that the two most popular consequences of failure to attend the program are contempt of court and delaying a final divorce hearing. In court-based programs, court officials design their own program, use a model already established, or combine information to fit the needs of parents and provide information relevant to the local legal process. Courts and other entities often share organizational and program management responsibilities. For example, some programs are partially funded and/or managed by grants, social service agencies, community mental health centers, or the state bar. Usually, parents are charged an average fee of $30 and a waiver is provided for individuals at the poverty level (Blaisure & Geasler, 1996; Blaisure & Geasler, 1999; Braver & Salam, 1996).

As reported above, course content is generally related to parents' and children's adjustment to divorce and separation. Slezak and Swift (1996) proposed a pilot education program for divorcing and separating parents, presenting a summary of course content that included: general information about divorce, problem solving and conflict resolution, the divorce experience for adults, the divorce experience for children, and the co-parental relationships. However, content of divorce education programs varies widely in detail, style, and theoretical basis (Blaisure & Geasler, 1996). Braver and Salam (1996), conducted a survey to assess the content coverage of divorce education programs in North America. Eighteen specific content areas that divorce education programs might address were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 = content area not covered to 5 = intensive coverage. Responses from 102 programs were received. Respondents indicated the most intensely covered topics in parent education programs were the effects of divorce on children and the benefits of parental cooperation. Moderately covered topics included those related to conflict resolution skills acquisition. Minimal coverage was devoted to legal issues. Some programs contain material that assists parents in preparing for mediation sessions (Lehner, 1994). A cognitive-restructuring model for educating parents in high conflict divorce relationships emphasized changes in thinking about roles as co-parents who are divorced from each other. The authors emphasize that changes in perception may improve cooperation and joint problem solving (McIsaac & Finn, 1999)

In their 1996 review of programs, Geasler and Blaisure (1996) reviewed the content of divorce education materials through a national survey. They categorized their results into a summary of topics and a summary of teaching strategies used. Topics were divided into three areas: parent-focused content, child-focused content, and court-focused content. The parent-focused content included topics such as personal adjustment, coping with change, parenting, and skills and resources. The child-focused content included the categories of children's response to divorce and helping children cope with divorce. The court-focused categories included court processes and parent responsibility. Teaching strategies used in programs included passive involvement such as lecture and handouts, limited involvement characterized as discussion, use of workbooks, and self-assessment tools, and active involvement such as role play, skills practice, and self-awareness activities.

Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996a) reported that there are several limiting factors to consider in the use of passive educational programs, which are limited to distributing information. First, some divorcing parents may not be significantly motivated to learn about the effects of divorce on children. For example, they may believe their children are coping sufficiently with the separation and divorce. Second, it is not known if parents read the material. Also, one parent may read the material thoroughly while the spouse reads with less conviction or not at all. Third, there is no opportunity for questions, feedback and skills training. Lastly, some parents have reading and/or language difficulties that limit their ability to comprehend the content of printed materials. Many of these limitations can be

overcome through mandatory attendance at multi-modal parent education programs where parents have ample opportunities to learn skills and ask specific questions.

Outcome Research in Divorce Education

The number of mandatory parent education programs for divorcing couples with children has dramatically increased during this decade (Blaisure & Geasler, 1999). Due to the fact that mandatory parent education is a relatively new public policy, outcome research in parent education is limited. However, several useful studies described below have contributed to this growing body of literature. Hughes and Kirby (2000) summarized outcome studies in the following categories: satisfaction, knowledge and skills gained, behavioral changes, and relitigation. The literature review below provides samples of outcome research in these areas and others. Although the differences in programs make it difficult to generalize positive outcomes across programs, consistently positive responses to programs may be an indication of overall program efficacy.

Some education programs are designed for children. Fischer (1999) conducted a pilot outcome study of a group curriculum for children ages 9-12. Parents were asked to complete a pre-program and post-program survey. The author developed the surveys. Parents were asked through a survey to assess children's willingness to express their feelings about the divorce, perceived level of self-esteem, and amount of acting out behaviors before and after the program. Results of the study suggested that parents observed improvements in all of the

areas. The largest improvements were realized be children with the least self-expression, lowest self-esteem, and most behavioral problems at baseline.

Stolberg and Garrison (1985) evaluated a 12-hour, 10-session voluntary divorce education program that focused on psychological adjustment to divorce. Program content was related to the emotional adjustments for parents and children in divorce. Mothers in the treatment group did not show more improvement in parenting skills than mothers in the control group. Furthermore, children in the treatment group did not score significantly higher on adjustment measures than those in the control group. Mothers reported more psychological benefits than fathers, but these results did not translate to positive effects of parent behaviors. Thus, there were no significant differences in improved parenting skills between treatment and control group.

Ogles, Lambert, and Craig (1991) randomly distributed one of four self-help booklets on coping with loss to 64 adults who were separating or divorcing. Participants who received the booklets experienced significant decreases in depression and anxiety. However, it was not clear that changes in psychological distress resulted from knowledge gained from the educational booklets.

Kurkowski, Gordon, and Arbuthnot (1993) gave divorcing parents a list of situations in which children of divorce reported feeling in the middle of parental conflicts. Parents were also given information on how to minimize these occurrences through increased awareness and improved skills. The parents' adolescent children reported less exposure to their parents' conflicts than

participants in the control group one-month after the information was given to their divorcing parents.

Kearnes, Gordon, and Arbuthnot (1991) evaluated a video-based intervention for children of divorce. Through the use of video, the program taught children how to cope more effectively with situations that place them in the middle of their parents' conflicts. The video was used to show scenarios that commonly cause distress for children. After each scenario was viewed, the situation was discussed and skills were taught including opportunities for practice. The fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students in the treatment group reported significantly less stress in a four-week follow-up. Although this study does not evaluate parent education, the scenarios used in this program are similar to the scenarios used in current programs.

Arbuthnot, Poole, and Gordon (1996) distributed an educational booklet, What about the children: A guide for divorced and divorcing parents (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1991), to parents filing for divorce over a 12-month period. Every other couple filing for divorce received the booklet and three-month follow-up interviews were conducted. Results indicated that mothers reported greater reduction in behaviors contributing to loyalty conflicts and increased encouragement of children to engage in child-father involvement. No differences were reported for fathers. Arbuthnot, Poole, and Gordon (1996) replicated their earlier study, and they followed up at one year as well. Their results indicated parental conflict played a significant role in children's adjustment to divorce. Children showing more adjustment problems had parents with greater

interpersonal conflict and distress. Parents without custody of the children in the treatment group showed an increase in time spent with their children while non-custodial parents in the control group showed a decrease in time spent with their children.

Kramer and Washo (1993) evaluated a two-session intervention that used videotape scenarios and discussions. Sessions were 90 minutes each and were held one week apart. The program covered the harmful effects of divorce on children and illustrated problem situations parents are likely to encounter. After each problem situation was illustrated, a leader facilitated discussion of the children's feelings and parent behavior alternatives to improve the outcome for the children. Questionnaires were administered immediately before the session, immediately after completing the class and three months after the program. Parents reported immediately after the class that the program was helpful and would be useful to other parents. Over 82% recommended the program continue to be mandatory. However, parents in the treatment group did not report significantly greater improvements in their children's adjustment than the control group three months after the program. However, parents with high conflict in their relationship reported significant improvements in cooperative behaviors three months after the program.

Arbuthnot, Gordon, and Schneider (1994) interviewed judges who served in districts that used a skills-based program. Judges reported that the program had reduced litigation rates, improved parental attitudes, reduced tensions between

attorneys and mental health professionals, and contributed to increased awareness of human issues in judicial decisions.

Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996a) evaluated the effectiveness of a court-mandated parent education program emphasizing the use of conflict resolution and communication skills in specific circumstances that reduce children's exposure to conflict. The skills included recognizing situations where children are put in the middle, avoiding using children as messengers or spies, avoiding criticism of the other parent, and owning responsibility for financial issues that affect the children. Communication skills emphasizing use of "I" messages were also utilized. Measures developed by the authors assessed parental mastery of conflict resolution skills immediately after the program and six months later, comparing results to a control group receiving no treatment. Eighty-nine parents in the treatment group reported they exposed children to parental conflicts less often, were able to work through difficult issues with their ex-spouses more effectively, and were willing to let their children spend more time with their ex-spouses. Skills were effectively learned and maintained at follow-up.

Gray and Verdieck (1997) conducted an evaluation of the first year of a court-mandated program in Maryland. The programs were two 3-hour sessions that utilized a variety of teaching methods. A questionnaire that assessed parents' expectations, levels of co-parental conflict, perceptions of children's adjustment, and opinions of the mandatory versus voluntary status was administered before the program and six months after the program in a follow-up mailing. A sample of 115 parents reported significant improvements in reduction of co-parental

conflict, improvements in children's adjustment, and they recommended the program be mandated in the follow-up survey six months after the program.

Arbuthnot, Kramer, and Gordon (1997) tracked two groups of parents over a two-year period after their divorce. A group of 89 participants who had participated in a mandatory divorce education class had returned to court for litigation less than half as often as a group of 23 who had not attended a class. The treatment group that participated in a skills-based parent education program achieved an average litigation rate of 1.6 filings versus 3.74 filings in the control group over the 27-month post-divorce period. Additionally, participants reported that parents who participate "are glad they attended (even if mandated), believe that programs are relevant and helpful, are more aware of their children's point of view, feel better able to help their children, and vow to do a better job of protecting their children from the stress caused by the parents' problems" (p. 269). This study indicated parent education might have contributed to behavioral changes as indicated by reduced litigation.

Kramer, Arbuthnot, Gordon, Rousis, and Hoza (1998) compared the effectiveness of an information-based program with a skill-based program utilizing videotaped scenarios. The two treatment groups consisted of 329 participants that attended the Children in the Middle (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996b) program and 278 that attended the Children First in Divorce program, an information-based program developed collaboratively by a Florida court and a children's clinic. Both programs were three hours in length. Measures consisting of Likert-type scales were developed by the authors to assess domestic violence,

parental communication, parental conflict, child behavior problems, parent knowledge, parent skills, and parent reactions. Results indicated that the skill-based program was more effective in improving parent communication, but both programs reduced children's exposure to conflict. Neither program significantly affected domestic violence, parental conflict, or child behavior problems.

Shifflett and Cummings (1999) compared a four-hour parent educational program designed for divorcing or separating parents with an educational program for parents that emphasized general parenting and disciplinary information. Seventeen parents completed a pre-test battery of measures that included the short version of the Parents' Knowledge About Conflict/Divorce Issues test, the O'Leary-Porter Scale (measuring positive and negative parental behaviors), and the Parents' Behavior Checklist. At the end of the program, parents completed the full version of the Parents' Knowledge About Conflict/Divorce Issues test and the Consumer Satisfaction Questionnaire. Participants were contacted by mail for a one-month follow-up. Results indicated parents participating in the divorce education program demonstrated increased knowledge and decreased destructive behavior after the program and at the follow-up. Additionally, parents expressed satisfaction with the program, indicating that education specifically designed for the needs of divorcing couples with children is most useful.

McKenry, Clark, and Stone (1999) compared participants in a divorce education program with a sample of participants that did not attend a program. The treatment group consisted of parents who attended the PEACE program (Parents' Education About Children's Emotions). A questionnaire was developed

containing several Likert-type rating scales that assessed a variety of co-parenting issues such as knowledge of adjustment issues, exposing children to conflict, communication skills, satisfaction with custody, etc.. Attitude toward the nonresidential parent was assessed using the Attitudes Toward the Nonresidential Parent Scale. Participants in the program in years 1991-1995 (1000) were surveyed. Program participants (136) and non-program participants (100) responded. A program effect was significant only for the domain related to parents' relationship with their children. Parents who participated in the divorce education reported improved relationships with their children. The study was conducted at least four years after the program for all of the participants.

Peterson and Steinman (1994) provided a summary of the development and implementation of a mandatory parent education program. Their post-class evaluation included open-ended questions that asked parents to provide their perceptions of the program. Content included questions about the helpfulness of the program and whether or not parents believed it would make a difference. An analysis of the data (n=600) revealed that over half of parents indicated that the class helped them understand their feelings about the divorce. The majority of parents (73%) also indicated improved awareness of issues related to their children's adjustment. Parents also reported (70%) that the program would make a difference in their own parenting behaviors.

As noted previously, there are methodological differences in outcome studies of published parent education programs that may contribute to differences

in results. Differences in dependent measures and instruments used in the studies in this review are illustrated in Figure A.

Authors	Dependent Measure	Instrument	Design
Arbuthnot, Kramer, & Gordon, 1997	Litigation Rates	Developed for study	Post-class interview with control group (no parent education)
Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996a	Parent reactions Parent learning of Communication skills Improved parenting behaviors Maintenance of skills Parental conflict	Developed for study	Post-class evaluation Six-month follow-up
Gray & Verdieck, 1997	Parental conflict Children's adjustment (parents' perception) Parents reactions	Developed for the study	Pre-class evaluation Six-month follow-up
Kramer, Arbuthnot, Gordon, Rouis, & Hoza, 1997	Domestic violence Parental conflict Parent knowledge Child behavior problems*	Developed for study *Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory	Pre-class evaluation Post-class evaluation Three-month follow-up Control group
Kramer & Washo, 1993	Satisfaction Children's adjustments (parents' perception) Parental conflict	Developed for study	Pre-class evaluation, Post-class evaluation, three-month follow-up
McKenry, Clark, & Stone (1999)	Personal reactions	Developed for study	Follow up surveys one to five years post-class
Shifflett & Cummings, 1999	Parent knowledge Parents' behaviors* Satisfaction**	Developed for study *Conflict Tactics Scale & O'Leary-Porter Scale **Consumer Satisfaction Questionaire (CSQ)	Pre-class evaluation Post-class evaluation One-month follow-up Control group

Figure A. Authors, dependent measures, instruments, and design of outcome studies in parent education.

Parent education programs have been evaluated in West Virginia. Maciorowski (1997) surveyed parents that attended a pilot parent education program in Family Law Master Group 17 of West Virginia. The parent education program in this region was developed by local professionals and adapted from

published parent education materials. Parents in the pilot program reported that the class was useful and that they learned how to help their children cope more effectively. Fishkin's (1999) study of the start-up phase of five parent education programs found that parents who attended a class had far greater understanding of important issues relating to the effects of divorce on their children than parents who did not attend a class. The author of this study, in collaboration with, Fishkin (2000) evaluated parent education classes in Family Law Master Regions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 17. Programs in these regions differed in curricula and level of instructor/participant interaction. Fishkin surveyed parents immediately after their parent education class. Dr. Fishkin's report indicated that parents reported many positive outcomes resulting from their participation in the class including improved knowledge of issues related to parents' and children's adjustment to divorce.

Summary

In a recently written book on the current state of American families, Judith Wallerstein (1998a) identified three major psychological factors contributing to children's development: reasonably harmonious parental relationships, sensitivity and commitment of each parent to the child, and the psychological intactness and morality of each parent. All three of these factors are challenged by the break-up of the family. Interventions such as divorce education may provide opportunities to improve children's adjustment to divorce. The programs encourage parents to examine their ongoing behaviors that influence their children's adjustment experience.

Kelly (2000) reported on major findings to date in outcome research of divorce education programs: early intervention is more effective than delayed intervention, parents in high conflict relationships appear to benefit the most, participants indicate a greater willingness to accept a co-parenting role, and skills based programs are more effective than improving outcomes than didactic programs. We cannot assume that programs are equally effective. Arbuthnot, Kramer, & Gordon (1997) called attention to the differences in established programs and noted the need to compare programs with each other to determine the most effective class content and method of instruction.

There is a need for comparative evaluations of divorce education programs. In the outcome research, results may vary dependent on length, design, content, theoretical basis, process, teaching strategy, and level of participation. Additionally, there may be reasons for changes in dependent variables other than the parent education class. Furthermore, methodological differences also influence the results which detracts from our ability generalize the results of one study to the larger population. For these reasons, there is a need for parent education programs to be evaluated in a comparative empirical study.

A comparative evaluation of current programs will bring much needed methodological consistency to outcome research in this area. It may help professionals in developing new programs and refining existing programs. Also, it may assist public officials who are assigned the task of selecting appropriate programs.

The present study will contribute to this growing body of empirical literature. It will compare the effectiveness of five divorce education programs in West Virginia. The five programs utilize four different and distinct educational programs that vary in many of the ways previously mentioned. The two regions using the same program differ in population demographics. The independent variable will be groups. The dependent variables will be participant learning, children's exposure to parental conflict, and parents' reactions to the programs.

Research Questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

Are there differences in participant learning across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

Are there differences in reports of parental conflict across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Research Question 3 (RQ3)

When comparing parents' reports of parental conflict they exposed their children to over the past three months with their predictions of parental conflict they will expose their children to over the next three months, are there differences across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Research Question 4 (RQ4)

When comparing (a) parents' reports of parental conflict they expose their children to over the past three months with (b) their predictions of parental

conflict they will expose their children to over the next three months, and (c) their report three months after the class of parental conflict since the parent education class, are there differences across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Research Question 5 (RQ5)

Are there differences in parents' reactions to the programs (satisfaction, perceived usefulness, improvement of communication skills, and satisfaction with amount of information provided) across the five parent education programs surveyed?

CHAPTER THREE

Method

This study resulted from an initiative from the Administrative office of the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals to evaluate mandatory parent education in West Virginia. This study was conducted in collaboration with Anne Fishkin, Ph.D., Marshall University Graduate College. In the following section, the traditional methodological components of empirical research as applied to this study will be described in detail. These include the participants, measures, hypotheses, proposed analysis, and procedure sections. In addition, the five parent education programs to be evaluated will be described. Finally, additional factors influencing the results will be explored. Demographic frequencies are provided in the results section.

Participants

Participants in the study were 451 divorcing parents with children that collectively attended 30 parent education classes over a six-month period from June 17, 1999 until December 16, 1999. Participants included divorcing parents in five family law master regions in the state of West Virginia.

There were slightly more female participants (237) than males (209). The overwhelming majority of participants (97%) were white and non-Hispanic. Fifty-five percent of participants were educated at the high school diploma level, followed by some college education or associate degree (24%), elementary education (11%), and bachelor degree (10.5%). The highest number of participants (42%) was in the 26-35-age range. The lowest number of

participants was in 46+ category. The most frequent annual income category of participants was "less than $10,000" (30%) followed by "$10,001-$20,000" (26%).

There are 17 counties included in the five family law master regions of this study. The location of the counties and regions are presented on a map of West Virginia and provided in Appendix A. In this study, Region 1 of West Virginia will be referred to as Group 1. Region 3 of West Virginia will be referred to as Group 2. Region 4 of West Virginia will be referred to as Group 3. Region 6 of West Virginia will be referred to as Group 4, and Region 17 of West Virginia will be referred to as Group 5. Differences in median household income and poverty levels vary in the regions, as described in Table 2.

Penny Crandall, Director of West Virginia Family Law Masters for the Supreme Court of West Virginia for the duration of the study, oversaw the staff, policies, and procedures associated with family law master activities in West Virginia during the data collection period, June 16, 1999 to December 16, 1999. The divorce education programs were under her jurisdiction. Therefore, permission to conduct the current study at the parent education programs in collaboration with Dr. Anne Fishkin's evaluation (Fishkin, 2000) was required and was obtained with the understanding that results were to be reported to the Administrative Office of the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals in a formal report authored by Dr. Fishkin.

Permission was granted with the following conditions. First, participation was to be voluntary. Second, the study coulod not interfere with the timing of

Table 2

Demographic Information of Family Law Master Regions

	Population	Percent of all Ages in Poverty	Annual Income (Household)	Average # of Divorces per Month	Major Cities
Group 1					
Tyler Co.	9,835	18.7%	$26,622.00		Middlebourne
Wetzell Co.	18,256	20.7%	$27,783.00		New Martinsville
Marshall Co.	35,441	17.6%	$27,789.00		Moundsville
Ohio Co.	48,287	15.4%	$29,700.00		Wheeling
Brooke Co.	26,004	13.7%	$31,280.00		Wellsburg
Hancocke County	33,973	13.8%	$29,983.00		Weirton
Total	171,766			60	
Mean		16.7%	$28,866.00		
Group 2					
Calhoun Co.	7,940	31.5%	$19,376.00		Grantsville
Jackson Co.	27,972	18.4%	$29,173.00		Ripley
Roane Co.	15,342	26.5%	$21,534.00		Spencer
Total	51,254			18	
Mean		25.5%	$23,354.00		
Group 3					

Kanawha Co.	202,011	17.1%	$29,872.00		Charleston, Dunbar
Mason Co.	25,869	20.2%	$27,385.00		Point Pleasant
Putnam Co.	51,164	11.4%	$39,619.00		Winfield
Total	279,044			40	
Mean		16.2%	$33,502.00		
Group 4					
Wayne Co.	41,957	22.1%	$25,969.00		Wayne
Cabell Co.	94,273	19.5%	$27,715.00		Huntington
Total	136,230			52	
Mean		20.8%	$26,842.00		
Group 5					
Berkeley Co.	70,970	13.4%	$33,425.00		Martinsburg
Jefferson Co.	41,368	11.9%	$36,711.00		Charles Town
Morgan Co.	13,640	13.9%	$29,068.00		Berkeley Springs
Total	125,978			88	
Mean		13.0%	$33,068.00		

Note. From U.S. Bureau of the Census (1999). Population numbers are from July 1, 1998. Percent of population in poverty and median household income numbers are from 1995. Divorce numbers are from July 1, 1997 to July 1, 1998.

scheduled programs. For example, programs would not be delayed or cut short by the researcher in an effort to invite participation or collect data. Third, data obtained for analysis would be obtained before and after each individual class targeted for data collection. Third, the researcher would collect data while attending the programs. Finally, the results of the current study would be shared with the acting Director of the West Virginia Family Law Masters for the Supreme Court of West Virginia.

Procedure

Data was collected at parent education classes from the five family law master regions over a six-month period from June 17, 1999 to December 16, 1999. The doctoral committee agreed that a sample size of 80 participants was required from each region to complete data collection. Therefore, the researcher targeted classes for data collection and attended consecutive classes based on regional schedules and travel time required. The demographics survey and the pre-class evaluation was presented to participants immediately before the beginning of the classes the researcher attended. The post-class evaluation was presented to participants immediately after the parent education classes the researcher attended. And three months after the parent education class, the follow-up survey was mailed to participants who had completed the pre and post-class evaluation. The researcher was responsible for the administration and collection of all data in the study.

The researcher arrived at the setting of each parent education class at least 15 minutes before the participants arrived. Five minutes before the class, those in

attendance were invited to participate in an academic study evaluating the effectiveness of parent education programs. The researcher summarized the purpose of the program, the extent of their participation, an explanation of the risks, the potential benefit of their participation for others, and appreciation of the researcher. This presentation was uniformly conducted through the memorization of a script (Appendix I).

