

Novice Parent Educators' Experience Facing Unexpected Interactions while  
Facilitating Group Parent Education

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF  
THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

Heather Marie Cline

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

Dr. Ruth Thomas, Adviser

July, 2010

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## Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank:

My adviser, Dr. Ruth Thomas, for her patience in and dedication to supporting my academic growth.

My thesis committee members, Dr. Jane Plihal and Dr. Misty Sato, for taking the time to review my thesis and participate in my thesis defense.

My study participants, for sharing their unexpected experiences with me.

My parents, Annette and Brad Cline, for instilling in me the persistence necessary to complete my thesis.

My "grad school girls," for being the inspirational women they are.

My boyfriend, Charlie Beattie, for providing my daily dose of strength and encouragement in the final stages of my thesis completion.

My dog, Bailey, for happily greeting me every day, even when she was not getting the attention she deserves.

## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my newborn nephew Ryan Edward Cram, born on Friday, April 30, 2010. I wish for him to experience as much patience and support from the adults who care for him throughout his development as I have received in my thesis journey.

## Abstract

This thesis describes and explores the lived experience of novice parent educators as they face unexpected interactions while facilitating group parent education. The study employed a descriptive phenomenological approach to conduct and analyze unstructured interviews with five novice parent educators. The analysis generated meaning constituents of (a) being surprised by the unexpected, (b) struggling to hide my reactions, (c) pressure to respond but I don't know how, and (d) needing to balance educating with protecting the individual and the group. Links between participant descriptions and literature concerning facing unexpected interactions, being a novice educator, and facilitating adult education are discussed. Implications are explored for the field of parent education in general and parent educator preparation in particular, and for further research.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

An experienced parent educator has been likened to that of a duck on the water who appears, from the surface, to be moving effortlessly but who under the surface is paddling furiously to maintain group progress, manage challenges, and support both individuals and the group (Campbell & Palm, 2004). The group parent educator strives to create and maintain a safe environment through which parents may explore and develop their knowledge, beliefs, and practices related to parenting and to supporting their children's development. With each parent bringing to the group a unique set of experiences with and conceptions of parenting, complicated further by the privatized nature of parenting today, facilitating group parent education is a meaningful but complex and challenging role.

Widely accepted is the notion that, compared to the expert educator, novice educators bring less content knowledge and facilitation skills to the group education setting. This lack of ability and flexibility makes facilitating an open dialogue difficult for the novice parent educator, due in part to the unpredictable nature of discussing the emotion-laden and controversy-ridden topic of parenting. My transition from student to Minnesota licensed parent educator led me to ask the research question: *What is it like for novice parent educators to face an unexpected interaction while facilitating group parent education?*

In every group parent education session there are probably events, comments, or conversations that anyone would consider unexpected, but these particular moments are so out of the ordinary that they stick with the educator. These are the moments that you would never have anticipated or predicted. For the purpose of this

study I define “unexpected interaction” as any question, comment, or other verbal interaction related to the broad topic of parenting and family life, involving one or more group members, that the parent educator did not expect or anticipate.<sup>1</sup> Not included in this definition of unexpected interactions are unpredictable interruptions to facilitating group parent education, such as a fire drill or emergency situation involving a group member or the parent educator. The unexpected interactions under investigation in this study must relate, in some manner, to the content of parenting and family life, and must occur within the group parent education setting.

In this chapter, the process of coming to my research question and the significance of this study will be described. Background on the history and function of group parent education will be provided. The role and training of the group parent educator will also be explored.

### *My Unexpected Experiences*

My interest in and awareness of the unexpected nature of parent education developed during my student teaching experience in a Minnesota school district’s Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program. I faced unexpected interactions during each of the two parent education groups I worked with in my student teaching placement.

The first experience occurred during introductions when one mom announced she was pregnant. This was received with excitement by most, but with tears by the mom next in line for introductions. She explained that she had just miscarried and was about as far along as the mom who had just announced her pregnancy to the

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of the term “unexpected interactions” encompasses definitions of “unexpected” and “interaction” taken from Dictionary.com (2010).

group. In that moment, I felt myself incredibly distracted as I tried to maintain my emotions. I was not expecting this supposedly light-hearted round of introductions to get so personal and heavy. Immediately, my throat caught and I nearly began tearing up as well. My emotions are easily triggered by others' emotions so it took all the energy I had to maintain my composure. As a student teacher, I thought it would appear unprofessional if I began crying as well. In addition to trying to maintain my composure, my head was spinning with questions about how to react. *Should I say something? What do I say to someone who does not know me, but who has just revealed such a personal and difficult situation related to parenting? What role should I take since I am not facilitating today, but instead participating and observing?* All of these questions were racing through my mind while my cooperating parent educator provided sincere condolences to this mother, paused for interaction among the group of parents, and then looked to me, as I was next in line for introductions. I bumbled my way through my introduction while feeling as though my energy had disappeared and a blanket of weights was placed upon my shoulders.

Throughout the remainder of the class that day, I wondered how my cooperating parent educator was able to get through that situation with such grace and continue with the lesson, providing a meaningful educational experience for the group. Later that day, my educator informed me that she was told about the miscarriage the week prior so she had had time to process this unfortunate news. She did not know if or when this mother would share about her miscarriage to the group of parents, but when it was shared, the news was not unexpected for the educator. After that day, I continued to wonder, *What if she had not known? What would that*

*moment have been like for her?*

My second unexpected interaction occurred during the same semester, but with a different group of parents. This time I was facilitating a discussion about discipline with a large group of parents of pre-school children. I was intimidated by the size of this group and its powerful dynamics. When the unexpected moment occurred, parents were openly discussing discipline practices they use, and when one mom shared confidently that she puts soap in her boy's mouth, I froze. *You do what?* I was shocked that this parent believed she was implementing and offering a useful discipline strategy. I assumed this practice of putting soap in a child's mouth was left with my grandmother's generation, and that this practice was widely accepted to be abusive and dangerous. Luckily, I did not say my thoughts aloud, but unfortunately, I did not say anything. I did not know how, in a respectful manner, to discuss the negative implications of this practice for the parent-child relationship and for the child's social and emotional development. I did not want the mother to feel terrible about herself as a parent or to leave myself vulnerable to further attack for which I was not prepared to respond.

### *Significance of the Study*

Facing these unexpected interactions prompted my further investigation into the nature of the unexpected in the novice parent educator's experience. Parent education literature speaks of difficult moments (Campbell & Palm, 2004), problems (Clarke, 1998), challenges to the leader (Aurbach, 1968), and disruptive behaviors (Curran, 1989) as an aspect of facilitation. However, this literature provides

recommended practices for responding to these situations without acknowledging the experience of facing them.

A growing body of research in the fields of teacher education and adult education distinguishes the novice educator from the experienced and suggests that novice educators are less skilled at responding to the unexpected or unpredictable messiness of the classroom (Berliner, 1987; Kennedy, 2005; Scherff, 2008; Shulman, 1986; Sternberg, 1995). This research focuses on how teachers make instructional decisions when a question is posed or misunderstanding is revealed (Kennedy, 2005; Schön, 1987). Clearly, the novice educator is disadvantaged in his or her ability to traverse the unpredictable classroom terrain. Rather than asking why the educator behaved in a certain manner and how they determined that action process, my investigation seeks to understand what it was like for the educator to live through the experience of facing unexpected interactions.

This thesis gives voice to one component of the novice educator's experience – that of facing unexpected interactions. The insight gained from the educator's voice regarding this phenomenon might be useful in multiple ways to the field of parent education. Those preparing to facilitate group parent education will have opportunities to be vicariously exposed to this phenomenon through the descriptions of others' experience before beginning their practice. Understanding what it is like to facilitate group parent education from the novice educator's perspective could provide a new lens for the field of parent education by acknowledging the novice stage of development in parent education and adding to the literature acknowledging

the complexity of the parent educator's role in touching the lives of parents, families, and children.