Parents that expressed an interest were handed a consent form (Appendix J) summarizing the study, including the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals request for formal evaluation, and the nature of their participation. The cover letter provided a space for their written consent, which they could sign and date or decline to participate.

The pre-class evaluation and demographic survey were distributed with the consent form to expedite completion of surveys under the limited time constraints. As reported above, permission for the study was granted with the understanding that participation would not interfere with the start time of the parent education class. Participants were asked to place their initials at the top of the evaluation. Participants were reminded that the class would begin at the scheduled time. The researcher offered assistance to any participants that needed assistance due to disability or low reading level. The pre-class evaluations were collected from participating parents prior to the start of the parent education session.

During the class, the researcher was present to observe and document factors related to class content, teaching methods utilized and the amount of

discussion and interaction that took place. To record observations, the researcher used an adaptation of a form originally developed by Anne Fishkin, Ph.D., Marshall University Graduate College, labeled "Program Description Form" (Appendix J). The original Program Description Form was used in an evaluation study of the parent education programs in the same five regions in this study (Fishkin, 1999) evaluation of the parent education program in Group 3 in West Virginia At the end of the class, the post-class evaluation was distributed to participating parents. They were asked to place their initials at the top of their survey. Upon completion, they were collected and matched to their pre-class survey by matching their initials. If initials for two or more parents were the same, identifying the handwriting on the surveys easily differentiated them. After the class, the researcher stapled pre-class evaluations to matching post-class evaluations and coded the surveys. Surveys were coded using Region, first letter of the city where the class was held, and number (sequenced) in the regional sample. As parents left the class, they were reminded that a follow-up survey would arrive three months later. Again, they were thanked for their participation.

To conduct the follow-up mailing, several steps were taken to ensure the follow-up surveys would be matched with the original data set. First, parents address labels were matched to their coded data sets by matching their names on the labels with their names on the consent form, which was the first page of each data set. A follow-up survey with their code printed on the back was placed in the envelope addressed to the participant (using the participant's handwritten mailing label). A stamped, self-addressed (researcher) envelope was also provided for the

participant to use for returning the follow-up survey. Follow-up surveys were received by the researcher between September, 1999 and May, 2000. Although surveys were mailed three months after parents' programs, some were not immediately returned.

Descriptions of Parent Education Programs

The descriptions that follow will provide an overview of each parent education program. Each of the five programs was operating prior to this study, overseen by a Project Coordinator. All Project Coordinators had masters degrees in a psychology related field or Law. Each Region was responsible for choosing a parent education curriculum, in consultation with the Director of West Virginia Family Law Masters. Samples of educational booklets used in each region are reported in Appendix B.

Instructor Training

All instructors had at least a master's degree in education, psychology, social work, or other mental health related degree. Individual instructors in all regions had at least three years work experience in the field of counseling with work experience related to helping adults and parents with adjustment issues related to divorce. In parent education classes in Group 4, in each of the parent education classes that were held in the study, at least one instructor had a doctorate degree in psychology.

Group 1

Family Law Master Region 1 includes Brooke, Hancock, Marshall, Ohio, Tyler, and Wetzel Counties. The program title was Children Cope with Divorce.

The classes were offered once a month in three locations and the average class size was 15. Classes have been held since November of 1998.

The content of this class included information from the Families First program, a video titled Children Cope with Divorce, overheads, and a script. Parents are distributed the handbook: Children Cope with Divorce: Parent Handbook at the end of the class. The class is 3½-4-hours long and includes two hours of lecture, 20 minutes of video, 15-30 minutes of discussion, and 25 minutes of administrative activities (breaks, instruction, and program evaluation). There was minimal interaction between instructors and participants.

The class curriculum contained significant content in the following areas: emotional adjustment issues for parents, emotional adjustment issues for children, effects of divorce on children at different ages, minimizing children's exposure to parental conflict, discussion of additional local resources, and conditions associated with the need to ask for professional help. Teaching methods used included the use of video, Co-parenting: Families First. This was a 30-minute video describing the importance of effective co-parenting after divorce. The video presented real life couples as case studies and highlighted their success through shared commitment to co-parenting. A second part of the video, played later in the class, portrays a divorced family with two teenage children. In the video, the parents make several mistakes common to parents in divorce. After the video, the instructor provided a summary of the parents' mistakes and alternative behaviors and communication strategies. The value of divorce mediation was

briefly summarized for participants. Instructors also used overheads, a flipchart, and provided an educational booklet as parents were leaving.

Group 2

West Virginia Family Law Master Region 3 consists of Calhoun, Jackson, and Roane Counties. This region will be referred to in this study as Group 2. The classes were offered in the town of Spencer and in Ripley. The average class size was 10. Classes have been held since June, 1998.

This region used the program Children in the Middle by Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996b). Their curriculum promotes the use of skills to help parents reduce the amount of parental conflict to which they expose their children. Their video, Children in the Middle (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996b) and the accompanying guidebook, What About the Children: A Guide for Divorced and Divorcing Parents4th Ed. (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996b) provided parents with examples of common situations that place children in the middle of parental conflicts. The class was two hours long and included 25 minutes of lecture, 30 minutes of video, 55 minutes of discussion, and 10 minutes of administrative activities. There was a high level of interaction between instructors and participants.

During the class, parents viewed scenarios on video. One example of a scenario is one that showed a daughter being placed in the middle of a disagreement between her divorced parents. The parents were negotiating a weekend visitation through their daughter. Their daughter was on the phone with her father and in the presence of her mother. The daughter was placed in a

situation requiring her to relay negative and derogatory messages back and forth between the parents. After the scenarios, the instructors led a discussion of the harmful effects on the children. This was followed by a demonstration of specific skills parents could use to improve communication with the co-parent and with the daughter. Another scenario showed a child needing money for a school activity with each parent instructing the child to get the money from the other parent. A third scenario showed a father seeking information about his ex-wife's new love relationship through his son. Opportunities for education, reactions, and discussion follow each training scenario. Additional focus of class content included the emotional adjustment of parents and children, the effects of divorce on children at different ages, and a discussion of additional resources. The court-mandated mediation component of their divorce process was briefly summarized for participants. Instructors also used a flipchart and provided an educational booklet as parents were leaving.

Group 3

Family Law Master Region 4 consisted of Kanawha,County. Regions 4 will be referred to as Group 3 in this study. This region used the Children in the Middle program described in Family Law Master Group 3, with no variations in length of the class, content, or teaching methods used by instructors. Classes were held once a month and the average class size is 19 (due to the larger population of this region). Classes have been held since October, 1998. There was a high level of interaction between instructors and participants.

Group 4

Family Law Master Region 6 consisted of Cabell and Wayne Counties. This region will be referred to as Group 4 in this study. This program is an information-based program using primarily a lecture format. The program is based on the Columbus, Ohio Children's Hospital Guidance Centers' program and handbook titled, Helping Children Succeed After Divorce: A Handbook for Parents. Classes were held twice a month and the average class size was 19. Classes have been held since September 1998.

This 2-hour class consisted of 80 minutes of lecture, 20 minutes of video, 10 minutes of questions and answers, and 10 minutes of administrative activities. Program content included emotional adjustment issues for parents, emotional adjustment issues for children, effects of divorce on children at different ages, minimizing children's exposure to parental conflict, communication skills with the co-parent, communication skills with the children, the importance of mediation as a tool for resolving custody and visitation issues, discussion of additional local resources, and conditions associated with the need to ask for professional help.

There was minimal interaction during lecture segments. However, there was a high level of interaction between instructors and participants during a question and answer session. Before the break, parents were given an opportunity to write anonymous questions on a piece of paper and turn them into the instructor as they left the room for a break. After the break, the instructors read the questions and provided answers to the class. The answers that were provided

included specific recommendations that included suggestions of what to say to children, how to manage one's own behavior when dealing with the ex-spouse, and how to manage one's own behavior with children when issues associated with the ex-spouse arise. It should be noted that at least one instructor at each of the programs in this region during the study was trained at the doctoral level.

The video used contained various short "clips" of children's testimonies, professionals, reporting on the importance of minimizing co-parental conflict and improving communication skills, and testimonies from families that had experienced success through the help of counseling and mediation services. Teaching methods utilized other than lecture included the use of overheads, a flipchart, and the educational booklet. The educational booklet was handed out before class. Instructors referenced specific content area in the booklet during the class, recommending that parents consider use of the booklet in the future, as a guide to facilitate communication with the co-parent.

Group 5

Family Law Master Group 17 consists of Berkeley, Jefferson, and Morgan Counties. This region will be referred to as Group 5 in this study. This program was an information/lecture-based program offered four times a month. Average class size was 18. Classes began in January, 1997. The 1½-hour class consisted of 45 minutes of lecture, 15 minutes of video, 0-15 minutes of discussion, and 15 minutes of administrative activities. There was minimal interaction between the instructors and the participants.

Program content included emotional adjustment issues for parents, emotional adjustment issues for children, effects of divorce on children at different ages, minimizing children's exposure to parental conflict, communication skills with the co-parent, communication skills with the children, the importance of mediation as a tool for resolving custody and visitation issues, discussion of additional local resources, and conditions associated with the need to ask for professional help. Instructors used a script to ensure consistency across classes.

The program used video clips from Healing Wounded Hearts (1995) and Don't Forget the Children (1988). The curriculum, script for instructors, and overheads were developed by a committee of family law masters, school counselors, faculty from West Virginia University and Marshall University Graduate College, the regional project director, and the Supreme Court Administrative Office representative. Materials for the program were obtained from The P.E.A.C.E. Project at Hofstra University, the Helping Children Succeed After Divorce Program of Children's Hospital Guidance Centers, Columbus, Ohio, and the Family Advocate, a journal published by the American Bar Association.

This project differed from other projects because it was paired with another mandatory program in the region, divorce mediation. All divorcing parents were required to participate in both programs with the exception of couples who reached mutually acceptable agreements on their own or through their attorney, who were subsequently not required to participate in mediation.

The Family Law Master Regional Project Coordinator screened couples for indicators of domestic abuse or substance abuse because significant problems in these areas greatly reduces the likelihood that fair and reasonable agreements will be reached in mediation, as reported in the literature review. If suitable agreements were reached in mediation, written proposals were submitted to the family law master through their attorneys with recommendations for settlement. If agreements were not reached, further litigation including possible custody evaluations were recommended and required before their final hearing. Parents were encouraged during the parent education class to identify the parenting and child development goals they both agree on, using them as "common ground" when developing custody and visitation agreements (Maciorowski, 1997).

It should be noted that participation in parent education was mandatory for all persons filing for divorce that have children. There were no provisions for exceptions in the regions in this study. In all regions surveyed, the circuit courts required documentation of completion of the class in the form of a certificate of completion. A certificate of completion from both parents was required before a final divorce hearing was granted.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

Are there differences in participant learning across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

Are there differences in reports of parental conflict across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Research Question 3 (RQ3)

When comparing parents' reports of parental conflict they exposed their children to over the past three months with their predictions of parental conflict they will expose their children to over the next three months, are there differences across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Research Question 4 (RQ4)

When comparing (a) parent s' reports of parental conflict they expose their children to over the past three months with (b) their predictions of parental conflict they will expose their children to over the next three months, and (c) their report three months after the class of parental conflict since the parent education class, are there differences across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Research Question 5 (RQ5)

Are there differences in parents' reactions to the programs (satisfaction, perceived usefulness, improvement of communication skills, and satisfaction with amount of information provided) across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Measures

An eight item true/false items adapted from the Knowledge of Impact of Divorce (KID) Scale (Gordon & Arbuthnot, 1991) was used to measure parent learning. Dr. J. Arbuthnot (personal communication, November, 1998) reported to the author that the lack of published instruments designed to evaluate the

efficacy of parent education made it necessary to author measures that were practical to administer and appropriate to the research questions associated with outcome evaluations of parent education programs. The eight item true/false measure was also used by Kramer et. al (1998). The content of the questions were related to parents' and children's adjustment to divorce. Reliability and validity data were unavailable on this measure. To further assess parent learning, parents were asked to respond in writing to an open-ended question developed by Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996a). Kramer et. al. (1998) also used this measure and reported interrater agreement rates (Kappa) ranging from .85 to point .95.

The open-ended question asked: "Imagine yourself in the following situation: Your children return from visiting with their other parent, and they are dirty. Your children are tired and irritable. You ask your children to help with chores, and you get whining and complaining. No homework has been done. When you ask your children about their visit with their other parent, you learn that most of the time was spent at the home of the other parent's new lover." Parents were then asked, "What would you say to your children?" and "What would you do?" The instructions directed parents to write a verbal response and behavioral response. The author and the dissertation Chairperson coded the responses to the open-ended questions. The responses were given a score ranging from one (least desirable) to five (most desirable). Responses with higher scores were representative of verbal and behavioral responses that demonstrated parents were keeping their children out of the conflict and communicating clearly with the other parent. The scoring criteria for the open-ended questions are provided as

Appendix C. The eight-true/false items and the open-ended question are on the second page of the post-test survey in the section titled “B. Participant Learning” (Appendix D).

To assess children’s exposure to conflict, the Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996a) Children's Issues Scale was used. This was a nine-item set of questions with an accompanying Likert-type response scale. No reliability and validity data were available on these measures.

Immediately before the class, parents were asked nine questions that assessed the degree to which their children had been exposed to parental conflict situations in the *past three months* (Appendix E). Responses on the five-item Likert-type scale ranged from “Daily to Never”. Immediately after the class, the same nine items asked parents to predict the degree to which their children would be exposed to parental conflict situations in the *next three months* (Appendix F). The nine items differed only in tense. Three months after the class, the same nine items assessed the degree to which their children had been exposed to parental conflict situations in the *past three months* (Appendix G). Again, there were no differences in item content at each data collection point. The questions differ only in tense.

Parent's reactions were measured using 4 questions previously used in a published study (Kramer, 1998). Kramer (1998) reported internal consistency reliability scores ranging from α=.63 to α=.64. These questions are located on the second page of the post-test survey and are labeled, "C. Participant Reactions" (Appendix D). Questions assess satisfaction with the program, usefulness of the

program, degree to which skills were taught, and satisfaction with the amount of information covered in the program. Responses on the first three satisfaction questions were assigned values on a Likert-type scale ranging from one, “Not at all”, to five, “Extremely”. Responses to the fourth question assessing satisfaction with the amount of information covered in the program will be assigned values on a Likert-type scale ranging from one, “way to little”, to five, “way too much”.

Demographic information was collected from parents by having them complete a demographic survey prior to the pre-class evaluation. The demographics information included amount of physical, verbal, and emotional conflict that currently existed in the co-parenting relationship (Appendix H).

Analysis

The independent variable for the five research questions was “Regions” (five family law master regions). For Research Question 1, there were three dependent variables: participant learning as measured by the eight-true/false items, participant learning as measured by the “What would you say?” question after the printed scenario, and participant learning as measured by the “What would you do?” question after the printed scenario. For Research Question 2, there was one dependent variable, children’s exposure to conflict as measured by the nine items on the pre-class evaluation, the post-class evaluation, and the three-month follow-up evaluation. For Research Question 3, there was one dependent variable, children’s exposure to conflict as measured by the nine items on the pre-class evaluation and at the post-class evaluation. For Research Question 4, there was one dependent variable, children’s exposure to conflict as measured by the nine

items on the pre-class evaluation, the post-class evaluation, and the three-month follow-up evaluation. For Research Question 5, there were five dependent measures: satisfaction with the program, usefulness of the program, degree to which skills were taught, and satisfaction with the amount of information covered in the program.

For Research Question 1, number of correct responses on an eight-item true/false measure was the dependent variable. Accordingly, participants had learning scores that ranged from 0 to 8. For this dependent variable, a one-way analysis of variance was computed to determine if there is a difference among the five groups. If this analysis of variance were to yield a significant F value, a Tukey test for multiple comparisons was computed to determine which groups differed in terms of participant learning.

For Research Question 1, a second participant learning dependent variable was a score assigned to a parent's written response to the question "What would you say?" after the presentation of the written scenario. Consistent with the scheme developed by Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996b), the range of possible values assigned by the researcher was be one to five. Higher scores demonstrated mastery of communication and conflict resolution skills learned in the class. The primary researcher and a dissertation Chairperson individually coded the responses. The Pearson correlational statistic was used to assess interrater agreement. Two independent raters scored these responses on a 1 to 5 (least favorable to most favorable response). The Pearson correlation between the two raters was $\underline{r} = .74$, $\underline{p} < .01$. Accordingly, the scores by the author (Rater 1) were

used for the dependent variable. This relative weakness of this interrater reliability may be related to problems with scoring criteria that are described in the discussion section.

A one-way analysis of variance was computed to test whether the five groups differed on this dependent measure. If this analysis of variance yielded a significant F value, a Tukey test for multiple comparisons was computed to determine which groups differed in terms of responses to the scenario.

For Research Question 1, the third participant learning dependent variable was a score assigned to a parent's written response to the question "What would you do?" after the presentation of the written scenario. Consistent with the scheme developed by Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996b), the range of possible values assigned by the researcher was one to five. As described above, higher scores demonstrated the mastery of skills learned in the class. Also as described above, the primary researcher and a dissertation chair individually coded the responses and the Pearson correlational statistic was used to assess interrater agreement. The Pearson correlation between the two raters was $\underline{r} = .73$, $\underline{p} < .01$. Accordingly, the scores by the author (Rater 1) were used for the dependent variable.

A one-way analysis of variance was computed to test whether the five groups differed on this measure. If this analysis of variance yields a significant F value, a Tukey test for multiple comparisons was computed to determine which groups differed in terms of responses to the scenario. A multiple linear regression analysis was computed to assess for significant demographic predictors of outcome on the three dependent variables for Research Question 1.

For Question 2, the dependent variable was children's exposure to conflict as measured by the nine items on the pre-class evaluation, the post-class evaluation, and the three-month follow-up evaluation. As described in the Measures section, nine items on this measure were presented immediately before the class, immediately after the class, and three months after the class. Scores ranging from one to five coincided with the response options that ranged from "daily" to "never". A mean score was obtained for each participant on each of these three nine-item conflict scales (pre, post, follow-up) A larger value indicated that children were exposed to less parental conflict.

A one-way analysis of variance was computed for each group of means (pre, post, and follow-up) to determine if there was a difference among the five groups. If this analysis of variance yielded a significant F value, a Tukey test for multiple comparisons was computed to determine which groups differed in terms of children's future exposure to conflict. A multiple linear regression analysis was computed to assess for significant demographic predictors of outcome on the three dependent variables for Research Question 1

For Question 3, the dependent variable was children's exposure to conflict as measured by the nine items on the pre-class evaluation and at the post-class evaluation. As described in the Measures section, nine items on this measure were presented immediately before the class and immediately after the class. Scores ranging from one to five coincided with response options that ranged from "daily" to "never". The dependent variable was the mean score for the nine items. A larger value indicated that children were exposed to less conflict.

A 5 X 2 mixed-model analysis of variance with one between-subjects independent variable and one within-subjects variable was computed to determine if there was a difference among the five groups. The between-subjects variable was Region (1,2,3,4,5) and the within-subjects variable was time (pre-class evaluation and post-class evaluation). If this analysis of variance yielded a significant F value, a Tukey test for multiple comparisons was computed to determine which groups differed in terms of children's exposure parental conflict before the class and after the class. A multiple linear regression analysis was computed to assess for significant demographic predictors of outcome on these dependent variables.

For Research Question 4, the dependent variable was children's exposure to conflict as measured by the nine items on the pre-class evaluation, the post-class evaluation, and the three-month follow-up. As described in the Measures section, nine items on this measure were presented immediately before the class, immediately after the class, and three months after the class. Scores ranging from one to five coincided with the response options that ranged from "daily" to "never". The dependent variable is the mean scores for the nine items. A larger value indicated that children were exposed to less conflict.

A 5 X 3 mixed-model analysis of variance with one between-subjects independent variable and one within-subjects variable was computed to determine if there is a difference among the five groups. The between-subjects variable was Region (1,2,3,4,5) and the within-subjects variable was time (pre-class evaluation, post-class evaluation, and the three-month follow-up evaluation). If this analysis

of variance yielded a significant F value, a Tukey test for multiple comparisons was computed to determine which groups differed in terms of children's exposure parental conflict during the three months since the parent education class. A multiple linear regression analysis was computed to assess for significant demographic predictors of outcome on these dependent variables.

Research Question 5 had one independent variable (Region) and four dependent variables. The dependent variables were satisfaction with the program, usefulness of the program, degree to which skills were taught, and satisfaction with the amount of information covered in the program. On the first three dependent measures for Research Question 5, scores ranging from one to five coincided with response options that ranged from "Not at all" to "Extremely". On the fourth dependent measure for Research Question 5 that assessed what parent's thought about the amount of information covered in the class, scores ranging from one to five coincided with five response options that ranged from "Way too little" to "Way too much".

A one-way analysis of variance was computed for the first three dependent measures for Research Question 5 to determine if there were significant differences among the five groups. If this analysis of variance yielded a significant F value in any of these four comparisons, a Tukey test for multiple comparisons was computed to determine which groups differed in terms of parents' reactions to the programs in the five regions. Because the responses to this question were not ordinal, a frequency analysis was conducted on the fourth dependent measure of Question 5.

Parents written responses to the question “What comments do you have about this survey or about the divorce education class you attended?” were recorded and provided as an appendix (Appendix M). No formal statistical analysis of this data was conducted.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

The results of this study are presented in this section. Descriptive demographic data are summarized in Table 3 through Table 9 and are included in Appendix M. In the subsequent summaries of the results, the research questions are provided followed by the analyses that were conducted to evaluate each research question. Significant results are reported as probability below the .05 level. Trends toward significant results are reported when the probability is between the .05 and .10 level.

As summarized in Table 3, data were collected from 451 participants at 30 parent education classes over a six-month period from June 17, 1999 until December 16, 1999. The average class size varied across region with Groups 3 and 4 having the largest average class size (19) and Group 2 having the lowest average (10). The average sizes of the classes were related to the population density of the regions. As noted in Table 2, Group 2 was the least populated area and had the smallest average class size.

The invitation to participate in the study was not well received by the parents as noted by frequent moans, rolling of eyes, and various other sounds and gestures. However, 90% of parents invited to participate completed the surveys.

Gender differences are summarized in Table 4. Although there were slightly more female participants (237) than males (209) overall, there were variations in gender differences across groups. There were slightly more females than males in Regions 1, 2, and 4. Five participants did not report their gender.

Racial differences among participants are summarized in Table 5. The overwhelming majority of participants (97%) were white and non-Hispanic. Six participants did not report their race.

Educational levels of participants are summarized in Table 6. Fifty-five percent of participants were educated at the high school diploma level, followed by some college education or associate degree (24%), elementary education (11%), and bachelor degree (10.5%). There were no doctoral level participants in the study. The demographics survey did not provide response options for master degree, Jurist Doctor, nor specify MD doctorate. Fourteen participants did not report their education level.

Age demographics are reported in Table 7. The highest number of participants (42%) was in the 26-35-age range. The lowest number of participants was in 46+ category.

Estimated annual income of participants is presented in Table 8. The most frequent annual income category of participants is "less than $10,000" (30%) followed by "$10,001-$20,000" (26%). There were 34 participants who did not report their estimated annual income.

Parents were asked to estimate the amount of physical conflict, verbal conflict, and emotional distress that exists in their co-parental relationship. These results are summarized in Table 9. Of the parents responding to this question, 16 percent reported some degree of physical conflict in their co-parental relationship. Seventy participants did not respond to "physical conflict" question, 41

participants did not respond to the "verbal conflict" question, and 45 participants did not respond to the "emotional distress" question.

Research Question 1 (RQ1)

RQ1 was: Are there differences in participant learning across the five parent education programs surveyed? As described in the Method section, there are three parts for this question, each part associated with a unique dependent measure.

The first part of RQ1 was analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance in which Group was the independent variable (1,2,3,4,5), and Sum of Correct Responses on the eight-item post-test measure was the dependent variable. This analysis yielded a significant finding, F (4,432)=2.35, p<.05., indicating there was a significant difference between the groups. Multiple comparisons by the Tukey HSD were computed to determine where the significant difference existed. Those analyses indicated a trend toward significantly higher sums of correct responses in Group 4 than in Group 2, p = .07. The results indicated that parents' scores (number of correct responses) on the true/false measure were generally higher (evidence of more learning) in Group 4 than in Group 2 (Figure B).

There were no other significant differences between any other combinations of groups on the true/false measure. The descriptive statistics for first part of RQ1 (Table 10), the RQ1 ANOVA table (Table 11), and the complete Tukey HSD test results (Table 12) are reported in Appendix P.

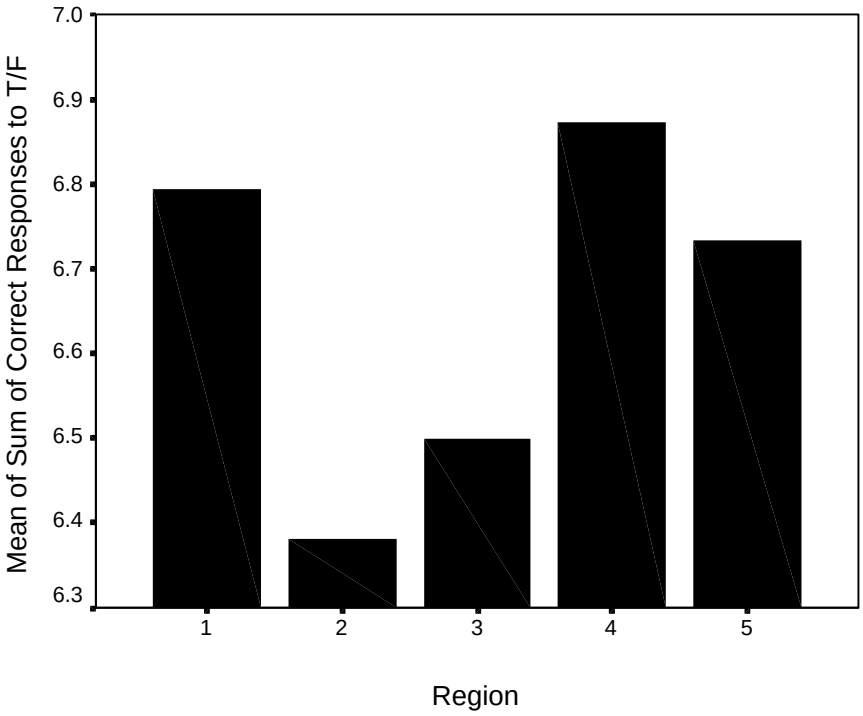

Figure B: Sum of correct responses to t/f across groups (N=437)

The second part of RQ1 was analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance in which Group was the independent variable (1,2,3,4,5), and scored written responses on the "What would you say?" scenario was the dependent measure. This analysis of variance yielded non-significant findings $\underline{F}$ (4,314) = 1.19, $\underline{p}$ >.05. There were no significant differences between the groups. The RQ1 descriptive statistics for the second part of RQ1 (Table 10), the ANOVA table (Table 11), and the complete Tukey HSD test results (Table 12) are reported in Appendix P.

Part three of RQ1 was analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance in which Region was the independent variable (1,2,3,4,5), and scored written responses on the "What would you do?" scenario was the dependent measure.

This analysis of variance yielded significant findings F (4,304) = 3.00, p <.05 indicating that there was a significant difference between groups. Multiple Comparisons by the Tukey HSD were computed to determine which groups differed from each other. Those analyses indicated that scores on responses to "What would you do?" were higher (indicating more favorable responses) in Group 1 than in Group 3, p<.05. Additionally, there was a trend toward significantly higher scores (indicating more favorable responses) in Group 1 than in Group 2, p=.09 (Figure C). The descriptive statistics for the third part of RQ1 (Table 10), the ANOVA table (Table 11), and the complete Tukey HSD test results (Table 12) are reported in Appendix P.

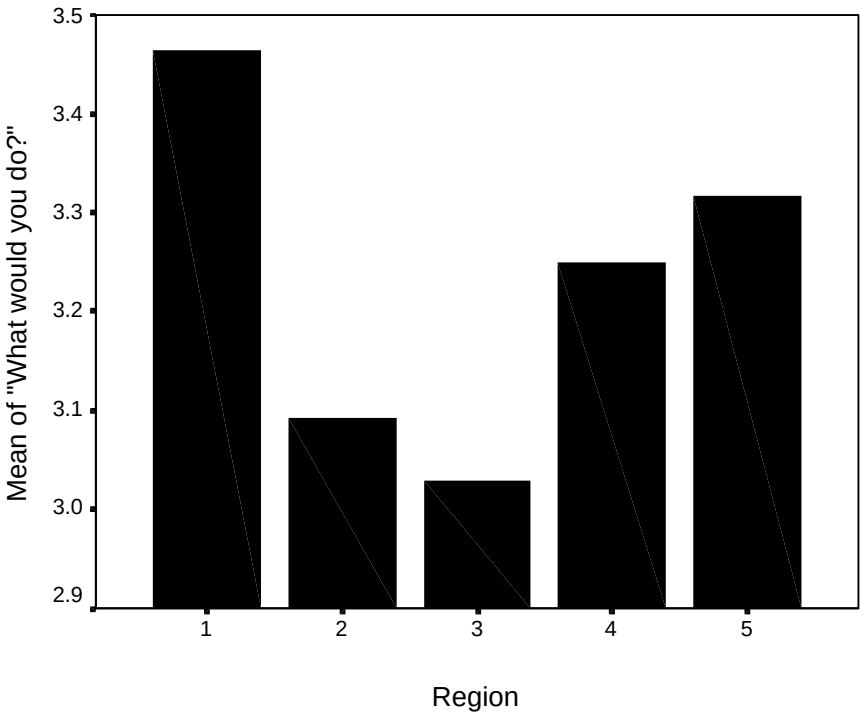

Figure C: Means of "What would you do?" across groups (N=308)

Multiple linear regression analyses were computed to determine if there were significant demographic predictors of outcome on the three dependent variables for RQ1. No significant contributions of demographic variables were found.

Research Question 2 (RQ2) was: Are there differences in reports of parental conflict across the five parent education programs surveyed? RQ2 has three parts: comparing mean scores on the nine-item conflict scale on the pre-class evaluation, the post-class evaluation, and at the three-month follow-up evaluation. Each part of this question was analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance in which Group was the independent variable (1,2,3,4,5), and a mean score of the nine-item conflict scale was the dependent variable. Statistical tables for RQ2 are provided in Appendix O (Tables 13-27).

The first part of RQ2 analyzed mean scores on the nine-item conflict scale at the pre-class evaluation. The nine-item conflict scale at the pre-class evaluation asked parents about the amount of conflict their children were exposed to "in the past three months." Higher mean scores were indicative of more favorable responses to the nine items on the scale. Higher scores indicated that parents placed their children in the middle of their conflicts less often. This analysis yielded a trend toward a significant finding, F (4,440) = 2.19, p=.06, indicating there was a trend toward significant differences between the groups. Multiple comparisons by the Tukey HSD indicated that there was a trend toward significantly higher scores (indicative of less conflict) in Group 2 than in Group 1 (p = .07) (Figure D). The descriptive statistics for the first part of RQ2 (Table

13), the ANOVA table (Table 14), and the complete Tukey HSD test results (Table 15) are reported in Appendix O.

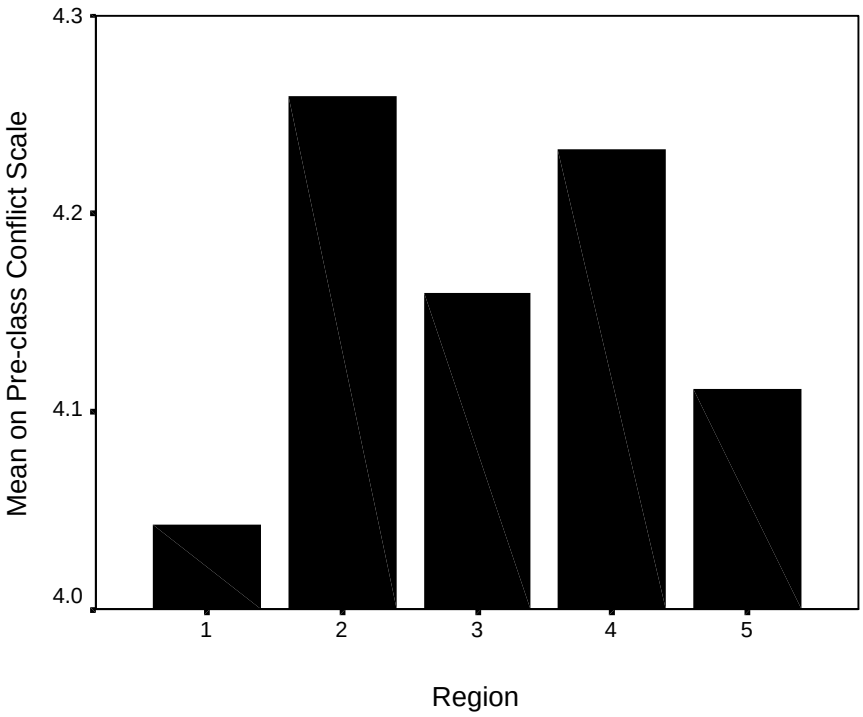

Figure D: Means on the nine-item conflict scale for the pre-class evaluation across groups (N=445)

Additionally, for the first part of RQ2, a multiple linear regression was computed in which (a) the criterion variable was pre-class score on the nine-item conflict scale and (b) the demographic predictors were age, gender, education, estimated annual income, and amount of physical conflict, verbal conflict, and emotional distress. Race demographics were not included in the multiple linear regression analysis because of the lack of racial diversity in the samples (97% white). The regression analysis revealed a significant finding, R-Square = 16

percent (Table 16), F(7,342) = 9.15, p< .01 (Table 17), The component analysis indicated significant contributions of age (t = 3.17, p<.01), physical conflict (t = 3.42, p<.01), and a trend for verbal conflict (t = 1.88, p = .06) (Table 18). The means for these three variables are shown in Table 19. These results indicated that (a) older parents, (b) those that indicated more frequent physical conflict (with the exception of two individuals), and (c) those that indicated more frequent verbal conflict, reported that their children were more often exposed to co-parental conflict in the three months previous to the parent education class.

The second part of RQ2 analyzed mean scores on the nine-item conflict scale at the post-class evaluation. The nine-item scale asked parents about the amount of conflict their children are likely to be exposed to "in the next three months." This analysis yielded a non-significant finding, F (4,439) = 1.30, p>.05. There were no significant differences between any combinations of groups. The descriptive statistics for the second part of RQ2 (Table 13), the ANOVA table (Table 14), and the complete Tukey HSD test results (Table 15) are reported in Appendix O.

Additionally, for the second part of RQ2, a multiple linear regression was computed in which (a) the criterion variable was post-class score on the nine-item conflict scale and (b) the demographic predictors were age, gender, education, estimated annual income, and amount of physical conflict, verbal conflict, and emotional distress. This regression analysis resulted in a significant finding, R-Square = 20.6 (Table 20), F (7,342) = 2.17, p <.05 (Table 21). The component analysis indicated a significant contribution of age (t = 2.19, p<.05), and a trend

toward a contribution of verbal conflict ($t = 1.87$, $p = .06$) (Table 22). The means for these two variables, as shown in Table 23, indicate that younger parents predicted they would expose their children to less co-parental conflict over the three months after the class. Also, parents that reported lower levels of verbal conflict at the pre-class evaluation generally predicted that there would be less co-parental conflict over the three months after the class.

The third part of RQ2 analyzed mean scores on the nine-item conflict scale at the three-month follow-up evaluation. The nine-item conflict scale asked parents about the amount of conflict their children were exposed to "in the past three months" since the completion of the class. This analysis yielded a significant finding, $F(4,63) = 4.47$, $p<.01$, indicating that there were significant differences between the groups on this measure. Multiple comparisons by the Tukey HSD indicated there were significantly higher mean scores (indicative of less conflict) in Group 4 than in Group 1 and higher mean scores in Group 2 than in Group 1. Also, there was a trend toward significantly higher scores in Group 5 than in Group 1. (Figure E). The descriptive statistics for the third part of RQ2 (Table 13), the ANOVA table (Table 14), and the complete Tukey HSD test results (Table 15) are reported in Appendix O.

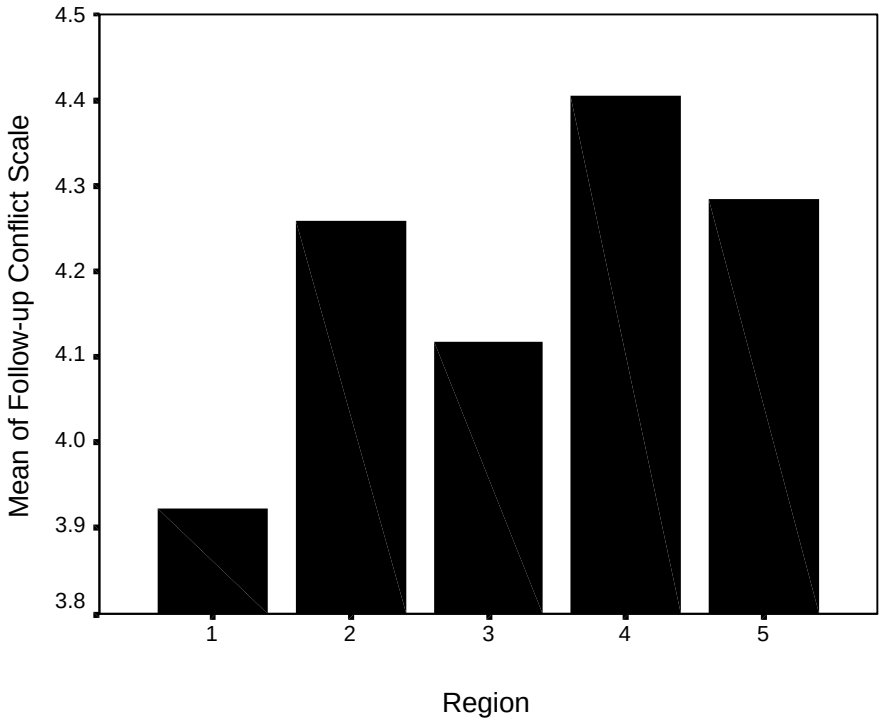

Figure E: Mean scores on the follow-up nine-item conflict scale across groups (N=67)

Additionally, for the third part of RQ2, a multiple linear regression was computed in which (a) the criterion variable was pre-class score on the nine-item conflict scale and (b) the demographic predictors were age, gender, education, estimated annual income, and amount of physical conflict, verbal conflict, and emotional distress. The regression analysis produced a significant effect, R-Square = 34 percent (Table 24), $F(7,42) = 3.07$, $p < .05$ (Table 25) The component analysis indicated significant contributions of age ($t = 2.58$, $p < .05$), and a trend for educational level ($t = 1.74$, $p = .09$) (Table 26). The means for these three variables are shown in Table 27. These results indicated that younger

parents and generally less educated parents exposed their children to parental conflict less frequently in the three months following the parent education class.

Research Question 3 (RQ3) was: When comparing parents' reports of parental conflict they exposed their children to over the past three months with their predictions of parental conflict they will expose their children to over the next three months, are there differences across the five parent education programs surveyed? Statistical tables for RQ2 are provided in Appendix P (Tables 28-31).

This question was analyzed using a 5 X 2 mixed-model analysis of variance with one between–subjects independent variable and one within-subjects independent variable. The between-subjects independent variable was Group (1,2,3,4,5). The within-subjects independent was time (pre-class and post-class evaluation). The dependent variable was mean score on the nine-item conflict scale ranging from one to five, five being the most desirable score indicative of the least amount of conflict exposure to children.

This analysis yielded a significant main effect for time, $F(1,436)=174.01$, $p<.01$ (Table 28, Table 29), indicating there were significant changes in mean scores on the nine-item conflict scale for all Groups from the pre-class evaluation to the post-class evaluation (Figure F) . The results indicated that parents in all groups predicted that they would expose their children to less conflict in the three months after the class than they had in the three months prior to the class. The main effect for group yielded a trend toward significance, $F(4, 436)=1.99$, $p=.10$ (Table 30), indicating a trend toward a significant difference between the Groups. However, the Tukey HSD revealed no differences among Groups (Table 31).

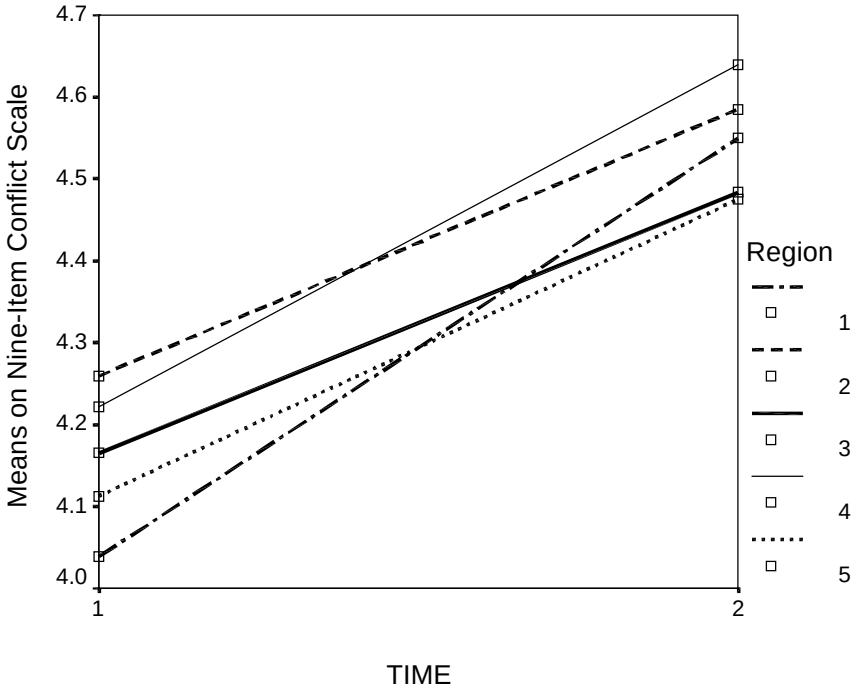

Figure F. Means on the nine-item conflict scale for the five groups at pre and post-class evaluation (time 1 and time 2, N=436)

The interaction of time by Group was non-significant ($p>.05$) (Table 29), indicating no significant interactions between mean scores from the five Groups from the pre-class evaluation to the post-class evaluation.

Research Question 4 (RQ4) was: When comparing (a) parents' reports of parental conflict they expose their children to over the past three months with (b) their predictions of parental conflict they will expose their children to over the next three months, and (c) their report three months after the class of parental conflict since the parent education class, are there differences across the five parent education programs surveyed? Statistical tables for RQ2 are provided in Appendix Q (Tables 32-36).

This analysis used to address this question was a 5 X 3 mixed-model analysis of variance with one between–subjects independent variable and one within-subjects variable. The between-subjects independent variable was Group (1,2,3,4,5). The within-subjects independent was time (pre-class, post-class, and three-month follow-up evaluation). The dependent variable was mean score on the nine-item conflict scale ranging from one to five, five being the most desirable score indicative of the least amount of conflict that children were exposed to.

This analysis yielded a significant main effect for time, $F(2,122) = 25.25$, $p<.01$ (Table 32, Table 33), indicating there were significant changes in mean scores on the nine-item conflict scale for all Groups from the pre-class evaluation to the post-class evaluation to the follow-up evaluation (Figure G) . The results indicated that parents in all Groups reported that they exposed their children to more conflict in the three months after the class then they predicted they would at the post-class evaluation. Sample sizes, means and standard deviations for the five Groups at all three evaluation times are provided in Table 34.

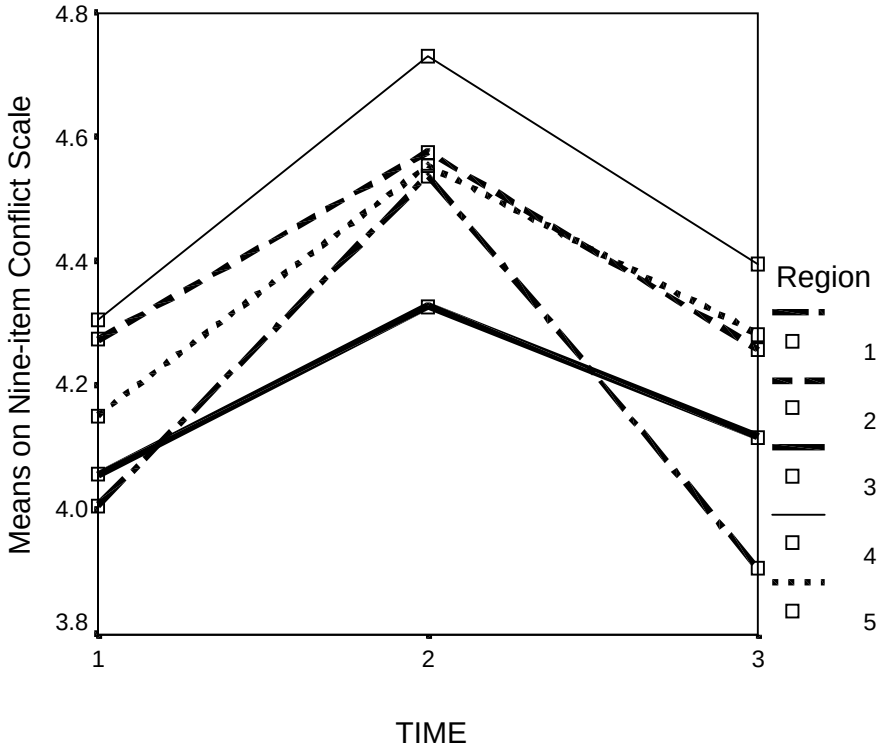

Figure G: Means on the nine-item conflict scale for the five groups at pre-class evaluation, post-class evaluation, and three-month follow-up evaluation (time 1, time 2, and time 3, N=61)

The main effect for Group yielded a significant finding, $G(4, 61)=3.16$, $p<.05$ (Table 35), indicating significant mean score differences among the Groups across the three time periods (pre-class evaluation, post-class evaluation, and follow-up evaluation). Multiple comparisons by the Tukey HSD test revealed significant differences between Groups (Table 36).