My personal experience, conversations with and observations of parent educators with varying years of experience, and the literature presented above on characteristics of the novice educator, suggests that facing an unexpected interaction while facilitating group parent education may be experienced differently for novice parent educators than for experts. For this reason, I chose to focus this study on novice parent educators. However, the maximum years of experience to be considered a novice parent educator are unknown. Literature in the field of education identifies novice teachers as being within their first or second year of teaching (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004; Corcoran, 1981). Berliner (1988) however, suggests that the development from novice to expert can take anywhere from two to five years. Since, there was not a distinct cut-off for the novice stage of teacher development, and no research was found specific to the novice parent educator, I chose to interview parent educators with no more than three years of experience teaching group parent education.

### *Group Parent Education*

According to the National Parenting Education Network (NPEN) (2006), the goal of parent education is to strengthen families by providing relevant, effective education and support and to encourage an optimal environment for the healthy growth and development of parents<sup>2</sup> and children. Parent education has provided parents with knowledge and skills in many forms (e.g., books, magazines, internet, in-

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<sup>2</sup> For NPEN, the term "parents" includes key persons who play the central parenting role in a child's life.

home services, parent groups) for decades. The group parent education environment was the context of parent education under investigation in this thesis; therefore, this historical overview and description will primarily focus on group parent education.

The responsibility of child rearing has historically fallen on the mother (Schlossman, 1983). Much of the motivation for parent education has been to provide mothers with the appropriate knowledge and skills in order to do best by their children (Grant, 1997). The specific message has varied almost with each passing decade, and has often been in response to society's perception of the state of the family and of youth at the time, the circumstances affecting family life, and the pervading voice of scholars in developing fields such as psychology, child psychology, and pediatrics (Schlossman, 1983).

These efforts to educate parents in order to be better equipped to raise their children have taken place since the colonial period, during which time these parent education efforts were taken up by the church (Schlossman, 1976). However, group parent education as a community-initiated effort was first documented in Portland, Maine in 1815, where mothers gathered to discuss methods of child rearing (Lewis-Rowley, 1993). Then in the 1890s, "mother's study" or "child study" groups taking place throughout the country joined together to form the National Congress of Mothers in 1897, which became what is known today as the National Parent-Teachers Association (PTA) (Schlossman, 1976).

The goals of these original study groups, as documented by Schlossman (1983), were consistent with the goals that guide many parent education groups today. For example, group parent education brings parents together to reduce the isolating

nature of the family. In addition, parents then and today are believed to benefit from connecting with others on common challenges and concerns of child rearing. Another goal of the mother- and child-study groups present in parent education today is to provide research-based information on parenting practices and child development. Before the 1920s, primarily middle-class women also engaged in social reform efforts in which they used behavior-science knowledge to assist low-income mothers in improving the quality of their home life (Schlossman, 1976). During the 1920s, these child study groups set aside their political agenda, serving more as a social center providing entertaining activities for parents. It was not until the 1930s that the PTA re-engaged with the field of parent education (Schlossman, 1976).

Although the PTA stepped out of focus, the 1920s are historically recognized as a booming time for the parent education movement (Schlossman, 1983). Among many organizations providing group parent education and disseminating information, the Child Study Association of America (CSAA) came into the spotlight. According to Schlossman (1983), the CSAA began as “an exclusive group of women formerly affiliated with the New York Ethical Culture Society, which sponsored lectures, prepared bibliographies, and conducted regular meetings to provide guidance and a forum for parents to discuss childrearing problems” (p. 13).

During the progressive era, behavior science was spreading the message of a technical way of raising children. In the 1920s, the middle-class, which had long served as a model for family life, reflected disorder and breakdown. Youth, regardless of social class, were characterized by behavior problems that stemmed from the demise of parental authority (Schlossman, 1983). As the scientific study of children

was growing, the parent education movement saw this information as a way “that parents could, via education, wholly change their basic attitudes and patterns of interaction with their children” (Schlossman, 1983, p. 25). At the same time, John Dewey and other developmentalists were calling for a child-centered approach to parenting through intellectual guidance rather than through punishment (Schlossman, 1983). The women of the CSAA gathered together to study, reflect on, and discuss expert advice from both behaviorists and developmentalists (Grant, 1997). With financial support from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM), and the leadership provided by the chief spokesperson of LSRM, Lawrence Frank, the CSAA also trained local women to be group leaders within their community.

The American Home Economics Association, although in existence since 1899, expanded its focus to include child development and parent education in the 1920s (Grant, 1997; Schlossman, 1983). Home economics was already part of the vocational education departments at some land grant institutions throughout the country, and these institutions already had extension agents visiting farms to provide women with skills for better home management informed by domestic science (Grant, 1997). Beginning in the 1920s, home economists began training extension agents in child development and parent education to provide an additional service in their home visits and to provide group parent education in rural communities. At this time, the training emphasized findings from behavioral science research in disseminating optimal child rearing strategies (Grant, 1997). Major assumptions informing parent education during this time were that (a) the early years were a critical period, (b) the environment played a major role in shaping children’s developing personality, and (c)

if the mother raised her child “by the books” she could be sure that her child would turn out well. Mothers were viewed as having complete control over and responsibility for child welfare (Grant, 1997).

Until the Great Depression, the focus of group parent education was on the care and training of small children with the mother-child relationship as a focal point. The influence of the Depression on families shifted the emphasis to family life and societal relationships (Grant, 1997). This is where we first see efforts to engage fathers in family interactions. Home economists tried to involve fathers in parent education and get them to play more of a role in the home and family. During this time, this was met with great resistance by fathers who thought their authority was being challenged. Father-involvement efforts re-emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as research began indicating the significant role fathers played in children’s development (Pew Charitable Trust, 1996; Smith, Perou, & Lesesne, 2002).

During the 1940s and 1950s, the focus of society shifted from scientific motherhood to domestic conformity (Grant, 1997). This is believed to be in response to the message from earlier decades about the complex and crucial role of mothers in raising their children. While group parent education efforts were encouraging democratic family life, mothers were growing evermore complacent and permissive in their parenting (Grant, 1997). At the end of WWII, emphasis shifted from parent groups to disseminating research-based information (through books and other print media) on normative child development and recommended child rearing practices until the 1960s (Smith, Perou, & Lesesne, 2002). Benjamin Spock’s book, “Baby and

Child Care,” is one very popular example of disseminating child-rearing advice directly to parents (Pew Charitable Trust, 1996).

Though child development research had been informing the parent education movement since the 1920s, a new emphasis on the first three years of life being a critical period for child development began to emerge during the 1960s. At this time, participants of parent education shifted from the middle-class to low-income families, perceived to be “in need” of intervention (Pew Charitable Trust, 1996). Head Start was developed as an intervention program to improve the chances of children’s school and life success (Smith, Perou, & Lesesne, 2002). Group parent educators worked in partnership with parents, as a way to assist parents in supporting their children’s learning.

The 1970s brought a new focus to group parent education as a skill-building enterprise. New parent education programs and curricula were developed with the goal of parent effectiveness, with the hope that teaching new skills and strategies for interacting with children would lead to improved child behavioral outcomes. Examples of these programs include Parent Effectiveness Training (PET) (Gordon, 1970) and Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1975). These programs, and others like them, still exist today and are often taught by professionals from a variety of service professions after they attend a short-term training workshop. Parent educator training will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

Group parent education flourished again in the 1980s and 1990s. According to a 1996 report on the status of parenting education programs in the United States, there

were “more than 50,000 parenting programs reaching millions of parents and caregivers across the country every day” (Pew Charitable Trust, 1996, p. 4). Now, middle-class parents expanded their use of group parent education to not only support their children’s social and emotional development, but also to support their children’s school success as well. Parent education became more culturally responsive by creating culture-specific programs, such as Positive Indian Parenting: Honoring our Children by Honoring our Traditions (The National Indian Child Welfare Association, 1986).

As indicated above, the importance of father-involvement in children’s lives, in family life, and in parent education re-emerged during the 1990s. Research on the benefits of positive father-involvement for children’s healthy development, along with dramatic changes to many American families, contributed to this focus on fathers (Pew Charitable Trust, 1996). Individual families were moving away from their extended family – almost half of the U.S. population moved between 1986 and 1990 – and more women were going to work – 75% of women with children under 18 and 54% of those with children under 5-years of age (Pew Charitable Trust, 1996). Several national initiatives and centers for fathers began developing in the 1990s, and group parent education programs such as Minnesota’s Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) and Parents as Teachers (PAT) have made significant efforts to involve fathers in their services (Pew Charitable Trust, 1996).