As seen in Figure G, Group 4 had significantly higher mean scores at all evaluation times than Group 3, $p < .05$. Also, Groups 4 and 1 differed significantly. As seen in Figure G, means for Group 4 differed significantly from means for Group 1 at the post-class evaluation and at the follow-up evaluation, $p <.05$. Specifically, parents in Group 4 predicted they would expose their children

to less conflict than parents in Group 1 at the post-class evaluation and at the follow-up. Also, Group 4 scores were significantly higher (indicative of less conflict) than Group 3 at the post-class evaluation and at the three-month follow-up evaluation.

Research Question 5 (RQ5) was: Are there differences in parents' reactions to the programs (satisfaction, perceived usefulness, improvement of communication skills, and satisfaction with amount of information provided) across the five parent education programs surveyed? This question was analyzed in four parts. The Statistics are provided in Tables 37-47 in Appendix R.

The first part was analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance in which Group was the independent variable (1,2,3,4,5), and overall satisfaction with the class as measured on a five-point scale ranging from "not at all" to extremely" was the dependent variable. This analysis yielded a non-significant finding, $F(4,431) = 0.55$, $p > .05$ (Table 37). The means and standard deviations for the five Groups are reported in Table 38. The results indicated that most participants in all Groups reported that the parent education class was between moderately satisfying (3 score) or very satisfying (4 score) (Figure H).

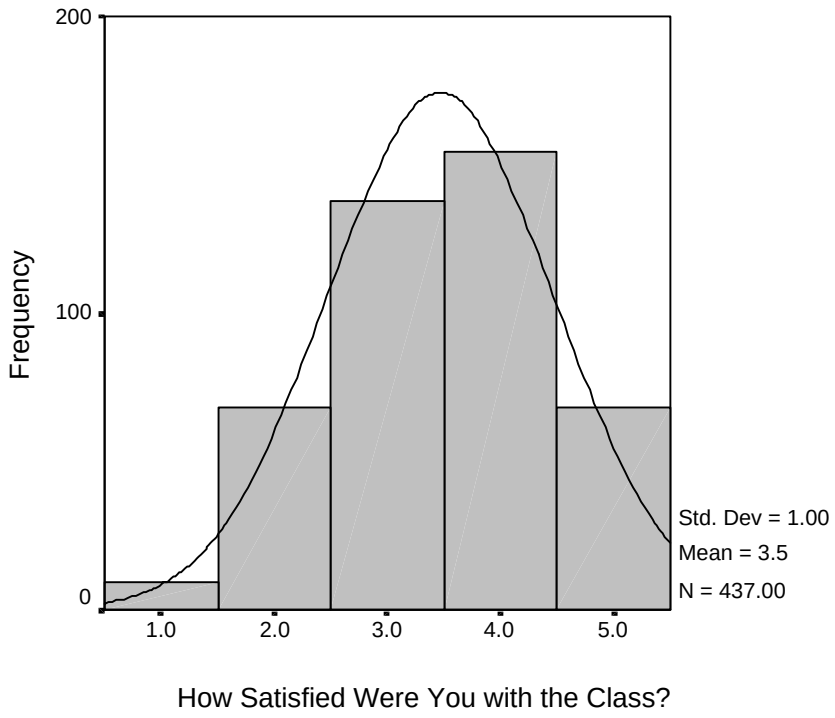

Figure H. Level of satisfaction in all groups

A multiple linear regression analysis was computed with the demographic variables (age, gender, income, education, and current amount of emotional, physical, and verbal abuse) as the predictor (independent) variables and satisfaction as the criterion (dependent) variable. The overall regression yielded a non-significant effect, $F(7,337) = 1.44$, $p>.05$ (Table 39).

The second part of RQ5 was analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance in which Group was the independent variable (1,2,3,4,5), and perceived usefulness of the class as measured on a five-point scale ranging from "not at all" to extremely" was the dependent variable. This analysis yielded a non-significant finding, $F(4,431) = 0.42$, $p>.05$ (Table 40). The results indicated that most participants in all Groups reported that the parent education class was between

moderately (3 score) useful or very useful (4 score) (Figure I). The means and standard deviations for the five Groups are reported in Table 41.

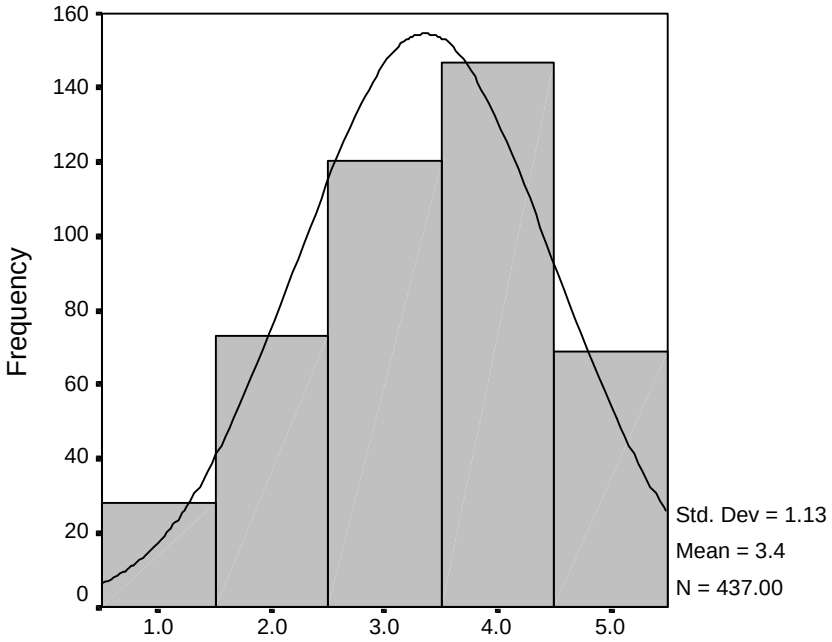

Figure I: Usefulness of parent education in all groups

A multiple linear regression analysis was computed with the demographic variables (age, gender, income, education, and current amount of emotional, physical, and verbal abuse) as the predictor (independent) variables and perceived usefulness as the criterion (dependent) variable. The overall regression yielded a non-significant result, $F(7,344) = 1.31$, $p > .05$ (Table 42).

The third part of RQ5 was analyzed using a one-way analysis of variance in which Group was the independent variable (1,2,3,4,5). The dependent variable was responses to a question asking parents if the class taught them skills to improve their relationships with the co-parent and the children. It was measured

on a five-point scale ranging from “not at all” to “extremely”. This analysis yielded a non-significant finding, F (4,428) = 0.52, p>.05 (Table 43). The results indicated that most participants in all Groups reported that the parent education class taught them skills at the level of moderate (3 score) level or the very much (4 score) level (Figure J). The means and standard deviations for the five Groups are reported in Table 44.

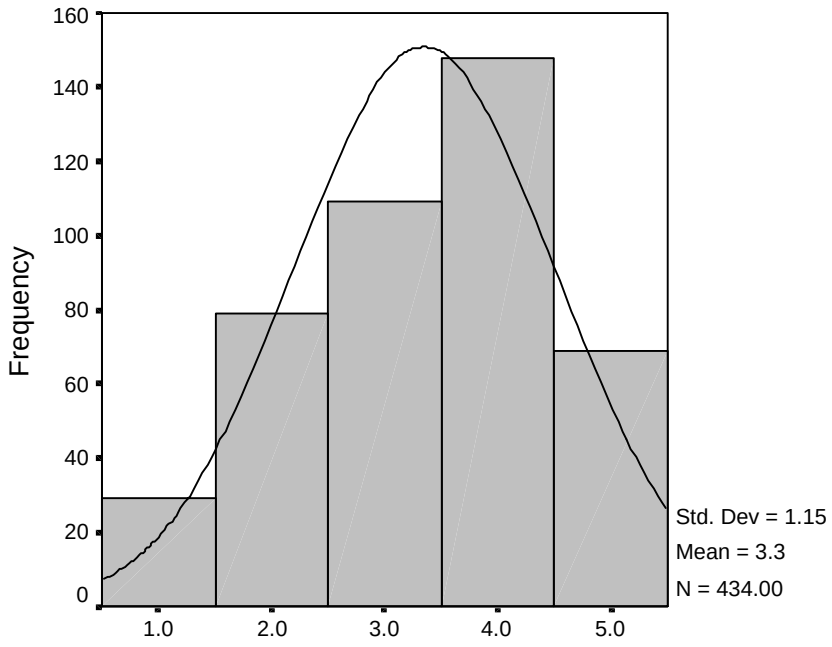

Figure J: Degree to which the class taught skills in all groups

A multiple linear regression analysis was computed with the demographic variables (age, gender, income, education, and current amount of emotional, physical, and verbal abuse) as the predictor (independent) variables and “Did the program teach you skills?” as the criterion (dependent) variable. The overall regression yielded a significant finding, F (7,335) = 2.33, p <.05 (Table 45), R-

Square = 5% (Table 46). The component analysis indicated significant contributions of gender ($t = 2.23$, $p<.05$), and educational level ($t = 2.72$, $p <.01$) (Table 47). The means for these three variables are shown in Table 48. The analysis demonstrated that gender and education are significant predictors of higher scores on this question. Women and persons with lower education levels reported learning more skills than individuals with higher education levels and men.

Part four of RQ5 was analyzed using a two-way frequency table, as reported in Table 23. As noted, the responses (way too little, too little, just right, too much, and way too much) were descriptive of parents' opinions of the amount of information covered in the class. A frequency table was used instead of analysis of variance because of the non-continuous nature of the response scale. As shown in Table 49, parents predominantly indicated that the amount of information covered in the class was "just right" (3 score).

There was, however, an indication that parents in all Groups more often reported "too little" than "too much" information was covered in the class. In each Group, the number of parents reporting "too little" was more than double the number reporting "too much." This discrepancy yielded chi-square = 22.3, $p<.01$. This difference is also observable in Figure K.

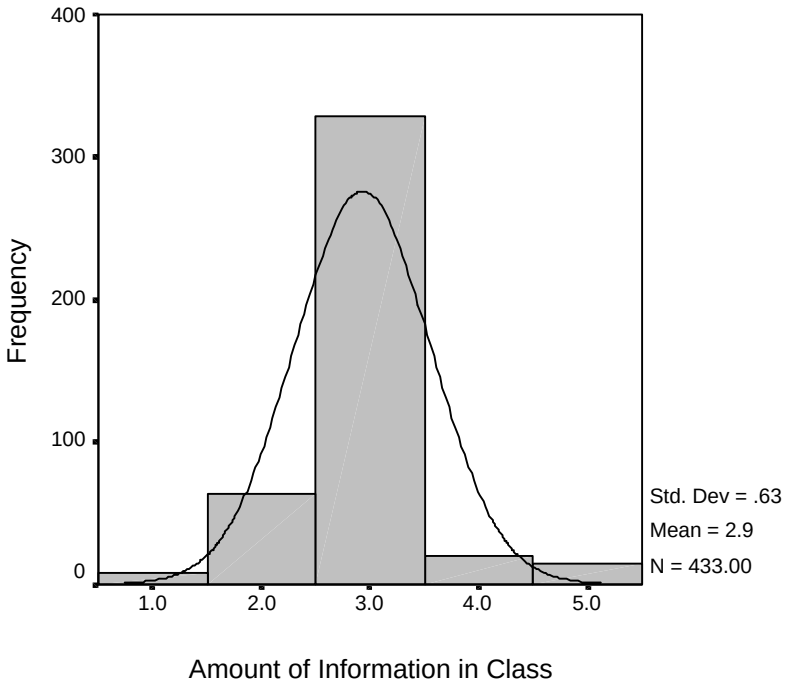

Figure K: Parents' report on the amount of information covered in the class in all groups

Parents written responses to the question "What comments do you have about this survey or about the divorce education class you attended?" were recorded and are provided as an appendix for review (Appendix U). No formal statistical analysis of this data was conducted.

Summary

(RQ1)

Are there differences in participant learning across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Results indicated that there were differences between the Groups on the dependent measure of parent learning. Specifically, parents in Group 4 scored higher than parents in Group 2 on the true/false items. There were no differences

between the groups on scored responses to the “What would you say?” open-ended question. There were, however, differences between Groups on the ‘What would you do?” open-ended question. Parents in Group 1 had higher scores than parents in Group 3. There was a trend toward significantly higher scores in Group 1 than in Group 2. There were no other significant differences among the Groups.

Research Question 2 (RQ2)

Are there differences in reports of parental conflict across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Using the mean on the Nine-item conflict scale as the measure of the amount of co-parental conflict parents expose their children to, results indicated there were no significant differences between Groups at the pre-class evaluation. There was, however a trend toward significantly higher mean scores in Group 2 than in Group 1. The results also indicated age, level of physical conflict, and levels of verbal conflict are strong predictors of outcome on this measure. Specifically, older parents and parents who reported higher levels of physical conflict and verbal conflict reported more often that their children were exposed to co-parental conflict in the past three months.

There were no significant differences between the Groups on the nine-item conflict scale at the post-class evaluation. However, the regression analysis demonstrated that age is a significant predictor of parents predictions of the amount of conflict they will expose their children to after attending a parent education class. Specifically, younger parents predicted more often that they

would expose their children to less co-parental conflict in the three months following the parent education class. Also, parents who reported lower levels of verbal conflict at the pre-class evaluation more often predicted that they would expose their children to less co-parental conflict in the three months after the parent education class.

At the three month follow-up evaluation, there were significant differences among the Groups on the nine-item conflict scale that assessed the amount of co-parental conflict they exposed their children to in the three months since the class. Parents in Group 4 had significantly higher mean scores, indicative of less conflict, than parents in Group 1. Also, parents in Group 2 had significantly higher mean scores, indicative of less conflict, than parents in Group 1. There was a trend toward significantly higher mean scores in Group 5 than in Group 1. The regression analysis demonstrated that younger parents more often reported exposing their children to less conflict. The analysis also revealed generally that less educated parents expose their children to conflict less often than more educated parents.

Research Question 3 (RQ3)

When comparing parents' reports of parental conflict they exposed their children to over the past three months with their predictions of parental conflict they will expose their children to over the next three months, are there differences across the five parent education programs surveyed?

The results indicated that there were significant changes in the means on the nine-item conflict scale in all Groups from the pre-class evaluation to the post-

class evaluation. Mean scores in all Groups went up from the pre-class evaluation to the post-class evaluation. There were no significant differences between the Groups in this change (pre to post-class evaluation). Parents in all Groups scored higher (more favorable responses) at the post-class evaluation than they did at the pre-class evaluation.

Research Question 4 (RQ4)

When comparing (a) parent s' reports of parental conflict they expose their children to over the past three months with (b) their predictions of parental conflict they will expose their children to over the next three months, and (c) their report three months after the class of parental conflict since the parent education class, are there differences across the five parent education programs surveyed?

The results indicated there were significant changes for all Groups from the pre-class evaluation to the post-class evaluation to the follow-up evaluation. Mean scores in all Groups went up from the pre to the post-class evaluation, and then went back down at the three-month follow-up evaluation. Parents in Group 4 parents predicted significantly less conflict at the post-class evaluation and reported less conflict at the follow-up than Group 1 and Group 3.

Research Question 5 (RQ5)

Are there differences in parents' reactions to the programs (satisfaction, perceived usefulness, improvement of communication skills, and satisfaction with amount of information provided) across the five parent education programs surveyed?

This question had four parts. The results of the first part that assessed parents' satisfaction revealed that most participants in all Groups reported the

class to be moderately satisfying to very satisfying. There were no significant differences between the Groups.

The results of the next analysis assessing whether parents found the class useful demonstrated that the majority of parents in all Groups found the class to be either moderately useful or very useful. There were no significant differences between the Groups on this measure.

The third part assessed the degree to which the class taught parents skills that would help them improve their relationship with their ex-spouse or their children. Parents reported in all Groups most often reported that the class taught them skills at the moderate to very much level. There were no significant differences between the groups on this measure. However, in the regression analysis of this measure, it was revealed that education level and gender were significant predictors of responses to the question of whether the class taught them skills. Persons with lower education level and women reported more often that the class taught them skills.

The last part assessed parents' opinions of the amount of information covered in the class. Of 433 parents responding to this question, 76 percent reported that the amount of information in the class was "just right". The number of parents that responded to the next most common response, "too little" was twice as high as the number of parents reporting "too much" in all Groups.

In the discussion section, the findings will be explained. The results will be placed in the context of the literature review and their convergence and/or divergence from published outcome studies in parent education will be explored.

The explanation of results will include a report of observations made by the researcher while attending the 30 programs across the five Groups in the study. The limitations of the study will be explored. Finally, a discussion of future directions for research will be included.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

Mandatory parent education for divorcing couples with children has become a standard practice in the United States. There is widespread acceptance of these programs as being informative and helpful for parents in helping themselves and their children adjust to divorce (Blaisure & Geasler, 1999). Outcome research in the field of parent education has been conducted to assess their value and efficacy. As reported in the literature review, we are limited in generalizing the results of published studies by the numerous differences in programs and the manner in which effectiveness was evaluated.

It has been established that parents report that parent education can improve self-esteem (Fischer, 1999, Stoleberg & Garrison, 1985). Parents also report that parent education is useful in understanding the impact of divorce on children and recommended it to other parents, even with the mandatory requirement (Gray & Verdieck, 1997, Kramer and Washo, 1993;).

Parent education also appears to increase knowledge of harmful behaviors, such as putting children in the middle of divorce conflict; and increased knowledge appears to lead to behavioral changes (Arbuthnot, Poole, & Gordon, 1993; Shifflet & Cummings, 1999). Furthermore, parent education can improve communication skills and conflict resolution skills, both of which can directly impact the amount of conflict to which parents expose their children (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996a). Furthermore, a reduction in litigation rates was found to result from parent education (Arbuthnot, Kramer & Gordon, 1997).

Kramer et. al., (1998) reported that skills-based programs were more effective than information-based (lecture) programs. Additionally, parent education can contribute to improved relationships between parents and children (McKenry, Clark, & Stone, 1999).

Kelly (2000) provided a summary report on major findings to date in outcome research of divorce education programs: early intervention is more effective than delayed intervention, parents in high conflict relationships appear to benefit the most, participants indicate a greater willingness to accept a co-parenting role, and skills based programs are more effective than improving outcomes than didactic programs. Arbuthnot, Kramer, and Gordon (1997) called attention to the differences in established programs and noted the need to compare programs with each other to determine the most effective class content and method of instruction. They suggested that comparative analyses may provide useful information to public policy-makers, parent education program developers, researchers, and instructors. The need for a comparative evaluation of divorce education programs provided the foundation for this research study.

The present study compared the effectiveness of five divorce education programs in West Virginia (Regions 1-5) that were similar in program content, but contained differences in curriculum design and teaching strategies. Generally, Group 1 and Group 5 were lecture-based programs. Regions 2 and 3 were skills-based programs. And Group 4 was a combination of lecture and skills-based program that contained a structured question and answer component.

The discussion section will include a summary of the participants' demographic profile. A discussion of the results of this outcome evaluation of five parent education programs in West Virginia will be provided with an accompanying explanation of the findings and their convergence or divergence with past outcome literature. The limitations of the study will be explored. It is important to note that the researcher personally gathered the data, attending all 30 of the parent education classes needed to achieve the sample size (N=451). Therefore, observations of factors that were not addressed with the measures used, but that possibly influence parents' learning will be discussed. For example, setting and size of class appeared to influence the amount of parent participation. Finally, implications for practice and recommendations for further research will be explored.

During the time that the study was conducted (June, 1999 to December, 1999), all divorcing couples with children in the five regions were required to attend parent education. Regional policies stated that a certificate of completion must be presented to the local circuit court before the granting of a final hearing. No divorcing parents were granted immunity from this requirement. Therefore, the sample of divorcing parents in this study is representative of the larger population of divorcing couples in West Virginia.

Participants were surveyed at 30 parent education classes over a six-month period (Table 3). Demographic data analysis revealed there were slightly more females than males. As reported in the results, there was a lack of cultural diversity in the sample (97% White). However, the fact that all divorcing parents

in the five regions during the six-month collection period attended the parent education classes demonstrated that there is a lack of racial diversity in the West Virginia divorcing population. Most participants were educated at the high school level. The ages of participants were spread over a wide range, with the largest number of participants being in the 26-35-age range.

The most common income category reported was "$10,000 or less". As reported in the Method section (Table 2), the average annual income (per household) was not lower than $23,000 in all of the regions. Therefore, it is possible that parents' report of annual income reflects their estimated income adjusted by the divorce. This would explain the difference between annual income reported by participants in the study and annual income reported Table 2. Also, parents in the study reported in the demographic survey on the levels of physical conflict, verbal conflict, and emotional distress in their co-parenting relationship.

Parent Learning

Research Question 1 (RQ1) was: Are there differences in participant learning across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Participant learning was measured by number of correct responses on an eight-item true/false measure. Generally, parents in Group 4 scored higher (more correct responses) than parents in Group 2. However, there were no statistically significant differences among regions on this measure. It should be noted that parents generally scored very well on the true/false measure. Seventy percent of

parents who completed the true/false measure responded correctly to seven out of eight of the items.

Parent learning was also measured by scoring their written responses to two open-ended questions after the presentation of a scenario. One question asked, "What would you say?" and one asked, "What would you do"? Although parents' responses in all regions generally demonstrated that they had learned to keep their children out of the middle of their co-parental conflict, there were no differences among the groups on scored responses to the "What would you say?" open-ended question. There were, however, differences between regions on the "What would you do?" open-ended question. Parents in Group 1 had higher scores, indicative of more favorable responses, than parents in Group 3. Also, there was a trend ($p > .05, < .10$) toward higher scores, indicative of more favorable responses, in Group 1 than in Group 2.

These results are consistent with the findings of Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996a). In their 1996 study, they reported no significant differences between a treatment group (parents who attended the Children in the Middle program) and control group (no program) on the "What would you say?" responses. However, parents who attended the program had significantly higher scores on the "What would you do?" response than parents in the control group. It should also be noted that although there were few differences between regions on any of the dependent measures associated with this research question, parents in all regions generally demonstrated that they learned the material that was presented in the class.

Reduction in Amount of Co-Parental Conflict to which Children are Exposed

Research Question 2 (RQ2) was: Are there differences in reports of parental conflict across the five parent education programs surveyed?

Co-parental conflict was measured using the nine-item conflict scale. Nine items assessed the amount of co-parental conflict to which children are exposed. A mean score on the nine items was determined. Results indicated there were not significant differences between Regions at the pre-class evaluation. There was, however a trend toward higher mean scores in Group 2 than in Group 1. Given that the intent of using the nine-item conflict scale at the pre-class evaluation was to record a baseline of the extent parents placed their children in the middle of their conflicts, lack of significant differences between the regions was not remarkable.

There was a general trend in the results that indicated increases in level of conflict reported by progressively older groups of participants. There are numerous possible explanations for this finding. It is possible that older parents had a lower frustration tolerance for conflict, or were more honest about the amount of conflict in their co-parent relationship. It is also possible that older parents had older children and were more likely to expose them to co-parental conflict than parents with younger children. Also, older children may be more rebellious and present more difficult parenting issues.

The results also indicated high levels of physical conflict and high levels of verbal conflict are strong predictors of lower mean scores, indicative of more conflict, on the nine-item conflict scale. Specifically, parents who reported higher

levels of physical conflict and verbal conflict reported more often that their children were exposed to higher levels of co-parental conflict in the past three months. This can be explained by the similar content between the demographic question assessing the amount of physical and verbal conflict and the nine-item conflict scale assessing the amount of co-parental conflict to which children are exposed. In other words, if there are high levels of conflict in the co-parent relationship, their children are likely to be regularly exposed to it.

There were no significant differences between the regions on the nine-item conflict scale at the post-class evaluation. However, the regression analysis demonstrated that age is a significant predictor of parents' predictions of the amount of conflict they will expose their children to after attending a parent education class. Specifically, younger parents predicted more often that they would expose their children to less co-parental conflict in the three months following the parent education class.

There are a number of possible explanations for this. It is possible that younger parents had younger children, perhaps even infants, and they may have believed it would be easy to prevent young children from being exposed to co-parental conflict. It is also possible that younger parents were more determined to make behavioral changes. Another possibility is that younger parents were less realistic about the behavioral changes they are capable of making. The program may have had a stronger impact on younger parents. Any of these factors may have contributed to this finding. Also, parents who reported lower levels of verbal conflict at the pre-class evaluation more often predicted that they would

expose their children to less co-parental conflict in the three months after the parent education class. This can be explained by the similarities in item content. Parents having a history of low levels of conflict seemed to expect that low levels of conflict would continue.

At the three-month follow-up evaluation, there were significant differences among the regions on the nine-item conflict scale. Parents at the follow-up evaluation reported on the amount of co-parental conflict to which they exposed their children in the three months since the parent education class. Parents in Group 4 had significantly higher mean scores, indicative of less conflict, than parents in Group 1. Also, parents in Group 2 had significantly higher mean scores, indicative of less conflict, than parents in Group 1. There was a trend toward significantly higher mean scores in Group 5 than in Group 1.

The results indicate that programs in Group 4 and Group 2 were more effective in reducing the amount of co-parental conflict to which children were exposed. The explanation of the differences in the results is supplemented by the researcher's direct observations while attended the classes. Group 4 was based on the Helping Children Succeed After Divorce program. Group 2 used the Children in the Middle program. Group 1 was based on the Children Cope With Divorce program and was presented as a lecture.

Although the Children in the Middle program was more interactive (parent discussion) than the Group 4 program, programs in Group 4 and 2 were both more interactive in nature than the program in Group 1. The program in Group 1 was primarily lecture based and much longer (1½ – 2 hours longer) than the programs

in Regions 4 and 2. Also, the researcher observed very little interaction between instructor and participants. Additionally, although a video was used, the instructors did not use it as a teaching tool. The researcher observed that most instructors in Group 1 made brief comments or no comments at all that related to the video. Regions 4 and 2 both incorporated a variety of teaching strategies including a demonstration of skills through the use of a video (Group 2) and encouragement of participants to ask questions using their own examples by providing a structured question and answer activity.

It should be noted that Group 3 used the same program as Group 2: Children in the Middle. There are a number of factors that may have contributed to higher mean scores, indicative of more conflict, in Group 3 than in Group 2, given that they used the same program. The program in Group 3 was held in the courthouse and the average class size was greater (19 vs. 10). Group 3 is an urban area (population 279,044) and Group 2 is a rural area (population 51,254)(Table 2). Also, participants in Group 3 were more educated than participants in Group 2. There were more participants educated at the Bachelors degree level (15 vs. 4) and fewer people educated only at the elementary school level (6 vs. 14) in Group 3 than in Group 2. These differences may indicate that factors such as settings, class size, education level of participants, and income level of participants have an impact on program effectiveness.

Caution should be used in interpreting these results as evidence of program efficacy. The number of participants returning the three-month follow-up was small, 68 out of 451 participants. Also, those participants that returned the

follow-up survey may not be representative of the larger sample at the pre and post-class evaluation. The fact they responded to the voluntary follow-up survey may indicate they are more highly motivated as a group than participants who did not return the follow-up survey.

It should also be noted that the analysis used to address this research question assessed the differences among regions at the follow-up class evaluation only and did not factor in the relationship between the follow-up mean scores and the post-class evaluation scores for each region. In other words, the degree to which parents' behavior in the three months after the class differed from their predictions at the post-class evaluation was an important issue and was related to the "holding power" of the information and skills that were learned at the class. This issue was addressed in research question four.

The regression analysis of the follow-up mean scores demonstrated that younger parents more often reported exposing their children to less conflict. It is possible that younger parents who predicted at the post-class evaluation that they would expose their children to less conflict in the three months after the class actually did follow through by making behavioral changes. In other words, they predicted that they would change and then they actually did make behavioral changes. There may be other explanations for the indication of age as a predictor. It is possible that the sample size at follow-up was not representative of the sample size at the pre and post-class evaluation because of the small sample (n=69 out of 451). Perhaps the participants in the sample were a more motivated group than the sample at the pre-class and post-class evaluation. The analysis

also generally revealed that less educated parents exposed their children to conflict less often than more educated parents. It is possible that the less educated parents who reported that the class taught them skills actually used those skills to make behavioral changes reported at the follow-up. Furthermore, it is possible that less educated participants were more impressed by the "expert" status of the instructors.

The results finding that skills-based programs (programs with higher levels of interaction) are more effective than lecture-based programs (programs with minimal interaction) is supported in the literature review (Arbuthnot and Gordon, 1996a, Shifflet and Cummings, 1999, Kramer et. al.1998). Programs with higher levels of interaction helped improve communication between co-parents and children and they increased parents expectations that they would keep their children out of the middle of conflicts

Research Question 3 (RQ3) was: When comparing parents' reports of parental conflict they exposed their children to over the past three months with their predictions of parental conflict they will expose their children to over the next three months, are there differences across the five parent education programs surveyed?

The results indicated that there were significant changes in the means on the nine-item conflict scale in all regions from the pre-class evaluation to the post-class evaluation. Mean scores in all regions went up from the pre-class evaluation to the post-class evaluation. There were no significant differences among the regions in this change (pre to post-class evaluation).

Although there were no significant differences among the groups, parents in all groups predicted they would expose their children to significantly less conflict in the next three months than they did in the past three months. This change can be explained by the direct relationship between the nine items on the conflict scale and the curriculum content in each class. In every class curriculum, instructors emphasized the importance of respecting children's right to enjoy a relationship with both parents, regardless of the status of relationship between the parents. During the classes parents were given numerous examples of ways children are placed in the middle of parental conflict, and more appropriate communication and behavioral skills were emphasized.

The finding that parents learn improve their awareness of issues that related to their co-parenting that improve children's adjustment to divorce is supported in the literature (Arbuthnot and Gordon, 1996a; Arbuthnot, Poole, & Gordon, 1993; Gray & Verdieck, 1997; Kramer et al, 1997; McKenry, Clark & Stone, 1999; Shifflet and Cummings, 1999). As mentioned previously, these studies have demonstrated that parents believe they will reduce the amount of co-parental conflict to which they expose their children after attending the class.

Research Question 4 (RQ4) was: When comparing (a) parents' reports of parental conflict they expose their children to over the past three months with (b) their predictions of parental conflict they will expose their children to over the next three months, and (c) their report three months after the class of parental conflict since the parent education class, are there differences across the five parent education programs surveyed?

The results indicated there were significant changes for all regions from the pre-class evaluation to the post-class evaluation to the follow-up evaluation. Mean scores in all regions went up from the pre to the post-class evaluation, and then went back down at the three-month follow-up evaluation. Parents in Group 4 predicted significantly less conflict at the post-class evaluation and reported less conflict at the follow-up than Group 1 and Group 3. As reported in the Method section and earlier in the Discussion section, Group 1 was a lecture-based program and Group 3 was a skills-based program. The program in Group 4 contained lecture, video, and a unique question and answer component. These results indicated that the program in Group 4 was more effective than the programs in Group 1 or in Group 3.

In the research, skills-based programs have been demonstrated to be more effective than information-based programs (Kramer, Arbuthnot, Gordon, Rousis, & Hoza, 1998). The finding that Group 4 was more effective than Group 1 is consistent with the findings in the literature review. However, the finding that Group 4 had better outcomes than Group 3 is inconsistent with the literature, given that they were both programs that encouraged instructor/participant interaction. Group 4 and Group 3 were both held in courtroom settings, both had larger class sizes, and both were conducted in more populated regions with higher education levels.

The identified difference between Group 4 and Group 3, other than the program curriculums, was education level of instructor. As reported in the Method section, at least one doctorate level instructor was present at each

program in Group 4. Furthermore, the researcher observed that the question and answer activity in this program was well done. As reported earlier, parents were provided with an opportunity to ask anonymous questions by writing them on paper and giving them to the instructor before the break. After the break, the instructors read questions and responded to them. In the clinical judgment of the researcher, their responses were very good. They provided very specific responses to questions. For example, they gave specific examples of what to say to children or how to deal with difficult spouses. In contrast, in Group 3, the researcher observed several instances of missed opportunities by instructors. For example, when instructors in Group 3 were asked to give advice about a specific situation, they often made a recommendation that the parent follow-up with a mental health professional for specific responses to their questions.

As reported above, it is also possible that the sample at the follow-up was not representative of the sample at pre or post-class evaluation because of the small sample size (67) and the possibility that the participants at the follow-up evaluation were more motivated as a group.

It is notable that means in all regions went up at the pre-class evaluation and declined at the follow-up evaluation. After parents in all groups predicted that they would reduce the amount of co-parental conflict they exposed their children to, parents who responded at the follow-up reported (in all regions) that they did not meet their own expectations reported at the post-class evaluation. This may be explained by insufficient preparation by instructors, insufficient practicing of skills by participants after the class, or insufficient follow-up after

the parent education class. It appears that although parents reported that they intended to make behavioral changes, changing behaviors may have been more difficult than they anticipated.

This finding is inconsistent with the findings of Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996a) who found in a six-month follow-up that parents maintained the skills they learned in the parent education class. Differences in these results may be related to methodological differences, indicating the need for further standardization of evaluative strategies.

Research Question 5 (RQ5) was: Are there differences in parents' reactions to the programs (satisfaction, perceived usefulness, improvement of communication skills, and satisfaction with amount of information provided) across the five parent education programs surveyed?

As reported earlier, this question had four parts. The results of the first part that assessed parents' satisfaction revealed that most participants in all regions reported the class to be moderately satisfying to very satisfying. There were no significant differences among the regions. These results are consistent with the findings presented in the literature review (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996a; Gray & Verdieck, 1997; Kramer & Washo, 1993; McKenry, Clark, & Stone, 1999; Shifflett & Cummings, 1999;

Consistent with the findings of Gray and Verdieck (1997), the results of the next analysis, which assessed whether parents found the class useful, demonstrated that the majority of parents in all regions found the class to be either

moderately useful or very useful. There were no significant differences among the regions on this measure.

The third part assessed the degree to which the class taught parents skills that would help them improve their relationship with their ex-spouse or their children. Parents in all regions most often reported that the class taught them skills at the moderate level or the very much level. This finding is consistent with the findings of Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996a). There were no significant differences among the groups on this measure. However, in the regression analysis of this measure, it was revealed that education level and gender were significant predictors of responses to the question of whether the class taught them skills. Persons with lower education levels reported that the classes taught more skills than persons with higher education levels. It is possible that the class content contained ideas and recommendations that were new to participants with lower educational levels, thus reporting that they learned more skills than more educated individuals. Women reported more often that the class taught them skills. This is consistent with the study by Arbuthnot and Gordon (1991) that reported women were more receptive than men to making behavioral changes after parent education.

The last part assessed parents' opinions of the amount of information covered in the class. Of 433 parents responding to this question, 76 percent reported that the amount of information in the class was "just right". This result may be explained by the fact that most parents believe they spent an appropriate amount of time at the class. The number of parents that responded to the next

most common response, “too little” was twice as high as the number of parents reporting “too much” in all regions. This may be an indication that although most parents believe the amount of information was just right, there were a significant number of parents who desired more information. This result is consistent with results of the Kramer and Washo (1993) study that reported over 82% of the participants in their sample recommended the parent education program to other parents, even in mandatory form.

Observations

As reported earlier, the researcher attended all 30 classes in five regions: six classes in Group 1, nine classes in Group 2, five classes in Group 3, five classes in Group 4, and five classes in Group 5. This provided a unique opportunity to observe other factors that may have influenced the results.

The class lengths varied from 1½ hours to up to four hours. Group 5 was 1½ hours long. The classes in this region were lecture-based and used a video, but offered little to no opportunity for questions and answers, discussions, or feedback. Given the amount of material that was covered in the 1½ hour period, there was usually no time for questions and answers at the end of class.

Regions 2, 3, and 4 were two hours long. Classes in these regions presented the same amount of material as in Group 5, but provided many more opportunities for discussion. Parents appeared to benefit when time was provided for question and answer periods where their specific questions were heard and specific responses were provided. Also, parents appeared to enjoy discussions with other parents about common issues when time was provided to them to allow

for discussion. Feedback and encouragement from other parents was very well received and seemed to contribute to a more favorable learning environment.

Classes in Group 1 were 3½-4 hours long. It appeared to the researcher that instructor's presentations became redundant, often describing how content later in the presentation related to content previously covered during the same class. Also, instructors seemed to be less structured with their time than instructors in other regions. Some instructors in this region tended to stray from the topic outline, using significantly more anecdotal information than instructors in other regions. It should be noted that although the classes in this region were much longer than those in the other four regions, instructors in Group 1 did not appear to have significant additional material representative of issues not covered in the other regions. Furthermore, even though these classes were much longer, instructors had difficulty getting parents involved in discussion. Discussion periods in the class often began with one parent's question followed by a "mini-lecture" on the topic before returning to the original class lecture material.

Class size may have influenced the results. The researcher observed that an optimum class size appeared to be between 12-20 for the following reasons. In classes larger than 20, participants raised fewer questions, volunteered less personal information for discussion, communicated or laughed with others in the class less frequently, and stayed after class to discuss resources or seek answers for questions less often. In larger classes, participants simply came in and sat down, said very little during the class and then just got up and left the room after the class. In smaller classes, participants socialized with each other and the

instructors more often, questions in the middle of lecture were asked more frequently, and instructors provided answers to questions more frequently.

The setting may have influenced the results. Group 1 classes were held in either a courthouse or a children's services center. Group 2 classes were held in a public library or a local health services center. Group 3 classes were held in a conference room in the city courthouse building. Group 4 classes were held both in a courtroom and in a conference room in the courthouse. And Group 5 classes were held at a local technical school and at a children's school library. It was the researcher's observation that the courtroom was a poor setting for parent education classes for the following reasons. Instructors appeared to work harder to elicit parent involvement in the courtroom than in other settings, even making references to the courtroom at times such as, "I am sure this courtroom reminds you of your divorce." The courtroom may have been a constant reminder of the adversarial nature of their divorce. Additionally, it may have been a reminder that they were court-mandated to the parent education class. Furthermore, court bailiffs were present during some of the classes held in courtrooms. This also appeared to subdue the participants and discourage them from asking questions. Quite simply, this environment may have fueled resistance to the message the instructors were trying to communicate.

The presence of security in classes may have influenced the results. A bailiff (courthouse) or city police officer (children's center) were present at all of the classes in Group 1. In Group 2, a local sheriff's deputy sat outside the room. In Group 3, there was no security personnel in the room, but they were in the

building. In Group 4 bailiffs were in the courtroom, but not in the conference room. And in Group 5, a local deputy stopped by, but did not appear to stay for the duration of the class. Security may be necessary, especially when spouses are present at classes. Occasionally, derogatory comments were made during classes and directed to a spouse present in the room. However, the researcher observed no aggressive acts beyond infrequent comments, which were often buffered with snickers and laughter from others in the room that appeared to find humor and comfort in knowing that others had similar thoughts and experiences. The researcher observed that when security personnel were nearby, but out of the room, such as just outside the door, parents appeared more relaxed. Some parents in Group 2 reported positively that the presence of security sent a message that this is a serious event and that individual safety and security are to be enforced.

Public library settings or other neutral settings may be better choices for parent education classes. It was observed that conducting parent education classes in children's school libraries introduced another factor. Several parents commented on the children's artwork in the room. It is possible that the evidence of children's school activities may have accelerated parents' empathy toward children's experiences. These libraries were filled with reminders of children's perceptions and experiences. Their artwork covered the walls and was hanging from the ceilings. Small books and reminders of children were everywhere. Parents commented that the library and the work children had produced were a strong reminder that coping with divorce was an additional stressor for children that may interfere with social and academic functioning.

Instructor expertise appeared to be a factor that may have influenced the results. Instructors having doctoral degrees and/or more than three years of clinical experience simply provided more thorough, educated responses to participants' questions. In general, their responses had more depth and they provided participants with feedback that was specific and directly related to the question asked. Instructors who communicate easily, appeared comfortable with public speaking, were sensitive to parents' experiences, and demonstrate competence in the content areas were most effective. Furthermore, when instructors used a variety of instructional methods such as video, overheads, and flipcharts to make their points, parents were more attentive and participative. The use of overheads, video demonstrations, handouts related to content, theme exercises, question and answer sessions, explanation of take-home booklets, and explanation of additional resources seemed to be very effective in increasing participation levels.

It should be noted that the researcher observed that the majority of parents who arrived for the parent education class appeared to be uncomfortable. Many appeared to be anxious and disinterested. However, many expressed anger toward instructors in the form of angry comments and to the researcher at the beginning of the class in the form of derogatory statements and statements of discontent in the mandatory requirement. It was observed that when parents began to participate in the class through interactive strategies such as asking questions and socializing, they became less defensive. Therefore, factors that positively influence parents' receptivity to learning appeared to be very important

in parent education curriculum design and program management. Based on observations obtained by attending all of the parent education classes in this study, utilizing well-trained instructors, using non-court related space as setting, having security personnel in the facility, reducing class size, avoiding unnecessary redundancy, encouraging participation, using interactive learning strategies, and allowing time for questions and answers all appear to have a significant influence on parent learning.

Summary of Findings

In summary, most parents appear to benefit from parent education in some manner. They find it satisfying, useful, they learn skills, and they report that they received the right amount of information. They demonstrate that they learn the material that was presented to them in the class. It appears that programs differ in influencing parents' willingness to make behavioral changes. Additionally, it appears that they differ in their impact on parents' ability to make behavioral changes in the early months after predicting they would change. The results indicated that programs with minimal interaction between instructors and participants were less effective than programs with higher levels of interaction. The results also indicated factors such as setting, education level of participants, educational level of instructors, size of class, age, amount of conflict existing in the co-parent relationship, and gender have an impact on outcomes in parent education. Parents in all groups demonstrated a greater willingness to have their children spend more time with the other parent, have greater intentions to cooperate, reported they are less likely to place their children in the middle of thei

r co-parental conflicts after participating in the program.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations should be considered when assessing the utility of the data obtained from this study and the degree to which the data can be generalized to the larger population. The following section will explore further the possibility of study replication and other factors influencing the results such as the measures, the sampling, and methodology.

The literature review revealed that parent learning is an important outcome related to efficacy of parent education programs. The content across programs is generally consistent and the purpose of the program is to inform parents, encouraging them to make educated decisions about their children in post-divorce relationships. Parents did demonstrate on the post-class evaluation parent learning measures that they had retained the information they had learned during the class.

There are some possible limitations to the measures of parent learning used in this study. First, the measures lack strong empirical support as standardized measures. Although they have good content validity and have been used in empirical research, they have not been established as consistently reliable and valid as measurement of parent learning during parent education classes. As reported in the literature review, there is a need for standardized measures in this area. The lack of standardized measures is evident in the summary of measures in outcome research of parent education programs (Figure A in Chapter II)

The true/false questions were chosen to provide a direct measure of parent learning using question content common to parent education for divorcing couples. Although there were only eight items on the true/false measure and the item content was covered in all of the regions, it is possible that some instructors emphasized some points more than others and that this had an impact on number of correct responses.

Coding the open-ended questions revealed unique limitations. As reported in the Method section, items were scored using scoring criteria developed by the authors of the open-ended question (Arbuthnot & Gordon, 1996a). The scoring criteria are provided in Appendix C. While the scoring criteria are quite specific, it is their specificity that contributed to problems in scoring. Several factors made it difficult to score the data. The criteria needed for a score of "three" were general and descriptive of a neutral plan without cooperative action with the ex-spouse. The criteria for achieving a score of four were quite specific. For example, In scoring the "What would you say?" responses, a four was given if the parent's written response met the following criteria: No anger or putdowns, and gives advice which avoids upsetting the child, or a simplistic statement of how to handle such situations:

a. "No matter where you are, it's your responsibility to keep clean and get your work done"
b. Uses "I" messages to express frustration with "ex"

These criteria proved difficult to meet for most parents. The criteria required to achieve a score of five were even more difficult to meet. Additionally, the use of

"I" messages in a written response to a question when they were not directed to use one may have been unlikely unless "I" messages were practiced during the class. Group 2 was the only class to actively practice the use of "I" messages and they did not score significantly higher than other regions on this outcome They required that the parent engage the child in a discussion to clarify the problem for the parent. Additionally, this criterion appeared vague, but was stated and thus needed to achieve a score of five.