The documenting of program effectiveness became essential to continued funding beginning in the 1990s, and evidence-based models continue to be a priority today. Numerous parent education models underwent program evaluations to discern

and document their effectiveness. Weiss and Jacobs (1988) provide an extensive review of family support programs that have undergone evaluation. Family support programs is a broad term that encompasses many types of community-based prevention programs, of which parent education is one component. According to Weiss and Jacobs' critical examination, of those programs that have undergone extensive, longitudinal program evaluations, many yield positive outcomes for children and families. However, a major limitation to determining the benefit of family support programs, including parent education programs, is the minimal number of programs that have undergone systematic evaluation (Weiss & Jacobs, 1988). Undoubtedly, the future of parent education and family support programs more broadly, will require stronger evaluation efforts to demonstrate program quality and efficacy.

Group parent education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been challenged by a lack of funding due to a struggling economy, the severe time-crunch on families, and the immediacy of parent education resources available through the Internet and other media sources. However, due to the complex society in which parents are raising children, and the isolated nature in which most families function, group parent education continues to provide the research-based information, support, and connection sought by many families throughout the United States. and around the world. An increasing number of programs, originally developed for English-speaking, American families have made adaptations to include or exclusively serve ethnically diverse families in the United States (Bennett & Grimley, 2001). In addition, parent education programs are now being offered in other countries, such as Turkey, China,

and France, with careful consideration of, and adaptations made, to support culturally specific parenting practices and goals (Bennett & Grimley, 2001). For example, differences in children's developmental milestones, infant sleep patterns, and parental roles have been identified in various countries throughout the world (Pachter & Dumont-Mathieu, 2004). Since the globalization of parent education is just beginning, the implications of this movement remain unclear.

### *Minnesota's Model*

Minnesota's Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program began in 1974 as a state-funded effort to support children's development during the first five years of life. Rather than targeting families considered at-risk for any number of reasons, ECFE is universally available to all families regardless of income, family structure, or children's developmental condition. Services provided through ECFE include home visiting, screening for Kindergarten readiness, and other support services, but the standard offering is group parent education. ECFE is available in nearly every school district throughout the state.

In ECFE, group parent education consists of two parts, parent-child interaction and parent group discussion (while children experience early childhood education). During parent-child time, parents and children interact in an early childhood room designed with the children's developmental abilities in mind. Some of the many benefits of parent-child time includes the opportunity for parents to (a) observe their children's developing skills and abilities in an optimal learning environment, (b) observe their children interacting with other children of similar age and with adults, and (c) interact with their child without the usual life distractions.

The parent-child time also gives the parent educator an opportunity to observe the quality and style of parent-child interaction amongst the families in the group in order to better understand and support the unique educational needs of each family. During the group discussion component, parents come together to discuss parenting topics and learn about their children's development while their children remain with the early childhood educator.

ECFE recently developed the *Parent Education Core Curriculum Framework and Indicators (PECCFI)* to provide a level of standardization, accountability, and focus for the role of the professional parent educator. The specific goals of the Parent Education Core Curriculum Framework and Indicators are to provide a resource that:

- (1) Frames or defines the body of knowledge in the field of parent education.
- (2) Identifies the intended content and objectives of parent education in ECFE and Even Start in Minnesota.
- (3) Is applicable across the field of parent education with any type of parent education program, population, setting, and delivery mode.
- (4) Is a planning tool for development and delivery of parent education curriculum and lesson plans.
- (5) Provides guidance for parent goal setting in parent education.
- (6) Guides assessment of parent education outcomes and programs.
- (7) Promotes accountability in parent education programs and with individual parent educators.
- (8) Informs practice in parent education. (Early Childhood Family Education, 2008, p. 5)

The broad content areas of PECCFI include parent development, the parent-child relationship, early childhood development, family development, and culture and community. Research-based indicators of progress have been identified under each content area to support long-term learning goals for the parents participating in parent education to support their children's development (PECCFI, 2008). In Minnesota's ECFE program, parent educators are licensed teachers in parent and family education.

Minnesota's teacher license and other credentialing requirements for parent educators will be addressed in the next section.

### *The Group Parent Educator*

Raising children is often referred to as the most important but also the most challenging job any one person may hold throughout his or her lifetime. Parent education has, for decades, supported parents in this caregiving role by providing knowledge and skills related to parenting, child development, and the parent-child relationship in a variety of formal and informal modes. The educator or facilitator of group parent education varies greatly in background, preparation, and purpose depending on the organization providing services. For parent education provided by parent educators who are embedded in other professional services, preparation of parent educators often consists of workshops or short-term training on or regarding a pre-written curriculum (Cooke, 2006; Pew Charitable Trust, 1996). However, increased awareness of the competencies needed for facilitating group parent education has influenced the creation of certificate and licensure programs that both acknowledge the professional role of parent educators and hold them accountable for providing quality education and support to the parents they serve (Arcus, 1995; Cooke, 2006; Walker, Cline & Cooke, 2009).

The parent educator plays a vital role in providing high-quality education for parents. However, research has not yet addressed this complex role. The striking lack of research on the parent educator may be due, in part, to the inconsistency in professional preparation for the parent educator. The placement of Minnesota's ECFE program in the public school system requires parent educators to obtain a state parent

educator's teacher license that is earned concurrently with or following completion of a bachelor's degree and is required for parent educators to teach in the state's ECFE program. To date, no other state requires this level of credentialing for parent educators.

Several universities offer undergraduate and graduate degrees with at least partial emphasis on parent education. For example, North Carolina State University and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro jointly administer a Master of Science in Human Development and Family Studies with a concentration in Family Life and Parenting Education (Cooke, 2006). Other forms of parent educator training include:

- Pre-service training programs focused on a particular program (e.g., Parents As Teachers (PAT) and Parent Effectiveness Training (PET))
- In-service trainings and workshops for professionals with credentials in related fields (e.g., pediatrics, early childhood education, family counseling, social work)

Pre-packaged parent education curriculum is, in some cases, advertised as requiring no training (e.g., Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) and Active Parenting) (Pew Charitable Trust, 1996).

Clearly, the field of parent education has yet to come to consensus on preparation standards for parent educators. Along with the need for more systematic program evaluation, training and support for parent educators is one of the most critical issues facing the field of parent education (Pew Charitable Trust, 1996). Due to this inconsistency in parent educator preparation in other geographic areas, this study focuses on the lived experience of licensed parent educators providing group

parent education in a Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) setting, where licensing requirements are consistent across all programs in the state.

Currently, university programs, such as the University of Minnesota's Family Education program and St. Cloud State University's Child and Family Studies program, offer preparation for parent education licensure. These programs provide teacher-preparation that meets state standards in preparing parent educators for competency in areas that include teaching and learning, child development, the family, and adult development. In these preparation programs, parent education licensure students learn about successful methods for working with adult learners and for facilitating groups of parents (Campbell & Palm, 2004; Clark, 1998; Curran, 1989; Merriam & Cafferella, 1999). The Minnesota state teacher license requires a student teaching experience not standard in other parent educator training programs. Throughout this student teaching process, students observe group facilitation processes and gain practice in facilitating parent groups with the support of a cooperating parent educator. These programs prepare future parent educators for possible challenges they may face while facilitating groups of parents and for handling these challenges. However, as all educators know, being prepared for challenging situations, while helpful, cannot completely prepare one for the experience of facing these situations. Educators build skills and confidence regarding challenging situations over time as they build experience-based knowledge informed by theoretical understandings learned during their professional preparation and continuing education. Novice educators lack this base of experience.

## Summary

For more than a century, parent education has provided parents with knowledge and skills to improve the quality of parenting and support children's development. Throughout this history, and still today, the field of parent education lacks consistency in standard requirements for parent educator preparation. Facilitating group parent education is complex and challenging due to the diverse histories, beliefs, and practices that parents bring to a group. Discussions about the emotion-laden and controversy ridden topic of parenting can be unpredictable. Novice educators have been shown to be less flexible than more experienced educators at responding to the unpredictable nature of the classroom. This study aimed to understand how the novice parent educator experiences unexpected interactions while facilitating group parent education.

## Chapter 2: Methodology and Method

This study aimed to understand the lived experience of the novice parent educator more completely (Giorgi, 2009). A descriptive phenomenological methodology was chosen to explore the research question: *What is it like for novice parent educators to face unexpected interactions while facilitating group parent education?* Descriptive phenomenology was selected because of its focus on staying “as close as possible to the original data,” (Dahlberg, Drew & Nyström, 2002, p. 183). This chapter begins with an overview of phenomenology and a discussion of the descriptive phenomenological method of analysis. The final section of this chapter delineates the procedures followed in applying the descriptive phenomenological methodology to the study of facing an unexpected interaction while facilitating group parent education as a novice parent educator.

### *Phenomenology*

Phenomenology began as a philosophy in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, for which Husserl (1913/1983) is credited as the founder. The epistemology of phenomenology assumes that knowledge of the world lies within experience. It is through a person’s consciousness that experience is known. According to Husserl (1913/1983), consciousness is considered an intentional mental process, which is always directed at something (e.g., object, person, event, idea). In other words, consciousness is always consciousness of something. Husserl states, “Under intentionality we understand the own peculiarity of mental processes to be consciousness of something” (1913/1983, p. 200). This idea of consciousness was expanded to include intentionality in both

mind and body, which is referred to in phenomenology as *subjectivity* of human experience (Giorgi, 2009).

Phenomenology is interested in the intentional relation, or the subjective experience of something (Giorgi, 2009). The purpose of phenomenology is to understand subjective lived experience; therefore in part, it is the study of ontological questions, or rather, one's conception of reality from a pre-reflective, *natural attitude* perspective. The natural attitude represents the perspective from which one lives every day life. In other words, as we actively engage in our everyday life we are not concurrently reflecting on each detail of our experience. The pre-reflective world in which we live everyday is referred to in phenomenology as the *lifeworld* (van Manen, 1997). Our subjective experience within the lifeworld defines our human reality. Investigation of the lifeworld illuminates the meaning of human experience by describing the structure of an experience.

The structure of an experience, referred to as *eidōs* by Husserl (1913/1931), encompasses the invariant or essential elements necessary to constitute the general way in which a phenomenon is experienced (Polkinghorne, 1989). The present study is interested in understanding the subjective experience of the novice parent educator when faced with an unexpected interaction while facilitating group parent education, from the natural attitude perspective – within the lifeworld. The meaning of this lived-through experience lies within the novice parent educator. A phenomenological investigation of the meaning of this experience seeks to describe the essential elements of the phenomenon of facing an unexpected interaction while facilitating group parent education as a novice parent educator.

### *Descriptive Phenomenology*

In order to investigate the meaning of human experience, concrete descriptions of the lived experience are needed from the experiencer. In Husserl's philosophical approach, descriptions and analysis of lived experience were provided by the researcher. Giorgi (1997; 2003; 2009) has modified Husserl's (1913/1982) philosophical phenomenological method in order to use phenomenological principles to investigate human experience within the human science discipline of psychology, which will be referred to as the descriptive phenomenological method. The investigation of the novice parent educator's lived experience follows Giorgi's modified Husserlian approach.

The first of Giorgi's modifications presented in this section relates to the experiencer under investigation. As noted previously, in Husserl's philosophical phenomenological approach, the investigated lived experience belonged to the researcher. The use of phenomenology within a human science discipline requires that data, in the form of rich descriptions of lived experience, be obtained from others and not from the researcher (Giorgi, 2009). Participants of a phenomenological investigation typically do not have a background in phenomenology; therefore, participants are describing their lived experience from the natural attitude perspective (Giorgi, 1997). This rich description of the lived-through experience is taken as valid data to be analyzed utilizing descriptive phenomenological methods.

In order for the researcher to analyze and describe an individual's lived-through experience of a phenomenon, the researcher must set aside or bracket any pre-understandings or past experience related to the phenomenon under investigation.

This suspension of the researcher's pre-understandings, known as the *phenomenological reduction*, is important so that the researcher can remain open to and describe the phenomenon "precisely as it is given" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 240). A second modification Giorgi made to Husserl's phenomenological approach is the level in which the researcher enters into the phenomenological reduction. According to Husserl (1913/1982), the transcendental (philosophical) phenomenological reduction requires the researcher to take on an attitude that "transcends" or moves beyond human consciousness to discover the pure essence of the object or act of consciousness under investigation. However, since data are gathered from others according to Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method, consciousness belongs to the other. Therefore, the researcher assumes a scientific phenomenological reduction that takes the lived reality of the phenomenon as it presents itself to the human subject without attending to any objective reality or pre-understanding of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009).

The final modification from Husserl's philosophical phenomenological approach to Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method is in the use of *free imaginative variation*. Free imaginative variation is a method of changing aspects of the phenomena to see what is necessary to be present and what is not, in order to maintain the essence of the phenomena. "Free imaginative variation requires that one mentally remove an aspect of the phenomenon that is to be clarified in order to see whether the removal transforms what is presented in an essential way" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 69). The philosophical phenomenological analysis of lived experience utilized free imaginative variation to search for essences of a phenomenon that transcend

individual subjective experience. The descriptive phenomenological method identifies key constituent meanings that make up a general structure of the phenomenon based on descriptions of subjective experience with that phenomenon under investigation from multiple others. Free imaginative variation, in the descriptive phenomenological method, is used to determine “if the structure collapses if a key constituent is removed” (Giorgi, 2009, p. 166).

Giorgi (2009) takes a psychological perspective on the structure of the phenomenon to express the lived experiences of an individual in a way that provides general meanings identifiable to a broader audience than those providing the data. The psychological structure does not claim to be generalizable as is defined by quantitative scientific standards. Instead, the psychological structure is meant to “depict the lived experience of a phenomenon” (p. 166) in a way that is perhaps identifiable to others (Giorgi, 2009). The principles of the descriptive phenomenological method presented here will be elaborated on in the next section as they applied to the study procedures.

### *Procedures*

This section describes the procedures followed in applying the descriptive phenomenological method to the study of facing unexpected interactions as a novice parent educator. The procedures are divided into the following sections: (a) participants (b) data collection, and (c) data analysis.

### *Participants*

The participants for this study were Minnesota licensed parent educators who have facilitated group parent education in an Early Childhood Family Education

(ECFE) as a student teacher or beginning teacher (no more than three years of experience). This specific participant qualification was chosen for multiple reasons. The primary role of licensed parent educators working in ECFE is facilitating group parent education, whereas, other professionals may provide group parent education as one aspect of their multifarious position (i.e., social workers and public health nurses). In addition, this participant qualification ensured greater consistency in participants' preparation for facilitating group parent education and in the context in which the phenomenon occurred. Third, as a Minnesota licensed parent educator, I have accessibility to this population.

Seven participants were recruited via e-mail advertisements on various listservs supported by professional organizations related to parent education and accessed by parent educators. Examples of the listerves include: Family Education Network (FENMN), Minnesota Association for Family and Early Education (MNAFEE), Minnesota Licensed Parent Educators (MN\_Parent\_Ed\_List), and Minnesota Council on Family Relations (MCFR). This method of recruiting participants is one that maximizes the voluntary nature of participation. The recruitment e-mail provided a basic premise for the study and asked interested educators to contact me for further information (See Appendix A).

Prospective participants contacted me via phone, email or in person.

Respondents' fit for the study was determined by the following criteria. Participants were required to have:

- Met the qualification requirements described above, related to Minnesota teacher licensure and maximum years of experience.
- Faced an unexpected interaction while facilitating group parent education through ECFE,

- The ability to articulate his or her experience. (Colaizzi, 1978)

From those inquiries, I asked for a brief description of their unexpected interaction(s) and ensured that respondents met the additional qualifications listed above. I received several inquiries from parent educators working in family service organizations outside of ECFE who were not licensed. In these circumstances, I thanked them for their interest in participating in my study but explained to them that they did not fit the specific participant qualifications. Other respondents who were licensed parent educators working in ECFE were not accepted because they were not able to articulate specific instances where they faced unexpected interactions during group parent education.