In the coding of responses to the question "What would you do?" there was similar difficulty with coding. Many parents responded "nothing" to this question. When considering the question put to parents that involved the children spending time at the ex-spouse's new lover's home on a weekend, the response of "nothing" to the question "What would you do?" sounded like a fairly mature response under the circumstances. By stating "nothing," parents may have intended to communicate that they would not interfere with the children's relationship with the ex-spouses new lover. Yet, because the response "nothing" was not one of the criteria, it was not codeable and so received a score of two. Additionally, as reported above, there were many responses that met the criterion of "keeping the child out of the conflict with no cooperative plan for the future," so there were many scores of three given. The detail required to obtain a score of four or five was very specific:

> 4 = Keep child out of conflict, coach child on how to deal with situation, cleanliness

5 = Same as "4" but with plans to discuss the problem with "ex" to minimize such disruptions in the future (not an attack on "ex")

Therefore, there were many responses to questions that had appropriate content to warrant a higher score, yet were scored a three because they did not meet the specific scoring criteria for the four or the five. This problem was evident in a significant number of responses. This limitation in scoring may have contributed to a lack of variability in responses, limiting the sensitivity of the measure, thus losing precision in measurement. The scoring criteria need to be revised to allow for more accurate scoring. Parents provide a wide range of responses. Therefore, the criterion must make reference to themes in parents' intent and leave some room for scorers to interpret the responses. The use of more than one scorer is a necessary component to ensure interrater reliability.

The use of the nine-item conflict scale, developed by Arbuthnot and Gordon (1996a), is recognized in the literature review as an instrument to measure parent behaviors during divorce. Its purpose is to assess the frequency of parent behaviors that placed children in the middle of their conflicts. Arbuthnot and Gordon, of Ohio University in Athens, Ohio are also the authors of the Children in the Middle parent education program, used in Regions 2 and 3 in this study. Their program specifically emphasizes the reduction of parent behaviors that place children in the middle. Also, the content in the nine-item conflict scale is directly related to their program content. Although similar curriculum content was covered in every parent education class in this study, the results of this study

did not indicate that participants in the Children in the Middle programs had an advantage that resulted in higher scores on the nine-item conflict scale.

Generally, the study is replicable in the form that it was conducted. However, it should be noted that family law master regions may make periodic changes, such as subtle changes in curriculum designs or there may be variations in presentation among presenters. The results of this study can be generalized to the general population in West Virginia due to the inclusion of all parents divorcing with children during a six-month period in the regions defined. The results may be generalized to other populations with similar racial profiles. However, the results of the study may not be generalized to other general populations due to the lack of racial diversity in the research sample. Careful review of racial demographic profiles should be completed when drawing conclusions or making comparisons with other research.

Recommendations for Further Research

As reported in this Discussion section, the results of this study have reinforced the established research in some areas and diverged from established research in others. Based on the results, the following section will provide recommendations in the areas of program development and continued research.

In the area of program content, it is recommended that programs continue make the best use of time to incorporate standardized program content that has been determined to be most useful. The comprehensive surveys conducted by Blaisure and Geasler (1999) have provided program developers with an inclusive document containing the most common programs, their content, and the

programmatic differences across North America. Blaisure and Geasler (1999) have proposed in a separate publication the use of an intervention model that categorizes current parent education models into three levels: (1) basic information, (2) feelings and skills, and(3) brief focused intervention. The published programs used in regions in this study fall in the level 2 category. They recommend that policy makers choose the level that best meets the need of the program participants. Outcome studies comparing the efficacy of these programs will help further clarify the factors contributing to successful outcomes.

There is growing evidence that skills-based programs with higher level of interaction are more effective than lecture-based programs with lower levels of interaction (Kramer, K. M., Arbuthnot, J., Gordon, D. A., Rousis, N. J., & Hoza, J., 1998). It was observed in this study that in all regions, parents were more engaged in the learning process when their participation was strongly encouraged. Given the short time frame of many parent education programs, it seems reasonable that improving interactive strategies may improve parent learning. Research designs that evaluate and compare interactive strategies in parent education would be helpful

Parents appeared uncomfortable when their ex-spouse was participating in the same class. Additionally, the researcher observed that others in the room noticed the tension when co-parents were present and making comments about each other. It is recommended that scheduling parents in a manner that prevents this from occurring will benefit parents. This recommendation is supported by Fuhrmann, McGill, and O'Connell (1999). They reported that the physical and

emotional safety of all participants should be ensured. This can be partially achieved by avoiding the concurrent scheduling of partners at parent education classes. Additionally, they recommended that instructors be trained in the issues of domestic violence. Continued assessment of physical conflict, verbal conflict, and emotional distress as demographic factors will help clarify the role of domestic violence in parent education outcomes.

Standardized measures in the multiple areas of satisfaction, parent learning that takes place, and parent behaviors would be helpful in improving evaluative strategies. Hughes and Kirby (2000) recommended standardizing the collection of demographic data on families that participate in parent education. Furthermore, they called for standardization of measures of satisfaction and knowledge. They reported that a common data bank of questions could be developed for evaluative purposes across parent education programs. This would be a considerable improvement over the eight-item true/false measure used in this study. The development of standardized outcome measures appears to be issue researchers and practitioners must work on together.

There are additional issues for consideration of further research in this area that relate to children. The assessment target in this study has been the parents, even though the treatment target is the children. The purpose of the parent education is significantly related to the adjustment of children in divorcing families. Therefore, addressing children's adjustment may help determine whether parent education really works.

Di Bias (1996) summarized three programs for children of divorce, two of which are mandatory, that include education components for children. It may be helpful to evaluate the benefit of involving children in the educational process, including an assessment of their behaviors after the intervention. Finally, tt may be a helpful evaluative strategy to incorporate parent involvement in assessment of children's behaviors in the home.

The results indicated that although parents intended to make behavioral changes, actually making them proved to be more difficult. Therefore, it is recommended that future outcome research include follow-up analysis whenever possible. Additionally, research should be conducted to explore factors influencing successful behavioral changes after the initial class. This may include follow-up programs, educational materials, and interactive media products such as educational computer software. There is evidence to support the efficacy of ongoing voluntary parent education after the initial mandatory class. These have been demonstrated to be a non-threatening opportunity for further professional help. Clearly, research is needed to identify the specific aspects of parent education that contribute to sustained behavior changes over time for parents.

This study confirmed published research that parents participating in parent education are willing to make behavioral changes that will keep their children out of co-parental conflict. It also reinforced the message that parents find mandatory education satisfying, useful, they report that they learn skills, and they report that the amount of information covered in the classes is "just right".

This study appears to have helped to clarify additional factors that may improve parents' learning experience.

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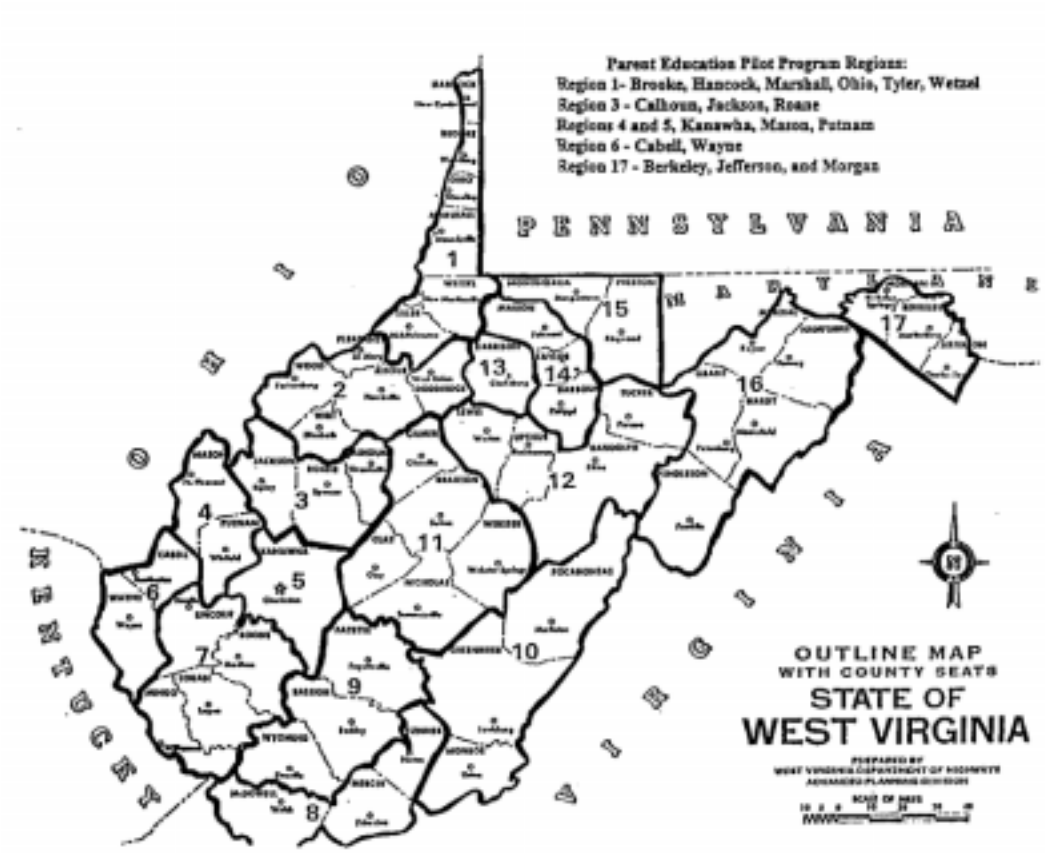
Appendices

Appendix A: Map of WV and Regions Surveyed



Appendix B

Booklets
Group 1: Children Cope with Divorce: Parent Handbook
Group 2: What About the Children: A Guide for Divorced and Divorcing Parents, 4th Ed.
Group 3: What About the Children: A Guide for Divorced and Divorcing Parents, 4th Ed.
Group 4: Helping Children Succeed After Divorce: A Handbook for Parents
Group 5: My Parents are Getting Divorced: A Handbook for Kids, *Family Advocate, 18(4)*

Appendix C: Scoring Criteria for Open-ended Questions

"What would you say?"

2. Express anger about the "ex" to child and/or putdowns of "ex"
3. No response, unreadable, unintelligible
4. No expression of anger or putdowns, neutral plan or statement for the present time, e.g., "You need to clean up, do homework, etc."
5. No anger or putdowns, and gives advice which avoids upsetting the child, or a simplistic statement of how to handle such situations:
    a. "No matter where you are, it's your responsibility to keep clean and get your work done"
    b. Uses "I" messages to express frustration with "ex"
6. No anger or putdowns, and engages child in discussion to clarify the problem for this parent; uses "I" message re child

"What would you do?

1. Show anger, make putdowns, in front of the child, involve child in the problem (e.g., "tell your father/mother…"), "tell off" "ex"
2. No response or uncodeable
3. Keep the child out of conflict, no plan for future cooperative action with "ex", "discuss",
4. Keep child out of conflict, coach child on how to deal with situation, cleanliness
5. Same as "4" but with plans to discuss the problem with "ex" to minimize such disruptions in the future (not an attack on "ex")

Appendix D.

B. Participant Learning

1. The following statements are either true or false. Mark "**T**" for **true** or "**F**" for **false** in each blank.

_____Continuing, bitter conflict between parents is more harmful to children than the divorce itself.
_____Easy access to the non-custodial parent is important to children's well being.
_____Parents should encourage children to decide for themselves which parent is right and which parent is wrong.
_____It is unhealthy for children to provide too much emotional support to their parents.
_____Children of divorce survive best when parents promote the children's relationship with the other parent.
_____Children "get over" reduced contact with the non-custodial parent.
_____Children in joint custody (shared parenting) receive a clear message that they are loved and wanted by both parents.
_____Joint custody (shared parenting) families experience more conflict.

2. Imagine yourself in the following situation:

Your children return from visiting their other parent, and are dirty. Your children are tired and irritable. You ask your children to help with chores, and get whining and complaining. No homework has been done. When you ask your children about the visit with the other parent, you learn that most of the time was spent at the home of the other parent's new lover.

a. What would you say to your children?

b. What would you do?

C. Participant Reactions

	Not at all	Somewhat	Moderately	Very	Extremely
1 Overall, how satisfied are you with the class?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
2. How useful do you expect the class to be in helping you and your children's other parent reduce divorce-related stress on your child?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
1. Did the class teach you skills for improving your relationship with your children and their other parent?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

	Way too little	Too little	Just right	Too much	Way too much
2. What do you think about the amount of information covered in the class?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

5. What comments do you have about this survey or about the divorce education class you attended?

Appendix E

B. Children's Issues

Please check (√) how often these issues were true **DURING THE PAST THREE MONTHS.**

	Daily	Once or twice per week	Once or twice per month	Once or twice in past 3 months	Never
1. How often have your children heard or seen conflicts between you and their other parent?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
2. How often have your children said they didn't want to see or be with their other parent?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
3. How often have you encouraged your children to spend time with their other parent?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
4. How often have you told your children that their other parent loves them?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
5. If you have felt angry, depressed, or upset because of the children's other parent, how often have you talked to your children about it?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
6. How often have you asked your children to take messages to their other parent when you didn't want to talk with him/her?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
7. How often have you asked your children about their other parent's activities or relationships with others?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
8. How often have you asked your children to help resolve problems with their other parent regarding money or child support?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
9. How often have you criticized or "put down" the other parent in front of your children?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

C. Children's Behavior: use one check (√) for each child

1. Which letter grade best describes your children's school grades for the past three months ?

A ( ) B ( ) C ( ) D ( ) F ( )

2. How would you describe your children's behavior in school for the past three months they attended school ?

Excellent ( ) Good ( ) Fair ( ) Poor ( ) Unacceptable ( )

	Daily	Once or twice per week	Once or twice per month	Once or twice in past 3 months	Never
3. How often have your children been ill, had a cold, or complained of physical pain in the past three months?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
4. How often do you have conflict (major arguments or disagreements) with your children?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

Appendix F

Post-test Survey 1

*County*_____ *Date*_____ *Survey #* _____ *Parent* _____

A. Children's Issues

Please check how often you expect these issues to be true **DURING THE NEXT THREE MONTHS.**

	Daily	Once or twice per week	Once or twice per month	Once or twice in next 3 months	Never
3. How often will your children hear or see conflicts between you and their other parent?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
4. How often will your children say they don't want to see or be with their other parent?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
3. How often will you encourage your children to spend time with their other parent?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
4. How often will you tell your children that their other parent loves them?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
5. If you have felt angry, depressed, or upset because of the children's other parent, how often will you talk to your children about it?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
6. How often will you ask your children to take messages to their other parent when you don't want to talk with him/her?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
7. How often will you ask your children about their other parent's activities or relationships with others?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
8. How often will you ask your children to help resolve problems with their other parent regarding money or child support?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
9. How often will you criticize or "put down" the other parent in front of your children?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

Appendix G

Region_____

A. Children's Issues

Please check (√) how often these issues were true **DURING THE PAST THREE MONTHS.**

	Daily	Once or twice per week	Once or twice per month	Once or twice in past 3 months	Never
1. How often have your children heard or seen conflicts between you and their other parent?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
2. How often have your children said they didn't want to see or be with their other parent?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
3. How often have you encouraged your children to spend time with their other parent?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
4. How often have you told your children that their other parent loves them?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
5. If you have felt angry, depressed, or upset because of the children's other parent, how often have you talked to your children about it?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
6. How often have you asked your children to take messages to their other parent when you didn't want to talk with him/her?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
7. How often have you asked your children about their other parent's activities or relationships with others?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
8. How often have you asked your children to help resolve problems with their other parent regarding money or child support?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
9.How often have you criticized or "put down" the other parent in front of your children?	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

Appendix H

Pre-test Survey 1

*County*_____ *Date*_____ *Survey #* _____ *Parent* _____

A. General Information Please check (√):

1. Circle your age group: 18-25___ 26-35___ 36-45___ 46+___

2. Female ___ Male ___

3. Racial information: White___ Black or African American___ Hispanic or Latino____ American Indian or Alaskan Native___Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander___ Asian___ Other___ Don't know___ Asian Other

4. Education completed: Elementary school ___ high-school ___ attended college or two year degree___ bachelors ___ Masters or Doctorate___

5. Number of children_____ Their ages _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

6. Custody of your children: Self___ Other parent___ Shared custody___ Other___

7. How long has it been since you and your children's other parent stopped living together?
Years _____ Months _____ Still living together_____Not Applicable _____

8. Present legal issue: separation___ divorce___ paternity___ custody___ visitation___ support___ (check all that apply)

9. Present status: separated___ divorced___ never married___ remarried___

10. Is your divorce final? yes___ no___

11. How many times have you been back to court since your divorce or custody order was first granted? 1__ 2-3__ 4+__

	not applicable	not at all satisfied	somewhat satisfied	mostly satisfied	completely satisfied
12. How satisfied are you with your present visitation arrangements?	1	2	3	4	5
13. Is paying or receiving child support a problem for you?	1	2	3	4	5

14. What is your annual income? Less than $10,000___ $10-19,999___ $20-29,999___ $30-39,999___ $40,000 and above___

15. How much conflict occurs in your home?

	Daily	Once or twice Per week	Once or twice per month	Once or twice in past 3mos	Never
A. Verbal Conflict	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
B. Physical Conflict	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
C. Emotional Distress	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

Appendix I

Script

Hello, my name is Brian Krolczyk. I am a graduate student from West Virginia University. I would like to invite you to participate in an academic study evaluating the effectiveness of mandatory parent education programs like the one you are attending today.

Your participation would require you to complete a brief survey before and after today's class. Also, I would like you to send you a follow-up survey three months after today's class. By placing your name on an address label that I will distribute, you can provide me with a mailing label that I can place on an envelope enclosing the follow-up survey. Your name and address will not be copied from the mailing label or used for any other purpose.

There are no known risks to you for participation in this study.

Parents who participate in mandatory parent education in the future may benefit from your participation

I have a Consent and Information form explaining additional details if you are interested. If you decide to participate, please begin immediately by completing the survey attached to the consent form.

I appreciate your effort and interest in this study. Thank you.

Appendix J

Departmental Letterhead Here
Consent and Information Form

"Evaluating the Effectiveness of Mandatory Parent Education"

Introduction. I, _____, have been invited to participate in this research study which has been explained to me by Brian J. Krolczyk. This research is being conducted to fulfill the requirements for a doctoral dissertation in Counseling Psychology at West Virginia University. This research is also being conducted by Anne Fishkin, Ph.D., Marshall University Graduate College, to provide a summary report to the West Virginia state legislature.

Purpose of the Study. The purpose of the study is to learn more about the effectiveness of mandatory parent education classes for divorcing parents with children.

Description of Procedures. This study involves the completion of a questionnaire before and after the class I am attending today. The content of the questionnaire is related to the circumstances of my divorce, my children, and the amount of conflict my children are exposed to. It will take approximately 5-10 minutes before and 5-10 minutes after the class to complete the pre and post-class questionnaires. I will receive a brief follow-up survey in three months with instructions to complete and return it in a self-addressed stamped envelope. I may omit responses to any questions I don't want to answer. Also, I may review the questionnaires before signing the consent form. Approximately 400 hundred people will participate in this study

Risks. There are no known or expected risks from participation in this study.

Benefits. I understand that this study is not expected to be of direct benefit to me, but the knowledge gained may be of benefit to others.

Contact Persons. For more information about this research, I may contact Brian J. Krolczyk at (304) 598-0840 or bkrolczy@wvu.edu. I may also contact Dr. Jeffery Messing, his Dissertation Chairperson at (304) 293-3807 or jmessing@wvu.edu. For information regarding my rights as a research participant, I may contact the Executive Secretary of the Institutional Review Board at (304) 293-7073.

Confidentiality. I understand that any information obtained about me as a result from my participation in this study will be kept as confidential as legally possible. I also understand that my research records, just like hospital records, can be subpoenaed by court order or may be inspected by federal regulatory authorities. In any publication that result from this research, neither my name nor any information from which I can be identified will be published without my consent.

Voluntary Participation. Participation in this study is voluntary. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent to participate in this study at any time. Refusal to participate or withdrawal will involve no penalty and will not affect my participation in the parent education class. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research, and I have received answers concerning areas I did not understand.

Upon signing this form, I will receive a copy.

I willingly consent to participate in this research.

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Participant	Date	Time
_____	_____	_____
Signature of Researcher	Date	Time

Appendix K

"Evaluating the Effectiveness of Mandatory Parent Education"
Program Description Form

Region #_____ County:_____Date:_____ # of Participants: _____
Presenter:_____ Credentials:_____
Co-presenter: _____ Credentials:_____
Co-presenter: _____ Credentials:_____
Other: _____ Credentials:_____
Other Training Received, Nature of Training:_____
_____
_____
Presence of Security Personnel:_____

Topics addressed in the presentation:	Not mentioned	Addressed	Major Topic
Adjustment to divorce is an ongoing process	_____	_____	_____
How parents cooperate affects children's adjustment	_____	_____	_____
Effects of divorce on children at different ages	_____	_____	_____
How children needs are different than their parents	_____	_____	_____
Children should not be involved in their parents' struggles	_____	_____	_____
Need to communicate directly with the other parents	_____	_____	_____
Care of children and decision-making can be shared	_____	_____	_____
Communication skills with the children	_____	_____	_____
Children do better if relationships with relatives continue	_____	_____	_____
A mediator can help parents develop a co-parenting plan	_____	_____	_____

Length of session (15 minute intervals)_____
Amount of time (in minutes): Lecture____ Video____ Discussion____ Administration____
Interactive strategies____ (Please Specify)_____
Use of following materials (time): Video:_____ Overheads: _____
Flip charts _____: Handouts: _____Other: _____
_____
How and when are handouts distributed:_____

Observations:

Name of recorder: _____Date:_____

Appendix L: Follow-up Letter

Department Letterhead Here

Date

Dear Parent,

Thank you for participating in the academic study designed to evaluate the effectiveness of mandatory parent education for divorcing parents with children. Please complete the attached survey and mail it in the self-addressed envelope provided.

Please contact me if you have questions and/or concerns about this survey or the academic study. I can be reached at (304) 293-4431 (W) or (304)-598-0840 (H).