Five participants were initially recruited to participate in the study. However, while conducting the interview, two of them were discovered to be slightly outside of the participant boundary described above. One participant was in her fourth year of facilitating group parent education at the time of the interview. These four years were not continuous, so the total years of facilitation was not realized until the further examination of her experience through the interview process. The other participant was facilitating group parent education on a variance from the state, and had not yet received her teacher license. She had completed all required coursework in preparation for her license, but needed to complete a basic competency exam (Praxis I) required by Minnesota licensed teachers in any content area, and then to submit her application for state licensure. Due to these violations of participant qualification, the interviews from those two participants were not included in the study. A second round of recruitment efforts resulted in two additional interviews. In the end, five

interviews were used for the thematic analysis and resulting description of the phenomenological experience under investigation. Each of the five participants was female; all were practicing parent educators located across the state of Minnesota.

### *Data Collection*

The study followed a *descriptive phenomenological* approach to gathering data in the form of rich descriptive text of the lived experience of facing an unexpected interaction while facilitating group parent education. Informed consent was solicited verbally from all participants after each was presented with a consent information sheet (See Appendix B). These participants were informed of their rights and responsibilities as well as of possible risks and benefits of this research.

Data were collected via face-to-face interviews with the participants. Interviews were approximately one hour in length. The interview consisted of minimal structure allowing participants to provide a sufficient research description of their experience from his or her perspective (Giorgi, 1997). Interviews began by reiterating the goal of understanding what it was like to facilitate group parent education when something unexpected happened. Participants were then asked, “can you think of a specific situation in which you had this experience and tell me about it from your perspective, how you experienced it?” Throughout the story, probes were used to get at lived experience such as, “tell me more about what that was like for you” or statements of being nervous, for example, were followed up with “You were nervous?” and pause for them to share more.

Part of the interview process for the researcher is determining how long to focus on each story before continuing on to another unexpected interaction. These

decisions are based on the researcher's observations of the connection of the description to the participant's lived experience. During my interviews, I used probes like those above to encourage participants to provide more description of what it was like for them to live through this experience. These descriptions included the thoughts or feelings they had, what they noticed, or what was happening in that moment, without reflection or evaluation. I made decisions about when to move on from a specific story when participants began making responses such as, "like I said" or when I felt I had enough information to understand that experience to move on to the next. This process continued for approximately one hour in order to capture enough lived experience while staying respectful of each individual's time.

With respect to the participants, the content they shared, and the people in their stories, interviews were conducted in a private but comfortable environment (e.g., a University building conference room and local, public library conference rooms). Rapport was established with each participant before the interview through our connection to parent education and my interest in participants' experience. Each interview was audio recorded and then transcribed into text form by a hired transcriber. Each transcript was read through while listening to the original audio recording of the interview in order to verify transcript accuracy. The verified interview text was assumed to represent a true description of the participants' lived experience and therefore valid data to analyze.

### *Data Analysis*

Giorgi (1997) outlines four steps to descriptive phenomenological data analysis: (a) reading the data as a whole, (b) breaking the data into parts, (c)

organizing and expressing the data, and (d) synthesizing the data. The transcripts were first read through completely to get a sense of the whole, or a global view. During this initial stage of the analysis, priority was on withholding my pre-understanding of the phenomenon in order to remain as open as possible to the data. Remaining in the phenomenological reduction requires a constant conscious effort to keep pre-understandings bracketed and to approach the data with a fresh perspective.

The second phase of analysis focused on parsing out segments of the text that constituted the phenomenon of facing an unexpected interaction. Each transcript was read multiple times to carefully draw out the lived experience spoken in the text. The procedure followed to determine which parts of the text were meaningful was slightly modified from the phenomenological descriptive method described by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003). Rather than marking each shift in meaning, all potentially meaningful text was marked to distinguish it from extraneous text. Features representing meaningful text included, for example, descriptions of thoughts, feelings, and observations of the lived experience of facing an unexpected interaction while facilitating group parent education. Descriptions that did not reflect this lived experience had features such as interpretations, reflections, or other unrelated information and were not included.

The next read-through focused on these sections to delineate meaning units and begin the process of transforming the participants' words into categories consistent with the discipline of education. To maintain a descriptive approach to this process, an attempt was made to draw out and elaborate on the dimensions of the experience that connected with the discipline of education without interpreting

meaning beyond what was given (Giorgi, 2009). The meaning units were numbered within the original transcripts for ease of categorizing. Each category was listed out, and the number pertaining to the relevant bracketed text was listed underneath.

Throughout the process of reading and coding these segments for meaning, some segments identified earlier in the process were found to represent multiple foci and were further segmented. Extensive time was spent going back and forth between the categories and the transcripts until the segments were fully parsed into complete thought meaning units. The process of clarifying the final constituents continued throughout the remaining phases of analysis, including the writing phase.

As constituents were created, *free imaginative variation* was employed to change aspects or parts of the phenomenon to see if it remained identifiable with the part changed or not (Giorgi, 1997, p. 242). For example, the constituent “needing to hide my personal and physiological reaction” was temporarily set aside while the structure of facing an unexpected interaction while facilitating group parent education as a novice parent educator was re-examined to determine if the phenomenon would remain intact. Without this constituent, the structure of the lived experience under investigation does not represent the tension between the reaction occurring within the educator and the attempted appearance of control to the group. Additionally, without this constituent there is a gap between being “surprised by the unexpected” and how that surprise is experienced physiologically as well as what it is like to hide the experience of surprise. Therefore, the constituent of “Needing to hide my personal and physiological reaction” was considered an essential aspect of the phenomenological structure. This procedure was completed with each of the

constituents along with a return to the original transcripts to ensure that the constituents created represented the lived experience of the participant descriptions.

### Chapter 3: Findings

The purpose of descriptive phenomenology is to understand and describe individuals' lived-through experience of a phenomenon. In this study, there was an effort to remain as close to participants' descriptions as possible throughout the analysis and reporting of findings (Dahlberg et al., 2002). According to participants' descriptions, the novice parent educator's lived experience of facing unexpected interactions constitutes intense emotional, cognitive, and physiological reactions along with an equally intense effort to hide those reactions from the group in order to maintain and balance one's professional roles as a facilitator and educator. This chapter presents the four constituents of the lived-through experience of facing unexpected interactions as a novice parent educator while facilitating group parent education.

#### *Constituent #1: Surprised by the Unexpected*

According to study participants, when faced with an unexpected interaction, the novice parent educator is in the process of facilitating a planned lesson when, *WHAM*. One or more of the parents in the group does or says something completely "out of the blue." Initially, the parent educator is completely shocked and caught off guard. This experience was illustrated often with, "Huhhhhh?!", by the interview participants. In every group parent education session there are probably events, comments, or conversations that anyone would consider unexpected, but these particular moments are so out of the ordinary that they stick with the educator. These are the moments that you would never have anticipated or predicted.

One unexpected interaction involved a mom in the group sharing the details of a conflict she had with her husband about parenting practices. The mom re-played the argument to the group, raising her voice and using profanity, to capture the full picture of the fight. Adding to the element of surprise was the fact that this was a non-separating group, which means that the young children (likely less than 2-years-old) were with an early childhood teacher on the other side of the same room. When asked to talk a little bit about what this particular unexpected interactions was like, the participant responded:

I think just the element of surprise and.... I think overwhelming, with a feeling of shock. I think I already said shock, but realizing that this mom really didn't have boundaries.

Another couple shared that they held food in their child's mouth to get him to eat it.

The following text expresses the experience of surprise that happened within the educator's mind:

When these parents were talking, my initial reaction to that situation, too, was the same, *huhhhh you are?! I don't think I said anything like that, but the alarms are sounding in my mind.*

One participant described an unexpected interaction between two parents in the group. The discussion began around the topic of raising boys versus girls, but quickly moved into a conflict of opinion between two parents. One mom shared with the group that although her husband wanted to study art and art history, her husband's father would only financially support his college education if he studied engineering. At this point, a father in the group expressed agreement with this arrangement because you cannot support yourself or your family with an art degree. Each of these parents shifted into defensive postures, engaged in a few more tense exchanges

around the topic, and then re-adjusted their postures away from each other and the group. During this unexpected interaction, the study participant describes being shocked by the comments made:

My initial reaction to her thought was, *oh that must suck* – you know, in my head - that was my thought, *that's really too bad, that sucks....* Then I know I felt kind of – a little bit shocked that somebody would say that. Not that I disagreed with him, but shocked that anybody would say it out loud – and then a little bit angry that he couldn't be more tolerant of somebody else's viewpoint.

Two of the study participants provided examples of unexpected interactions with one parent over a number of circumstances. These participants distinguished between the initial unexpected interaction and those that continued occurring over time. This was illustrated in further discussion of the situation previously described in which the participant was shocked by a mother without boundaries who shared, in an animated fashion, conflict with her husband. The first time it happened, this interaction was unexpected, as illustrated by the experience of surprise. However, as this type of interaction developed into a pattern, the parent educator was able to anticipate the occurrence. When asked, “do you remember what it was like for you the first time this happened?” The participant responded:

Shock! I think I was shocked because it was so boisterous and animated and you name it; I think I was really surprised and *where do I go with this?* The first time it happened I wasn't as on to her, so while I was so surprised to hear what I was hearing, I think it was harder for me to deal with than in the coming weeks, or the coming semester really, because I kind of could think about it in the car as I went there that day.

When asked a similar question about the lived experience of facing the first unexpected interaction of many with the same parent, another participant distinguished between her experience during her first and third year of facilitating:

Um, well first of all I kind of went *uh oh, here we go again*. Because I've had to talk to her in the past. So, I don't get uncomfortable anymore. I did the first year I worked with her.

*Constituent #2: Struggling to Hide my Reactions*

In addition to the participant descriptions of being surprised by the unexpected, further detail was provided regarding the judgmental thoughts and bodily reactions experienced throughout the unexpected interaction. An essential quality to these descriptions, however, was the containment of these reactions so they remained private. Participants made note of these thoughts and reactions being within themselves, and at times, making an effort to withhold the expression of these reactions or maintain a controlled demeanor in front of the group.

*Reactions of Judgment*

Each of the participants spoke about having a personal judgment to unexpected interactions that often consisted of judgmental thoughts related to the particular topic surrounding the unexpected interaction. When a parent shared with the group that she had been getting psychic readings and recommended the other parents in the group get psychic readings to benefit their parenting, the participant experienced a personal reaction:

She's going on and on... and I'm looking around and I'm seeing people shifting in their chairs and I'm just kind of thinking *wow, this is really far out*.

One parent educator described two different unexpected interactions involving parents holding a hand over their child's mouth in order to get the child to swallow a mouthful of food rather than spit it out. One of those situations was alluded to under constituent #1. In reaction to the other related unexpected interaction, the participant described experiencing judgmental thoughts:

Well it's hard not to judge sometimes. To be very honest, I'm thinking *oh my goodness, are you insane?*

Each of the unexpected interactions the parent educators experienced related to a parenting practice. Licensed Parent Educators have spent a lot of time thinking about their parenting philosophy, and likely have strong personal opinions about healthy, supportive parenting and unhealthy, detrimental parenting practices. The situation of the parent holding a hand over his or her child's mouth brought up personal values and beliefs about parenting that contradicted those of the parent in the group. This participant description reveals a mix of personal reactions and professional considerations as the group facilitator, along with an acknowledgement of the privacy of these thoughts:

I guess I really believe that that does borderline on abusive, so I've got my own set of feelings about that. Certain things that we hear, I think we just have to reframe it for the group to process because it's not about us; it's not about our own experience. So when these parents were talking, my initial reaction to that situation, too, was the same, *huhhhh you are?!* I don't think I said anything like that, but the alarms are sounding in my mind.

Although the parent educator is technically the professional in the room, they are also human beings just like every other person in the group. When the unexpected interaction occurs, the participants talked about being caught up in their own experience as a person rather than as a parent educator. These participants may go through their own private processing while the situation is playing out. During the unexpected conflict between two parents about paying for a child's college if they major in something that may not provide financial stability, the participant's thought process clearly portrayed the experience of being caught up in her own experience as a person:

It happened so quickly and I was processing this, *well that sucks for her and I'm surprised he said that*, and then she had already jumped back in with “we should support our children in their endeavors and whatever they want to do and not dictate their lives for them.” I was thinking, *she's right*. So I was, for a moment there, forgetting my role . . . as a facilitator and I did feel much more like a spectator, because I was so taken aback by the whole thing, that it did take me a moment to kind of remember my role.

This participant goes on to describe this experience of being caught off guard like a driver watching an accident:

I've seen parents disagree, but in the past, I've seen, “that's not how I see it; I see it this way.” More of a constructive disagreement – agree to disagree type of a viewpoint. This was very much a head to head – my way or the highway kind of a disagreement and so I was taken aback and kind of in awe – almost like the gawker slowdowns on the highway, where you see the wreck and you're kind of in awe and then you remember, *oh yes, better drive my car so I don't get in a wreck myself*. Almost that same sensation of, *oh crap, that's right, I'm supposed to be doing this here*.

As I will discuss in more detail later, although the study participants experienced judgmental thoughts, they expressed a great deal of care and consideration in their role as parent educators when determining how to respond. One participant teaches a teen parenting class at a local high school. When only two parents showed up to the class one day, both angry and refusing to talk, this participant expresses her initial judgmental thoughts and the acknowledgement of her role to empower:

My first reaction was, I think inside I probably felt a little frustrated with them, why they're pulling this attitude, but my role really is to empower them.

### *Bodily Reaction*

Facing unexpected interactions while facilitating group parent education is uncomfortable. According to my participants, when they were trying to figure out what to do during this unexpected interaction, they realized that this is an awkward moment and they felt uneasy. Their body also reacted to this uncomfortable feeling.

The participant facing the unexpected conflict between two parents in the group provided a rich description of her physiological reaction along with her effort to maintain a controlled demeanor:

I could feel my heart rate getting really high and I know that I was getting hot. I could feel it creeping up through my neck, my armpits getting sweaty, my hands getting clammy. So, it was very uncomfortable, but yet trying to keep my breathing under control and trying to keep my voice controlled as I moved it along away from that.

While forgetting the role of being a parent educator, this participant noticed that her physical position made a difference in how she appeared on the surface even though she was feeling defensive on the inside. She described the experience of facing conflict between two parents in her group as being “completely unexpected”:

I think it was good I was standing because it prevented me from being able to take in that defensive posture. . . . I think if I had been sitting, I could easily have moved into that defensive posture. . . . I know in my mind I was doing that because I forgot for a moment that I was quote “in charge” of the room and of the families and I was just – because I’d not had an experience like that before - it had never occurred to me that parents would disagree so strongly.

This participant continued to describe both her physiological response and her effort to hide this reaction from the group:

I was nervous. It did bring up some adrenalin kind of a rush but I was, I think, able to keep my voice even. I don’t remember it cracking or wavering much. I know my hands shook some, but I had papers, so I could kind of move the papers to distract from the fact that my hands were shaking so much or shaking at all and I talk with my hands a lot, so that also helps to distract from the shakiness of the hands.

*Constituent #3 Pressured to Respond but Uncertain about What to Do*

Once the unexpected interaction has occurred, the participants sensed all of the other parents looking to them to respond. One participant described this experience happening after a mom revealed that her daughter had a glass eye and she

wanted to know how to help her daughter with self-esteem. An important piece of this context is that this question was brought up in response to the parent educator's final call for questions as the class was coming to a close. The parent educator recalls that:

It really came out of the blue and everybody was looking at her and then it was all mass movement, they all swiveled their heads and looked at me and I'm like *oh*.

Participants also felt that parents were looking to them for the "right" answer in response to an unexpected question, as stated below:

It was really hard for me because everybody was looking at me wanting expert advice, but I had no clue what to say; it was unexpected.

Participants were aware of how the group might be experiencing the unexpected interaction. When they felt the group was uncomfortable, participants described a sense of pressure to respond. The participant facing an unexpected interaction involving food issues illustrates this pressure to respond:

And at that point, I think that there were a lot of eyes opening wide and obviously the parent educator needs to diffuse probably what's going on in the minds of the people listening and what's going on – what's happening between the child and the parents and what's going on in the home and probably reframe things so that they can have a different perspective and respectfully. So that too, I think any situation like that, I refer to it as like a zinger; you get a zinger and you're like *huuuuhhh!*; immediately you know, *okay I need to respectfully share some information here to let them know why it would be important to reframe from what's going on.*

Also present in this quote, is the participant's idea that the appropriate response to a "zinger" is to immediately provide information. This illuminates an interesting question about how the range of possible responses to unexpected interactions one has as a novice parent educator.