This will conclude your participation in this academic study. Your participation will help us provide the best program possible for divorcing parents in the future. Your help is greatly appreciated

Sincerely,

Brian Krolczyk, M.A.
Doctoral Student in Counseling Psychology, West Virginia University

Appendix M: Demographic Statistics

Table 3
Date of Class, Class Size, Participant Totals, and Mean of Class Size by Group

	Group					
Date of Class	1	2	3	4	5	Total
06/17/99	0	7	0	0	0	
06/21/99	0	0	0	0	15	
06/24/99	0	0	11	0	0	
06/29/99	0	0	0	19	0	
06/30/99	0	0	0	0	20	
07/08/99	0	0	15	0	0	
07/12/99	14	0	0	0	0	
07/13/99	12	0	0	0	0	
07/14/99	0	0	0	19	0	
07/15/99	0	11	0	0	0	
07/27/99	0	0	23	0	0	
08/04/99	0	0	0	12	0	
08/09/99	15	0	0	0	0	
08/10/99	20	0	0	0	0	
08/11/99	0	0	0	0	18	
08/12/99	0	9	0	0	0	
08/17/99	0	0	0	26	0	
08/19/99	0	8	0	0	0	
08/23/99	0	0	0	0	19	
08/24/99	0	0	25	0	0	
09/02/99	0	0	0	0	16	
09/09/99	0	14	0	0	0	
09/13/09	8	0	0	0	0	
09/14/99	21	0	0	0	0	
09/15/99	0	0	0	17	0	
09/16/99	0	12	0	0	0	
09/21/99	0	0	20	0	0	
10/21/99	0	10	0	0	0	
12/09/99	0	3	0	0	0	
12/16/99	0	12	0	0	0	
Totals	90	86	94	93	88	451
Mean Class Size	15	10	19	19	18	15

Table 4
Number of Males and Females by Group

	Group					
Gender	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Female	51	54	44	48	40	237
Male	39	32	50	43	45	209
Totals	90	86	94	91	85	446

Table 5
Race Demographics across Group

	Group					
Race	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
White (non-Hispanic)	89	83	89	88	83	432
African-American	0	2	3	1	3	9
Native American	0	0	1	1	0	2
Asian	0	0	0	0	1	1
Other	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total						445

Table 6
Education Demographics across Group

	Group					
Education level	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Elementary	10	14	6	10	7	47
High School	47	48	51	42	51	239
Some College/Assoc. Degree	25	16	22	24	18	105
Bachelors Degree	7	4	15	12	8	46
Doctorate	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total						437

Table 7
Age Range Demographics across Group

	Group					
Age Range	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
18-25	3	26	7	18	12	66
26-35	31	38	37	45	36	187
36-45	44	18	40	22	32	156
46+	12	3	10	6	7	38
Total						447

Table 8
Estimated Annual Income across Group

	Group					
Annual Income	1	2	3	4	5	Totals
$10,0000 or less	23	30	20	31	21	125
$10,001-$20,000	28	22	22	23	12	107
$20,001-$30,000	11	16	22	14	21	84
$30,001-$40,000	9	4	15	8	12	48
$40,001 +	12	4	11	11	15	53
Total						417

Table 9
Amount of Physical Conflict, Verbal Conflict, and Emotional Distress Present in Co-Parental Relationship

	Group					
	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Physical Conflict						
Daily	0	0	1	0	1	2
1-2x / week	5	1	1	3	3	13
1-2x / month	3	4	4	2	3	16
1-2x in past 3 months	9	7	7	10	5	38
Never	61	63	72	55	61	312
Total						
Verbal Conflict						
Daily	16	3	9	19	8	55
1-2x / week	15	16	16	20	21	88
1-2x / month	13	9	16	11	8	57
1-2x in past 3 Months	17	20	23	11	17	88
Never	22	30	25	21	24	122
Total						
Emotional Distress						
Daily	19	4	14	28	14	79
1-2x / week	22	9	15	12	19	77
1-2x / month	9	15	21	9	4	58
1-2x past 3 Months	16	19	13	8	13	69
Never	16	32	26	21	28	123
Total						406

Appendix N: RQ1 Descriptive Statistics, ANOVA tables, and Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons

Table 10
Descriptive Statistics for Responses to True/False Questions and Open-ended Questions

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Sum of Correct Responses to T/F	1	87	6.79	1.24	0.13
	2	84	6.38	1.36	0.15
	3	94	6.50	1.28	0.13
	4	87	6.87	1.23	0.13
	5	86	6.73	1.10	0.12
	Total	438	6.66	1.25	0.06
What would you say?	1	71	2.77	0.70	0.08
	2	57	2.98	0.52	0.07
	3	68	2.85	0.63	0.08
	4	56	2.84	0.53	0.07
	5	67	2.93	0.50	0.06
	Total	319	2.87	0.59	0.03
What would you do?	1	69	3.46	1.05	0.13
	2	54	3.09	0.49	0.07
	3	67	3.03	0.67	0.08
	4	56	3.25	0.77	0.10
	5	63	3.32	0.91	0.11
	Total	309	3.24	0.83	0.05

Table 11
ANOVA tables for Sum of True/False Questions and Open-ended Questions

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Sum of Correct T/F	Between Groups	14.90	4.00	3.73	2.40	0.05*
	Within Groups	672.04	433.00	1.55		
	Total	686.94	437.00			
What would you say?	Between Groups	1.64	4.00	0.41	1.19	0.31
	Within Groups	108.09	314.00	0.34		
	Total	109.73	318.00			
What would you do?	Between Groups	7.97	4.00	1.99	3.00	0.02*
	Within Groups	201.79	304.00	0.66		
	Total	209.75	308.00			

*p < .05. **p < .01

Table 12
Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons for Sum of T/F Questions and Open-ended Questions

Dependent Variable	Group	Group	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Sum of T/F Responses	1	2	0.41	0.19	0.19
		3	0.29	0.19	0.51
		4	-0.08	0.19	0.99
		5	0.06	0.19	1.00
2 lower than 4 (trend)	2	1	-0.41	0.19	0.19
		3	-0.12	0.19	0.97
		4	-0.49	0.19	0.07
		5	-0.35	0.19	0.35
	3	1	-0.29	0.19	0.51
		2	0.12	0.19	0.97
		4	-0.37	0.19	0.26
		4	-0.37	0.19	0.26
		5	-0.23	0.19	0.72
		5	-0.23	0.19	0.72
4 higher than 2 (trend)	4	1	0.08	0.19	0.99
4 higher than 2 (trend)	4	1	0.08	0.19	0.99
		2	0.49	0.19	0.07
		2	0.49	0.19	0.07
		3	0.37	0.19	0.26
		3	0.37	0.19	0.26
		5	0.14	0.19	0.95

	5	1	-0.06	0.19	1.00
		2	0.35	0.19	0.35
		3	0.23	0.19	0.72
		4	-0.14	0.19	0.95
What would you say?	1	2	-0.21	0.10	0.27
		3	-0.08	0.10	0.94
		4	-0.06	0.10	0.97
		5	-0.15	0.10	0.56
	2	1	0.21	0.10	0.27
		3	0.13	0.11	0.73
		4	0.14	0.11	0.69
		5	0.06	0.11	0.98
	3	1	0.08	0.10	0.94
		2	-0.13	0.11	0.73
		4	0.01	0.11	1.00
		5	-0.07	0.10	0.95
	4	1	0.06	0.10	0.97
		2	-0.14	0.11	0.69
		3	-0.01	0.11	1.00
		5	-0.09	0.11	0.93
	5	1	0.15	0.10	0.56
		2	-0.06	0.11	0.98
		3	0.07	0.10	0.95
		4	0.09	0.11	0.93
What would you do?	1	2	0.37	0.15	0.09
What would you do?	1	2	0.37	0.15	0.09
		3	0.43	0.14	0.02
		3	0.43	0.14	0.02
		4	0.21	0.15	0.59
		4	0.21	0.15	0.59
		5	0.15	0.14	0.84
		5	0.15	0.14	0.84
1 higher than 2 (trend)	2	1	-0.37	0.15	0.09
1 higher than 2 (trend)	2	1	-0.37	0.15	0.09
		3	0.06	0.15	0.99
		3	0.06	0.15	0.99
		4	-0.16	0.16	0.85
		4	-0.16	0.16	0.85
		5	-0.22	0.15	0.57
		5	-0.22	0.15	0.57
1 higher than 3	3	1	-0.43	0.14	0.02*
1 higher than 3	3	1	-0.43	0.14	0.02*
		2	-0.06	0.15	0.99
		2	-0.06	0.15	0.99
		4	-0.22	0.15	0.57
		4	-0.22	0.15	0.57

	5	-0.29	0.14	0.26
4	1	-0.21	0.15	0.59
	2	0.16	0.16	0.85
	3	0.22	0.15	0.57
	5	-0.07	0.15	0.99
5	1	-0.15	0.14	0.84
	2	0.22	0.15	0.57
	3	0.29	0.14	0.26
	4	0.07	0.15	0.99

*$\underline{p}$ < .05. **$\underline{p}$ < .01

Appendix O: RQ2 Tables 13-17

Table 13
Descriptives Statistics for Responses to Nine Item Conflict Scale Across Groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pre-class mean	1	89	4.04	0.49	0.05
	2	86	4.26	0.63	0.07
	3	93	4.16	0.54	0.06
	4	92	4.23	0.55	0.06
	5	86	4.11	0.56	0.06
	Total	446	4.16	0.56	0.03
Post-class mean	1	89	4.55	0.81	0.09
	2	86	4.59	0.47	0.05
	3	92	4.48	0.45	0.05
	4	91	4.62	0.37	0.04
	5	87	4.47	0.51	0.05
	Total	445	4.54	0.54	0.03
Follow-up mean	1	14	3.92	0.41	0.11
	2	15	4.26	0.24	0.06
	3	17	4.12	0.36	0.09
	4	13	4.41	0.19	0.05
	5	9	4.28	0.35	0.12
	Total	68	4.19	0.35	0.04

Table 14

ANOVA Tables for Responses to Nine Item Conflict Scale Across Groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Pre-class mean	Between Groups	2.75	4	0.69	2.24	0.06
	Within Groups	135.02	441	0.31		
	Total	137.77	445			
Post-class mean	Between Groups	1.52	4	0.38	1.30	0.27
	Within Groups	128.67	440	0.29		
	Total	130.19	444			
Follow-up mean	Between Groups	1.84	4	0.46	4.47	0.01**
	Within Groups	6.50	63	0.10		
	Total	8.34	67			

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$

Table 15

Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons for Responses to Nine Item Conflict Scale Across Groups

Dependent Variable	Group	Group	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Pre-class mean	1	2	-0.22	0.08	0.07
		3	-0.12	0.08	0.61
		4	-0.19	0.08	0.15
		5	-0.07	0.08	0.93
2 higher than 1 (trend)	2	1	0.22	0.08	0.07
		3	0.10	0.08	0.75
		4	0.03	0.08	1.00
		5	0.15	0.08	0.40
	3	1	0.12	0.08	0.61
		2	-0.10	0.08	0.75
		4	-0.07	0.08	0.90
		5	0.05	0.08	0.98
	4	1	0.19	0.08	0.15
		2	-0.03	0.08	1.00
		3	0.07	0.08	0.90
		5	0.12	0.08	0.59
	5	1	0.07	0.08	0.93
		2	-0.15	0.08	0.40
		3	-0.05	0.08	0.98
		4	-0.12	0.08	0.59
Post-class mean	1	2	-0.04	0.08	0.99
		3	0.06	0.08	0.94
		3	0.06	0.08	0.94
		4	-0.08	0.08	0.86
		4	-0.08	0.08	0.86
		5	0.07	0.08	0.90
		5	0.07	0.08	0.90
	2	1	0.04	0.08	0.99
	2	1	0.04	0.08	0.99
		3	0.10	0.08	0.72
		3	0.10	0.08	0.72
		4	-0.04	0.08	0.99
		4	-0.04	0.08	0.99
		5	0.11	0.08	0.65
		5	0.11	0.08	0.65
	3	1	-0.06	0.08	0.94
	3	1	-0.06	0.08	0.94
		2	-0.10	0.08	0.72
		2	-0.10	0.08	0.72
		4	-0.14	0.08	0.39
		4	-0.14	0.08	0.39
		5	0.01	0.08	1.00

	4	1	0.08	0.08	0.86
		2	0.04	0.08	0.99
		3	0.14	0.08	0.39
		5	0.15	0.08	0.33
	5	1	-0.07	0.08	0.90
		2	-0.11	0.08	0.65
		3	-0.01	0.08	1.00
		4	-0.15	0.08	0.33
Follow-up mean	1	2	-0.34	0.12	0.05*
		3	-0.19	0.12	0.45
		4	-0.48	0.12	0.01
		5	-0.36	0.14	0.08
2 higher than 1	2	1	0.34	0.12	0.05*
		3	0.14	0.11	0.73
		4	-0.15	0.12	0.75
		5	-0.02	0.14	1.00
	3	1	0.19	0.12	0.45
		2	-0.14	0.11	0.73
		4	-0.29	0.12	0.12
		5	-0.17	0.13	0.72
4 higher than 1	4	1	0.48	0.12	0.01**
		2	0.15	0.12	0.75
		3	0.29	0.12	0.12
		5	0.12	0.14	0.90
5 higher than 1 (trend)	5	1	0.36	0.14	0.08
5 higher than 1 (trend)	5	1	0.36	0.14	0.08
		2	0.02	0.14	1.00
		2	0.02	0.14	1.00
		3	0.17	0.13	0.72
		3	0.17	0.13	0.72
		4	-0.12	0.14	0.90
		4	-0.12	0.14	0.90

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 16

Multiple Linear Regression Model Summary for Nine Item Conflict Scale (Pre-class Evaluation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.40	0.16	0.14	0.48

Table 17

ANOVA table for Regression Analysis of Nine-item Conflict Scale at the Pre-class Evaluation

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	14.93	7	2.13	9.15	0.01*
	Residual	79.66	342	0.23		
	Total	94.59	349			

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 18

Coefficients for Regression Analysis of Nine-item Conflict Scale at the Pre-class Evaluation)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.57	0.20		17.83	0.00
	gender of parent	0.03	0.06	0.03	0.59	0.56
	parental age	-0.11	0.03	-0.17	-3.17	0.00
	education level	-0.05	0.03	-0.08	-1.55	0.12
	annual income	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.49	0.63
	verbal conflict	0.06	0.03	0.15	1.88	0.06
	physical conflict	0.14	0.04	0.19	3.42	0.01**
	emotional distress	0.02	0.03	0.06	0.78	0.43

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Table 19

Nine-item Conflict Scale Mean Scores (M) sample size (n), and Standard Deviations (SD) at the Pre-Class Evaluation for Age, Physical Conflict, and Verbal Conflict (Predictors from the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis)

Age	Mean	n	SD
18-25	4.28	65	0.60
26-35	4.20	184	0.58
36-45	4.11	156	0.50
46+	3.97	37	0.59
Total	4.16	442	0.56
Physical Conflict			
Daily	4.56	2	0.63
1-2 times/week	3.47	13	0.73
1-2 times/month	3.51	16	0.91
1-2 times in past 3 months	3.94	38	0.60
Never	4.25	310	0.46
Total	4.16	379	0.56
Verbal Conflict			
Daily	3.87	55	0.72
1-2 times/week	3.98	87	0.58
1-2 times/month	4.18	57	0.37
1-2 times in past 3 months	4.26	88	0.45
Never	4.32	121	0.48
Total	4.16	408	0.55

Table 20

Multiple Linear Regression Model Summary of Nine-item Conflict Scale at the Post-class Evaluation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.21	0.04	0.02	0.53

Table 21

ANOVA table for Regression Analysis of Nine-item Conflict Scale at the Post-class Evaluation

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.31	7	0.62	2.17	0.04*
	Residual	97.14	342	0.28		
	Total	101.45	349			

*p < .05.

Table 22

Coefficients for Regression on Nine-item Conflict Scale at the Post-class Evaluation

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.51	0.22		20.31	0.00
	gender of parent	-0.06	0.06	-0.06	-0.97	0.33
	parental age	-0.08	0.04	-0.13	-2.19	0.03*
	education level	-0.01	0.04	-0.01	-0.21	0.84
	annual income	0.04	0.03	0.10	1.55	0.12
	verbal conflict	0.06	0.03	0.16	1.87	0.06
	physical conflict	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.37	0.72
	emotional distress	-0.01	0.03	-0.04	-0.43	0.67

*p < .05

Table 23

Nine-item Conflict Scale Mean Scores (M) sample size (n), and Standard Deviations (SD) at the Post-Class Evaluation for Age and Verbal Conflict (Predictors from the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis)

Age	Mean	n	SD
18-25	4.6	65	0.5
26-35	4.6	183	0.4
36-45	4.5	155	0.7
46+	4.4	38	0.5
Total	4.6	441	0.5
Verbal Conflict			
Daily	4.5	52	0.6
1-2 times/week	4.4	88	0.5
1-2 times/month	4.6	57	0.3
1-2 times in past 3 months	4.7	87	0.8
Never	4.6	122	0.4
Total	4.6	406	0.5

Table 24

Multiple Linear Regression Model Summary for Nine-item Conflict Scale at the Post-class Evaluation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	0.58	0.34	0.23	0.32

Table 25

ANOVA table for RQ2 Regression Model Summary for Nine-item Conflict Scale at the Post-class Evaluation

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.17	7	0.31	3.07	0.01**
	Residual	4.24	42	0.10		
	Total	6.40	49			

**$p < .01$.

Table 26

Coefficients Regression Model Summary for Nine-item Conflict Scale at the Post-class Evaluation

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.85	0.34		11.33	0.00
	gender of parent	0.12	0.11	0.15	1.12	0.27
	parental age	-0.16	0.06	-0.36	-2.58	0.01*
	education level	-0.10	0.06	-0.26	-1.74	0.09**
	annual income	0.07	0.04	0.27	1.67	0.10
	verbal conflict	0.08	0.05	0.31	1.58	0.12
	physical conflict	0.07	0.07	0.14	1.00	0.33
	emotional distress	0.01	0.05	0.05	0.26	0.80

**p < .01.

Table 27

Nine-item Conflict Scale Mean Scores (M) sample size (n), and Standard Deviations (SD) at the Follow-up Evaluation for Age and Education Level (Predictors from the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis)

Age	Mean	n	SD
18-25	4.31	9	0.22
26-35	4.25	26	0.40
36-45	4.10	27	0.35
46+	4.13	6	0.28
Total	4.19	68	0.35
Education Level			
Elementary	4.47	7	0.23
High School	4.13	27	0.41
Some College or Assoc. Degree	4.15	16	0.29
Bachelors	4.17	15	0.35
Total	4.18	65	0.36

Appendix P: RQ3 ANOVA table, and Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons

Table 28
Tests of Within-Subjects Effects for the Nine-item Conflict Scale at Time 1 and Time 2 across Groups

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Sphericity Assumed	32.99	1.00	32.99	174.01	0.01*
	Greenhouse-Geisser	32.99	1.00	32.99	174.01	0.00
	Huynh-Feldt	32.99	1.00	32.99	174.01	0.00
	Lower-bound	32.99	1.00	32.99	174.01	0.00
TIME * GROUP	Sphericity Assumed	1.13	4.00	0.28	1.49	0.21
	Greenhouse-Geisser	1.13	4.00	0.28	1.49	0.21
	Huynh-Feldt	1.13	4.00	0.28	1.49	0.21
	Lower-bound	1.13	4.00	0.28	1.49	0.21
Error(TIME)	Sphericity Assumed	82.66	436.00	0.19		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	82.66	436.00	0.19		
	Huynh-Feldt	82.66	436.00	0.19		
	Lower-bound	82.66	436.00	0.19		

*$p < .05$

Table 29

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts for the Nine-item Conflict Scale at Time 1 and Time 2 across Groups

Source	TIME	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Linear	32.99	1	32.99	174.01	0.01**
TIME * GROUP	Linear	1.13	4	0.28	1.49	0.21
Error(TIME)	Linear	82.66	436	0.19		

**p < .01

Table 30

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for the Nine-item Conflict Scale at Time 1 and Time 2 across Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	16698.55	1	16698.55	40877.26	0.01*
GROUP	3.25	4	0.81	1.99	0.10
Error	178.11	436	0.41		

**p < .01

Table 31

Multiple Comparisons Tukey HSD for the Nine-item Conflict Scale at Time 1 and Time 2 across Groups

		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Group	Group			
1	2	-0.13	0.07	0.33
	3	-0.03	0.07	0.99
	4	-0.14	0.07	0.26
	5	0.00	0.07	1.00
2	1	0.13	0.07	0.33
	3	0.10	0.07	0.60
	4	-0.01	0.07	1.00
	5	0.13	0.07	0.34
3	1	0.03	0.07	0.99
	2	-0.10	0.07	0.60
	4	-0.11	0.07	0.51
	5	0.03	0.07	0.99
4	1	0.14	0.07	0.26
	2	0.01	0.07	1.00
	3	0.11	0.07	0.51
	5	0.14	0.07	0.27
5	1	0.00	0.07	1.00
	2	-0.13	0.07	0.34
	3	-0.03	0.07	0.99
	4	-0.14	0.07	0.27

Appendix Q: RQ4 Statistics, Tables 32

Table 32

Tests of Within-Subjects Effects for the Nine-item Conflict Scale at Time 1, Time 2, & Time 3 across Groups

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Sphericity Assumed	5.77	2	2.89	25.25	0.01**
	Greenhouse-Geisser	5.77	1.78	3.25	25.25	0.00
	Huynh-Feldt	5.77	1.95	2.97	25.25	0.00
	Lower-bound	5.77	1.00	5.77	25.25	0.00
TIME * GROUP	Sphericity Assumed	0.82	8.00	0.10	0.90	0.52
	Greenhouse-Geisser	0.82	7.11	0.12	0.90	0.51
	Huynh-Feldt	0.82	7.78	0.11	0.90	0.52
	Lower-bound	0.82	4.00	0.21	0.90	0.47
Error(TIME)	Sphericity Assumed	13.95	122.00	0.11		
	Greenhouse-Geisser	13.95	108.37	0.13		
	Huynh-Feldt	13.95	118.71	0.12		
	Lower-bound	13.95	61.00	0.23		

**$p < .01$

Table 33

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts for the Nine-item Conflict Scale at Time 1, Time 2, & Time 3 across Groups

Source	TIME	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
TIME	Linear	0.03	1	0.03	0.22	0.64
	Quadratic	5.74	1	5.74	77.52	0.00
TIME * GROUP	Linear	0.21	4	0.05	0.33	0.86
	Quadratic	0.62	4	0.15	2.08	0.10
Error(TIME)	Linear	9.43	61	0.16		
	Quadratic	4.52	61	0.07		