In addition to interpreting pressure from the group of parents to respond to the unexpected interaction, participants described their own feelings of responsibility, as the facilitator, to respond:

I think that the group becomes hesitant to say anything because they don't know where to go. I think they are probably having the same thoughts that I'm having but I'm the one that has the background in facilitation. . . . And so they're looking to me to provide the security to make sure the group is still where it needs to be.

When the unexpected interaction was in the form of a parent sharing with the group a parenting practice that the participant considers unhealthy, the participant expresses feeling pressure to respond by stating "So, it's out there and definitely something that needs attention."

The problem with feeling responsible for responding is that novice parent educators, despite their training, may not be able to quickly translate the tools they have into an action for a specific unexpected situation, and they have insufficient experience to have established action patterns for particular kinds of situations. In this moment, one parent educator expresses her experience of not knowing what to do when she realizes a mom had been monopolizing the group discussion for 10 minutes, talking about her child that was not a part of that particular group:

I was feeling uncomfortable. Like, *Oh gosh how am I gonna stop this, how am I gonna stop this? Oh my gosh I can't believe she's talking.* And not knowing what to do.

The anxiety experienced when faced with an unexpected interaction may also affect the parent educator's ability to respond:

Well, I usually start sweating a little bit. I think, for me, I don't know if there are other people like this, but I kind of go into brain freeze. I just can't seem to get the words out. Something happens in my head where it just sort of locks up.

According to study participants, novice parent educators may lack confidence in their ability to respond under this pressure, which contributes to their level of bodily reaction. One participant describes:

Well for me it was awkward because my confidence in my own skills is pretty small yet because this is my first year out with my license so I don't have a lot of experience to work from to know that it is going to be okay. I feel like I really have to prove myself, both to myself and to the people I'm working with, and families because I am new, so I feel like I have this big mountain to climb kind of thing. So it's awkward because I didn't have the scripts in my head yet – *okay this is what I should say or this is what I should aim to say* because I don't have a textbook that tells me, 'if the families do this, you should try these things,' because I don't have that experience to say *it worked that time, maybe it'll work again*.

One participant felt that she was not prepared for this situation through her education, and having never been in this kind of situation, she was at a loss for “the right words.” This participant describes feeling like she just had to figure out how to respond based on her own ability:

Through the student teaching and the coursework, conflict in the classroom was not something that was ever brought up or discussed and I didn't see any of that during my student teaching to have anybody else model it for me, so I was relying on my own personal abilities. Conflict in your family is very different than conflict in your classroom. You can't say what you think in the classroom as easily as you can say in your family, so it was very awkward.

*Constituent #4: Needing to Balance Educating with Protecting the Individual and the Group*

According to the study participants, when parent educators are figuring out how to respond to this unexpected interaction, they experience an overwhelming need to protect the group functioning and the individual parent(s) directly engaged in the unexpected interaction. Part of this is wanting to “save face” for the vulnerable parent who was subject to attack by another parent or the parent who expressed a

questionable parenting behavior that the group does not agree with. This need to protect was reflected in one parent educator's description of her experience with a parent who shared personal information irrelevant to the group discussion:

And so to protect the group to protect the members as individuals, to protect the group as a group, the group functioning, the group process and to protect her, I really felt like I needed to address that continuously by making comments about – telling her that while this is a really important issue and while it does have a lot of importance in the way that families function, we really need to continue to stay focused on this and continually moving it back to the group process, and hopefully validating that these things were going on somewhat; she just shared way too much.

Part of the role of protecting the individual parents and the group is providing an educational experience for the parents despite the unexpected interaction. This need to provide an educational experience is illustrated here:

It's my role to kind of diffuse everyone's feelings and make them realize that if something gets said that is kind of out of the continuum, kind of an out of bounds thing, that it will be addressed; that we're not there to just have a "coffee klatch," that we're not there to just gather and talk about anything under the sun, that we are there with the current research and the information on child development.

In trying to determine how to respond in an educational way, many questions may be running through their mind. This stream of questions is illustrated by the participant facing the unexpected interaction in which a couple shared that they were holding a hand over their child's mouth to get him to swallow his food:

Thoughts, I guess, *here we go*. We need to enlighten I think here and find out what is it that they're worried about, what's going on, are they worried that their kids won't eat or is it just frustration over what's being served or do they not have appropriate developmental expectations. Do they just not know, I mean the whole gamut of questions, I think, comes up and so my thoughts being *where do I start with this?* They seemed like they would know better I think or have some different thoughts about it, but maybe they just see it as a power struggle. They might not see all the other elements of it until we're there to ask the questions, *how might this affect the child's relationship with*

*food? How might it affect the relationship between parent and child? Those sorts of things. So, those were my thoughts.*

When this participant was asked about what she said or what happened after the parents had shared their issue with their child's eating, this participant responded:

*I think I probably shifted into *how can we add some elements of cooperation or how can we get there and what are the long-term effects?* So that they're not thinking I'm just telling them *you can't do this*.*

In addition, the parent educators experienced a need to maintain a positive relationship with each parent in the room so that the parents would want to continue voluntarily attending this particular group with this particular educator:

Looking at these gals, with their faces, they seemed almost angry. Obviously they were frustrated with other things, but they looked almost angry and I think one of the most uncomfortable things for me was I was hoping that they didn't feel angry with me.

### Summary

This chapter presented four constituents of the lived-through experience of facing unexpected interactions as a novice parent educator while facilitating group parent education. According to participants' descriptions, in addition to being surprised by the unexpected interaction, novice educators experienced judgmental thoughts and bodily reactions which they felt the need to hide from the rest of the group. After being faced with something unexpected, novice parent educators felt pressure from the group and from themselves to respond to the unexpected. However, as a novice parent educator, determining how to respond under this pressure was difficult. Study participants attributed their feeling of uncertainty in responding to a lack of confidence, feeling unprepared, freezing up in the moment, or not knowing what to do. In addition to feeling uncertain in how to respond, participants described a

need to provide an educational experience while protecting the individual(s) directly involved in the unexpected interaction from feeling vulnerable. Overall, the experience of facing an unexpected interaction as a novice parent educator was consumed by a need to hide one's reactions and be responsive to the individual participants, the group as a whole, and one's professional role as a parent educator.

## Chapter 4: Discussion

This descriptive phenomenological study explored the meaning of facing an unexpected interaction, as a novice parent educator, while facilitating group parent education. According to my study participants, the meaning of this phenomenon constitutes intense emotional, cognitive, and bodily reactions along with an equally intense effort to hide those reactions from the group in order to maintain and balance one's professional roles as a facilitator and educator. This chapter will discuss the constituents of this phenomenon in response to the literature concerning facing the unexpected, being a novice educator, and facilitating adult education. Following this discussion, questions will be raised about the concept of novelty as it relates to the parent educator and facing unexpected interactions. This chapter will conclude with study recommendations for further research, implications for parent educator preparation, and study limitations.

### *Constituent #1: Surprised by the Unexpected*

According to the participants in this study, the novice parent educator feels surprised when faced with an unexpected interaction. Participants reported feeling “shocked,” “surprised,” or “caught off guard” by what was said or what happened during these unexpected interactions. This experience of being surprised constitutes the initial moment in which the educator is faced with an unexpected interaction. Additional experiences of shock and surprise fall under constituent #2, which speaks to the personal judgments made in response to the specific unexpected interaction. The descriptions of the initial feeling of surprise in reaction to the unexpected interaction

supports others' findings that have connected surprise as an element of unexpectedness (Obear, 2000; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006).

The transcribed textual descriptions of being surprised cannot fully capture the intensity of experience expressed by participants. When saying such things as, "Huhhhh?! You are?!" eyes opened wide, hands approached the mouth or tensely grasped the table, and the pitch of the voice was raised, which is consistent with characteristics reported in the literature as *surprise tokens* or *response cries* thought to externalize an internal state (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006). In their descriptions, participants were externalizing the recalled internal state of surprise. Interestingly, in the moment of surprise, the internal state was not externalized. The parent educator made conscious efforts to keep these feelings of surprise from showing in their expression or body language.