Table 34

Nine-item Conflict Scale Mean Scores (M) sample size (n), and Standard Deviation (SD) at the Pre-Class Evaluation, Post-Class Evaluation, and Three-Month Follow-up Evaluation

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pre-class mean	1	89	4.04	0.49	0.05
	2	86	4.26	0.63	0.07
	3	93	4.16	0.54	0.06
	4	92	4.23	0.55	0.06
	5	86	4.11	0.56	0.06
	Total	446	4.16	0.56	0.03
Post-class mean	1	89	4.55	0.81	0.09
	2	86	4.59	0.47	0.05
	3	92	4.48	0.45	0.05
	4	91	4.62	0.37	0.04
	5	87	4.47	0.51	0.05
	Total	445	4.54	0.54	0.03
Follow-up mean	1	14	3.92	0.41	0.11
	2	15	4.26	0.24	0.06
	3	17	4.12	0.36	0.09
	4	13	4.41	0.19	0.05
	5	9	4.28	0.35	0.12
	Total	68	4.19	0.35	0.04

Table 35

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Nine-item Conflict Scale at Time 1, Time 2, & Time 3 across Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	3493.76	1	3493.76	14128.98	0.01**
Intercept	3493.76	1	3493.76	14128.98	0.01**
GROUP	3.13	4	0.78	3.16	0.02
GROUP	3.13	4	0.78	3.16	0.02
Error	15.08	61	0.25		
Error	15.08	61	0.25		

**$p < .01$

Table 36

Multiple Comparisons Tukey HSD for Nine-item Conflict Scale at Time 1, Time 2, & Time 3 across Groups

		Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Group	Group			
1	2	-0.22	0.11	0.27
	3	-0.02	0.11	1.00
	4	-0.33	0.11	0.05*
	5	-0.18	0.12	0.60
2	1	0.22	0.11	0.27
	3	0.20	0.10	0.28
	4	-0.11	0.11	0.87
	5	0.04	0.12	1.00
3	1	0.02	0.11	1.00
	2	-0.20	0.10	0.28
	4	-0.31	0.11	0.04*
	5	-0.16	0.12	0.64
4	1	0.33	0.11	0.05*
	2	0.11	0.11	0.87
	3	0.31	0.11	0.04
	5	0.15	0.13	0.77
5	1	0.18	0.12	0.60
	2	-0.04	0.12	1.00
	3	0.16	0.12	0.64
	4	-0.15	0.13	0.77
	4	-0.15	0.13	0.77

*$p < .05$

Appendix R: RQ5 Statistics, Tukey HSD Multiple Comparisons, and Multiple Linear Regression

RQ5 part 1

Table 37
ANOVA for Satisfaction

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.21	4	0.55	0.55	0.70
Within Groups	432.34	431	1.00		
Total	434.55	435			

Table 38
Sample Sizes (n), Means (M), and Standard Deviations (SD) for Satisfaction responses across Groups

Parent Ed. Program	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1	3.40	88	.99
2	3.47	85	1.08
3	3.39	93	1.05
4	3.58	85	1.04
5	3.51	86	.82
Total	3.47	437	1.00

Table 39
Regression ANOVA for Satisfaction

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	9.900	7	1.414	1.435	.190
	Residual	332.187	337	.986		
	Total	342.087	344			

RQ5 part 2

Table 40
ANOVA for Usefulness

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.15	4	0.54	0.42	0.79
Within Groups	549.75	431	1.28		
Total	551.90	435			

Table 41
Sample Sizes, Means, and Standard Deviations (SD) for Usefulness responses across Groups

Parent Ed. Program	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1	3.28	86	1.23
2	3.46	85	1.15
3	3.30	93	1.08
4	3.43	86	1.10
5	3.32	87	1.07
Total	3.36	437	1.13

Table 42
Regression ANOVA for Usefulness

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.47	7	1.64	1.31	0.24
	Residual	421.30	337	1.25		
	Total	432.77	344			

RQ5 part 3

Table 43
ANOVA for Skills

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.73	4	0.68	0.52	0.72
Within Groups	565.00	428	1.32		
Total	567.73	432			

Table 44
Sample Sizes, Means, and Standard Deviations (SD) for Skills responses across Groups

Parent Ed. Program	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1	3.31	86	1.08
2	3.43	83	1.26
3	3.22	93	1.16
4	3.41	86	1.10
5	3.36	86	1.14
Total	3.34	434	1.15

Table 45
Regression ANOVA for Skills

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.43	7	2.92	2.33	0.03*
	Residual	420.46	335	1.26		
	Total	440.89	342			

*$p < .05$

Table 46
Regression Analysis Model Summary for Skills

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	.22	.05	.03	1.12
	.22	.05	.03	1.12

Table 47

Coefficients Regression Analysis Model Summary

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.75	0.47		7.97	0.00
	gender of parent	-0.29	0.13	-0.13	-2.23	0.03*
	parental age	0.04	0.08	0.03	0.50	0.62
	education level	-0.22	0.08	-0.16	-2.72	0.01**
	annual income	-0.02	0.05	-0.03	-0.46	0.64
	verbal conflict	0.04	0.07	0.05	0.55	0.59
	physical conflict	0.12	0.09	0.08	1.29	0.20
	emotional distress	-0.06	0.06	-0.07	-0.88	0.38

*p < .05 **p < .01

Table 49

Frequencies for “amount of information covered” across Groups

	Group					
Response Options	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Way too little	0	1	5	2	1	8
Too little	13	14	12	13	11	63
Just right	65	62	68	65	68	328
Too much	6	5	5	3	1	20
Way too much	3	3	1	2	5	14
Total	87	74	86	85	86	433

Appendix S: Parents Comments

7/13/99	
1W15A	None
1W16B	I think it will help others
1W17A	This will only help if both parents attend, separately and listen.
1W18B	Like keeping myself more discrete on my divorce
1W19A	Waste of time, too late
1W20B	Taught me a lot about how to see my child's point of view and how not to hold a lot of anger towards his father. And to communicate much better with my child
1W21A	I don't believe it would hurt anybody to attend. I know there were things said that I am glad my husband was there to hear.
1W22B	Children cope with divorce may help the divorce parents how to manage children well, but if it's working or not working.
1W23A	Well worth $25.00
1W24B	None
1W25A	Need classes for children
1W26B	None
8/10/99	
1W42A	Very Helpful.
1W43B	None
1W44A	It did not cover after years of divorce and going through a custody dispute after years.
1W45B	None
1W46A	None
1W47B	None
1W48A	None
1W49B	None
1W50A	I think it is great to get the opinions of others
1W51B	Hope the other parent will learn from the class.
1W52A	I think my children's father will have a great eye opener when he attends. I have been trying to apply good parenting skills and I have been trying to shield my children ages 3 and 5 from the nasty world of divorce.
1W53B	None
1W54A	None
1W55B	This class is good but again I was made to be here. Take my time and money because my ex is playing games
1W56A	They really don't set any guidelines except cooperation - some divorced people have too many problems to even forgive or participate with the ex.
1W57B	None
1W58A	None
1W59B	None
1W60A	I didn't hand in the first surveys because I have many relatives at WVU taking classes there!
1W61A	
9/14/99	
1W62B	None
1W63A	You need to be careful not to get both parents in there at the same time if there is a domestic problem with both
1W64B	None
1W65A	None
1W66B	Due to my situation the class helped me some, but my situation was not covered.
1W67A	My spouse and I get along very well and don't drag our daughter into our disputes.

1W68B	None
1W69A	Ok if you had not done any research at all on children of divorce. I read for at least one year before I separated- so I felt I already knew all of this.
1W70B	None
1W71A	I learned a lot of things but it could have been condensed
1W72B	Too long of a class
1W73A	None
1W74B	None
1W75A	None
1W76B	None
1W77A	This class is great for describing what a child goes through in a regular divorce. But for some divorces, many other situations affect the parent. The parents get along fine though a divorce but in the middle the grandparents are trying to make things worse, only to gain custody from the parents.
1W78B	None
1W79B	None
1W80B	None
1W81B	I appreciated the opportunity to learn better ways to help my children though this process. Their welfare mentally and physically is very important.
1W82A	None
8/9/99	
1NC27A	Makes parents think more of their children's problems at a time when they need the attention.
1NC28B	None
1NC29A	I feel that if the co-parents currently have an amiable relationship, that they should be encouraged to attend the same session.
1NC30B	None
1NC31A	I think the class should remain mandatory for parents who are divorcing.
1NC32B	None
1NC33A	It has informed me of my children's behavior and how now to handle it.
1NC34B	Survey is OK, class could be more scenarios and conclusion
1NC35A	None
1NC36B	None
1NC37A	Not very applicable to my situation, especially with other spouse not attending but it was good information.
1NC38B	On behalf of the children - Thanks
1NC39A	Thank you
1NC40B	None
1NC41B	None
9/13/99	
1NC82A	My son has been in violent situations, seeing it. He's 21 months. He bites, punches and hits me also he tries to dig me and it seems like he wants to hurt me. Is it the stage? Is he hurt? How can I get him to stop the right way
1NC83B	None
1NC84A	It helped me see what's really important in helping my daughter
1NC85B	The class was helpful but I think it could be made more interesting by using different teaching methods.
1NC86A	None
1NC87B	I found it very informative and it made me realize that what they are going though is normal and I feel more comfortable about helping them.
1NC88A	I felt that it has helped me. Thank you.
1NC89A	None

7/8/99	**********
4+5C12A	Well, I didn't know just what to think about the first survey. But I know how to answer the 2nd just fine. Cleared up some issues I had. Class is good.
4+5C13B	Much needed program, putting the focus back on the children
4+5C14A	I hope it helps resolving stress for children and learning how to approach a situation in a different will help in reducing stress.
4+5C15B	I feel this class is forced. The ladies doing the class did a great job. But I do not feel this class should be a must where custody is not a hot spot.
4+5C16A	None
4+5C17B	None
4+5C18A	None
4+5C19B	Great
4+5C20A	Perhaps an option for follow up group divorce counseling. Others going through the same experience often have some wisdom to share. I actually learned more from comments from others in the group than from the curriculum.
4+5C21B	None
4+5C22A	None
4+5C23B	None
4+5C24A	It's a good class under normal circumstances. My kid's dad never calls or sees them. I attend church up the same road that he lives on. He has beeped his horn at my daughter and never stops. He hasn't came to class yet I think he needs to come (Illegible)
4+5C25B	None
4+5C26B	
8/24/99	
4+5C50A	It shouldn't be mandatory and there should be repercussions if the other parent don't show
4+5C51B	None
4+5C52A	None
4+5C53B	It needs to be more real on the facts about divorce
4+5C54A	None
4+5C55B	None
4+5C56A	None
4+5C57B	I was resentful about attending the class because I felt that after being a parent for almost twenty years it would be a waste of time. I also have had a great amount of training in psychology and have resolved all custody issues with my husband. I feel this class while possible useful in some cases, is just a money maker for the county and should not be a requirement …Illegible
4+5C58A	Parents need to grow up and start acting like adults
4+5C59B	None
4+5C60A	None
4+5C61B	None
4+5C62A	Very informative and educational about how to handle sensitive issues
4+5C63B	None
4+5C64B	None
4+5C65A	None
4+5C66B	None
4+5C67A	None
4+5C68B	None
4+5C69A	Very helpful
4+5C70B	See attached letter… Should definitely be age appropriate, this did not apply to teenagers
4+5C71A	None
4+5C72B	None

4+5C73A	It makes a person think
4+5C74A	More one on one rather than such large classes, family law master to answer questions
9/21/99	
4+5C75B	I think it helps us see within ourselves
4+5C76A	Class helpful, but needed to cover more issues about new boyfriends, girlfriends, etc.
4+5C77C	None
4+5C78A	None
4+5C79B	If a child can decide what parent to live with at age 14, then the parent of the 14-year-old should not have to attend.
4+5C80A	None
4+5C81B	None
4+5C82A	No comment
4+5C83B	None
4+5C84A	None
4+5C85B	None
4+5C86A	None
4+5C87B	Learned a lot
4+5C88A	In my particular circumstances most everything covered in the videos I already do but I know of several divorced couples that could use this class
4+5C89B	None
4+5C90A	It helped me, it was worth it
4+5C91B	It is a beginning for civilized expectations of helping children survive, then prosper. Way too diluted, but there is a start
4+5C92A	None
4+5C93B	None
4+5C94A	I think it will prove to be helpful- I hope to apply what I have learned.
9/15/99	
6H77A	None
6H78B	I hope mom pays close attention
6H79A	None
6H80B	None
6H81A	Way to skewed to the female point of view
6H82B	None
6H83A	Information is good, but too general-I think more time on questions and answers would be helpful
6H84B	None
6H85A	None
6H86B	None
6H87A	It seems this is for the children, which it should be, rather than for the parent. Remember, we are adults, they are not.
6H88B	I am glad I came. This class can help me with this. Very good job
6H89A	None
6H90B	None
6H91B	None
6H92B	None
6H93B	None
6/24/99	
45C1A	Illegible
45C2B	None

45C3A	None
45C4B	None
45C5A	Good idea to it mandated.
45C6B	None
45C7A	None
45C8B	Parents should not put children in the position of having to decide which parent is right or wrong.
45C9A	None
45C10B	None
45C11A	None
6/29/99	
6H1A	None
6H2B	I was pleased
6H3B	None
6H4A	Most of it did not pertain to my individual situation- have been divorced for some time and ex is unfit due to alcohol, etc.
6H5A	None
6H6B	I would have tried to have more time to cover more materials and questions
6H7A	None
6H8B	None
6H9A	None
6H10B	None
6H11A	Illegible
6H12B	Illegible
6H13B	Illegible
6H14B	None
6H15A	None
6H16A	None
6H17B	None
6H18A	None
6H19B	None
7/14/99	
6H20A	Why do I have to be here? I have never been married.
6H21B	Very good idea
6H22A	None
6H23B	None
6H24A	Helpful
6H25B	None
6H26A	None
6H27B	I felt it was helpful.
6H28A	None
6H29B	It should have been mandatory 10 years ago like most states. West Virginia needs to catch up to the other 49 states in legal matters.
6H30A	Repeats way too much information from start to finish.
6H31B	None
6H32A	Good
6H33B	None
6H34A	None
6H35B	I've learned a lot. It helped to know that the things we were doing were good and positive for our children.
6H36B	None
6H37B	None
6H38B	Extremely important, I'm glad it is required in divorces.
8/4/99	

6H39A	I don't believe 2 hours can "undo" a lifetime
6H40B	None
6H41A	Illegible
6H42B	None
6H43A	Probably would have helped more if it had been before my divorce. Most of the class had nothing to do with what had happened with my divorce.
6H44B	None
6H45A	A really good class should help me a lot with the children.
6H46B	None
6H47A	None
6H48B	None
6H49A	We learned how to identify the symptoms of the children but not how to change how they react.
6H50B	None
8/17/99	
6H51A	I feel it was very beneficial to the people that needed it.
6H52B	I think it was very helpful.
6H53A	None
6H54B	None
6H55A	Hopefully, both will be helpful.
6H56B	I think it is a good program, but I think there is way too much to cover in a single 2 hour class.
6H57A	The class was educational and helpful.
6H58B	None
6H59A	None
6H60B	None
6H61A	None
6H62B	None
6H63A	Too broad a category to be addressed in one combined class
6H64B	None
6H65A	I think it helped me in a way that I can use to express feelings to my children and teach them about divorce better.
6H66B	None
6H67A	None
6H68B	Satisfactory
6H69A	None
6H70B	It was helpful.
6H71A	None
6H72B	None
6H73A	It's great. They seem to really care.
6H74B	None
6H75A	None
6H76B	None
7/12/99	
1NC1B	None
1NC2A	More coverage of the effects of different ages and what can be done to reduce the damage.
1NC3B	None
1NC4A	None
1NC5B	None
1NC6A	None
1NC7B	Too short, seats too hard
1NC8A	None
1NC9B	My children are 3 and 4 so some of the information was helpful.

1NC10A	Need to know more about shared and joint custody
1NC11B	None
1NC12A	None
1NC13B	None
1NC14A	I think all should go through it
6/30/99	
17M16B	I think it is very beneficial but I think parents should attend together because they are parents together, unless of violent issues.
17M17A	I was really interested and thanks for class. It is very helpful and understanding
17M18B	None
17M19B	None
17M20A	The information provided in the classes would and will be the best information for divorced/separated families. If people could learn to put their children's feelings before themselves, it could be a lot easier to deal with them where they are now
17M21A	None
17M22B	None
17M23A	None
17M24B	It could be very helpful
17M25A	It was helpful
17M26A	None
17M27B	None
17M28A	None
17M29A	Tomorrow I will have an answer to this question. Once I start thinking about the class. I think it is a needed class.
17M30B	None
17M31B	None
17M32B	None
17M33A	Increase the font size on overheads- They cannot be seen from the back of the room
17M34B	None
17M35A	None
8/11/99	
17M36A	None
17M37B	I feel the class is value added but additional information in multiple sessions would provide greater insight. Remember we are dealing with fragile children who depend on us
17M38A	Cover most and keep simple
17M39B	None
17M40A	None
17M41B	The instructors did very well for the limited time given.
17M42A	This class was about divorced parents. I am not married. This class is for parents with older children. My child is 6 months old and her father is away in the army. I think this class will help me when my child is older.
17M43B	Hope others follow suggestions
17M44A	None
17M45B	None
17M46A	A very good idea
17M47B	None
17M48A	It will be a great reward for the children if both parents can follow though with the information given at this class.
17M49B	None
17M50A	Questions were not always clear : Class was a nice refresher from a third party
17M51B	Good
17M52B	Nothing

17M53A	There are no set guidelines and rules that will apply to all family situations, however this class and survey touches major issues for all of us. Thank you !
8/23/99	
17M54B	I appreciate…..Illegible
17M55A	Need more time and more info
17M56B	The class was extremely helpful
17M57A	None
17M58A	None
17M59A	Work things out
17M60A	It's all good
17M61A	None
17M62B	None
17M63A	None
17M64B	None
17M65A	None
17M66B	None
17M67A	None
17M68B	None
17M69A	None
17M70B	None
17M71A	None
17M72B	None
6/21/99	
17R1B	None
17R2A	Helpful
17R3B	None at this time, wait and ask 3 months
17R4A	It was very helpful.
17R5B	None
17R6A	This was helpful, we've been in counseling throughout - though I think (illegible) parents really need to attend. This - it is happening to both - not just me or fighting for custody both parents have an impact, because it is their child/children.
17R7B	None
17R8A	None
17R9B	None
17R10A	None
17R11B	None
17R12A	None
17R13B	It was relayed in a boring manner - need to include more input from participants
17R14A	I have implemented a lot of things already, but I learned a couple I didn't know.
17R15A	None
9/2/99	
17R73A	None
17R74B	Just stated what you should do but there are many different situations and different things to do with each one.
17R75A	None
17R76B	None
17R77A	None
17R78B	None
17R79A	Gear the information toward all of children. Infants and toddlers can be surveyed as well.
17R80B	None
17R81A	None
17R82B	None
17R83A	None

17R84B	Fair class
17R85A	None
17R86B	None
17R87A	It's alright
17R88B	None
7/27/99	
4+5C27A	None
4+5C28B	None
4+5C29A	Should have had it 7 years ago when I went through all 4 stages
4+5C30B	None
4+5C31A	None
4+5C32B	None
4+5C33A	None
4+5C34B	None
4+5C35A	None
4+5C36B	None
4+5C37A	None
4+5C38B	None
4+5C39A	Needs to be longer with a break
4+5C40B	More info about what you should do when conflicts arise besides how to prevent them.
4+5C41A	None
4+5C42B	I think the class will be helpful to some parents. But I think a lot of the situations that occurred on video are very real situations and should give people an idea of how to treat each other and their children.
4+5C43A	Very well presented
4+5C44B	None
4+5C45A	None
4+5C46B	None
4+5C47A	My children are almost 16 and 18. They are free to visit with other parent at anytime and my kids are stable and happy. I think it is a real shame the law required us to do this and "used up" a $25.00/$50.00 that could have been used on my children - food, clothing, school materials, and so on.
4+5C48A	Helps you to see common mistakes you are making and not realizing it.
4+5C49A	None
Code	
6/17/99	
3S1A	None
3S2B	None
3S3A	None
3S4B	None
3S5A	None
3S6A	None
3S7B	None
8/19/99	
3S28A	None
3S29B	None
3S30A	Survey is a great thing to find out something that can be helped for later. The class was good.
3S31B	None
3S32A	None
3S33B	None
3S34A	None
3S35B	None

9/16/99	
3S36B	None
3S37A	None
3S38B	None
3S39A	None
3S40B	I have been put in a lot of the situations discussed on the video and I see now I handled it pretty good. I think that it was very informative and just kind of let me know I was on the right track with my child being a single parent.
3S41A	None
3S42B	None
3S43A	None
3S44B	None
3S45A	None
3S46B	All Parents should attend this.
3S47A	None
10/21/99	
3S62A	None
3S63B	None
3S64A	I think it will be very helpful. Especially since I am the one who has to talk and explain everything to the children.
3S65B	It was O kay
3S66A	Would love to have booklets on all the information sent to me.
3S67B	None
3S68A	None
3S69B	None
3S70A	None
3S71B	None
12/16/99	
3S75A	None
3S76B	None
3S77A	None
3S78B	None
3S79A	None
3S80B	None
3S81A	None
3S82B	I think it’s a good idea for parents to learn as much as possible for the children's sake as well as their own
3S83A	None
3S84B	It's good
3S85A	None
3S86B	None
7/15/99	
3R8A	It was great. It gave me ideas on how to handle the situations when or if they occur.
3R9B	None
3R10A	It brings out a lot of good points. But some fathers are very irresponsible when it comes to their children. Some father's just stay away the children would be better off in the long run.
3R11B	I do feel better about my situation
3R12A	Waste of time
3R13B	None
3R14A	None
3R15B	None
3R16A	None

3R17B	None
3R18B	None
8/12/99	
3R19A	None
3R20B	None
3R21A	None
3R22B	It may help
3R23A	None
3R24B	Most of it was things I felt, some were things I read in the book.
3R25A	None
3R26B	None
3R27A	None
9/9/99	
3R48B	I thought it was grate, I learnt a lot
3R49A	None
3R50B	I feel this course should be applied to parents who are though divorce only! There should be a separate class for non married couples
3R51A	None
3R52B	Helpful
3R53A	None
3R54B	None
3R55A	Done Great
3R56B	The class only covered generalities, and for most parents in there, that didn't seem very helpful. I think parent attending together for another class might help.
3R57A	None
3R58B	None
3R59A	None
3R60B	Needs to be a little more in depth, maybe even make it a 2 evening event
3R61A	None