Contradictory theories exist regarding the voluntary nature of these expressions. The Organismic framework, based upon classic evolutionary theory, asserts that expression of emotion is an instinctual and uncontrollable physiological response (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006). According to this theory, the raising of the eyebrows in response to the unexpected interaction is a reflex that enables other response tokens such as the eyes and mouth opening quickly and widely and the exaggerated inhale of breath (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006).

In contrast, the Interactional approach suggests that the expression of surprise is intentionally communicative rather than due to involuntary reflexes (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006). This conscious control of emotional expression supports participants' descriptions of this experience as intentionally contained within

themselves. From this perspective, the educator could control the expression of this emotion to intentionally not communicate the experience of surprise.

In a study exploring the use of surprise tokens as a social action, Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2006) “detach the psychology of surprise (the emotional experience of encountering an unexpected interaction) from the social expression of surprise (the public display of finding something counter to expectation)” (p. 152). This study also finds that “actions accomplished by the performance (or withholding) of surprise include the reflection and reproduction of culture.” (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006, p. 152). As it relates to the present study, culture might refer to the culture of being a facilitator of group parent education. In the role of group facilitator, the parent educator is to maintain a professional appearance, one that is not fazed by the unexpected interaction, therefore motivating the facilitator to withhold the expression of surprise tokens when faced with the unexpected interaction. This idea of withholding one’s expression relates directly to participants’ struggle to hide their personal and physiological response to the unexpected interaction represented under constituent two.

#### *Constituent #2: Struggling to Hide my Reactions*

Brookfield (1986) says that one characteristic of an exemplary instructor is to, “appear confident” (p. 133). This notion is consistent with what the novice parent educators in my study conveyed about struggling to hide their judgmental thoughts and bodily reactions to the unexpected interaction. The unexpected interaction triggered cognitive, emotional, and bodily reactions. However, these parent educators

did not want to reveal these responses, but instead, strove to maintain the appearance of a confident, professional demeanor.

This effort to “appear confident” despite one’s internal experience raises questions about why educators hold this expectation for themselves. The field of teacher education provides some theories about the socialization of teachers. Research on new teachers has consistently shown the tendency for new teachers to revert to traditional teaching practices despite professional training oriented toward liberal or progressive practices (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). Lortie (1975) suggests that a teacher’s “apprenticeship of observation,” or years of observing teachers as a student, has a greater impact on teaching practice than formal teacher training. As it relates to my study, novice parent educators may have developed the expectation that educators should appear in control even in the face of an unexpected interaction through their own apprenticeship of observation. Perhaps the culture of schooling sends a message of expert teachers unfazed by the unexpected. This message may be reinforced by cooperating parent educators, the culture of the parent education program, and parents’ expectations (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981).

While functioning in the role of parent educator when faced with an unexpected interaction, participants still exist as human beings with personal philosophies and assumptions about parenting and behavior within a group. When faced with an unexpected interaction, parent educators reported having their own thoughts and feelings about the situation. Essentially, these educators made judgments or valuations about the parenting practices or the human behavior brought out by the unexpected interaction. Obear (2000) and Landix (2005) conducted studies

exploring the experience of triggering events, or an event that stimulates an emotional reaction, in different types of group facilitation. In each of these studies, educators or facilitators were found to have personal histories or strongly held beliefs related to topics of discussion, which may influence their valuation of and ability to respond to the triggering event and those particular group members directly involved. The present study did not investigate participants' personal histories or strongly held beliefs related to parenting topics, although the Obear and Landix findings raise an interesting question about contributing factors to the experience of facing an unexpected interaction other than being a novice parent educator.

Additionally, when faced with an unexpected interaction, parent educators reported bodily responses consistent with those reported in the literature on stress management and group facilitation about how people respond in a "fight or flight" situation under stress (Obear, 2000). Participants' descriptions of bodily responses to an unexpected interaction match those reported by facilitators when triggered emotionally (e.g., getting warm, feeling their heart-rate getting really high, and feeling uncomfortable) (Landix, 2005). One participant demonstrated the struggle to hide these bodily reactions when she said:

I could feel my heart rate getting really high and I know that I was getting hot; I could feel it creeping up through my neck, my armpits getting sweaty, my hands getting clammy. It was very uncomfortable, but yet trying to keep my breathing under control and trying to keep my voice controlled as I moved it along away from that.

In this moment, the educator is consciously aware of her bodily response and intentionally monitoring her actions to appear in control.

*Constituent #3: Pressured to Respond but Uncertain about What to Do*

Another tension experienced by novice parent educators when faced with an unexpected interaction occurs because they feel pressure to respond but they may experience uncertainty in this novel, pressure-filled situation. Some of this pressure comes from the other parents in the room, when they turn to the educator to see what he or she will do with the unexpected interaction. The novice parent educator contributes to this external pressure with their internalized notion that it is the professional facilitator's responsibility to respond. However, as a novice educator facing a novel and unexpected interaction, one feels uncertain about how to respond.

Anyone with experience as a teacher or student can recall a time when something was said that caused the people in the room to pause and then turn to the instructor. The traditional notion of teacher as expert drives this tendency for students to turn to the teacher for an answer or direction about where to go with what just occurred. The participants experienced this phenomenon when faced with an unexpected interaction. As stated in chapter three, one participant described this experience happening after a mom revealed, during the final moments of the discussion, that her daughter had a glass eye and she wanted to know how to help her with self-esteem. The parent educator recalls that:

It really came out of the blue and everybody was looking at her and then it was all mass movement, they all swiveled their heads and looked at me and I'm like *oh*.

Regardless of how the educator sees her role in responding to this situation, the other parents in the group are communicating non-verbally that they see the educator's role as the one who should be the first to respond.

In addition to the pressure placed upon educators from the parents in the group, participant descriptions indicate pressure placed upon themselves to respond to the unexpected interaction. Participants felt that the professional facilitator in the room was responsible for knowing what to say or do. Literature suggests that when teachers expect themselves to have all of the answers or when they lack confidence in their ability to respond effectively they may feel anxious when faced with unexpected or triggering events (Obear, 2000).

In an investigation about the concerns of prospective students, Fuller (1969) identified a self-other dichotomy, whereby prospective students began their student teaching with concerns related to themselves and progressively moved toward a focus on other's experience. Although this study was conducted with student teachers, the findings indicate a continuum from self-focused to other-focused paralleling the continuum from novice to expert. This conceptualization supports the data reported in the present study that suggests that participants with limited experience in facing unexpected interactions seemed to focus more on their own overwhelming reaction. The participant who had the most experience as a parent educator had faced unexpected interactions in the past and reported being able to shift her focus to the educational implications of the unexpected interaction.

The tension represented in this constituent is in the contradiction between the pressure from both outside and inside forces to respond to the unexpected interaction, but as novice educators, participants did not know how to respond or what to do. According to the literature, there are two explanations for this experience of not knowing what to do. Obear (2002) studied social justice educators' response to

triggering events. These educators had various years of experience so the Obeare study was not limited to novice educators. Obeare (2002) suggests that when educators are triggered, they “may respond in less effective ways that undermine the goals and objectives of the session,” (p. 10). This theory is supported by participants’ descriptions of feeling put on the spot or caught off guard. This experience does not necessarily speak to a lack of preparation or knowledge needed to respond to this unexpected interaction. Instead, this points to the notion of having “stage fright,” which is characterized similarly to the experience described by one participant:

I kind of go into brain freeze. I just can’t seem to get the words out. Something happens in my head where it just sort of locks up.

Another theory that speaks more to the lack of knowledge and experience is the literature in teacher education on the novice educator. A growing body of research distinguishes the novice educator from the experienced and suggests that novice educators are less skilled at responding to the unexpected or unpredictable messiness of the classroom (Kennedy, 2005; Berliner, 1987; Shulman, 1986; Scherff, 2008; Sternberg, 1995). Merriam and Caffarella (1999) propose “experts bring more knowledge to solving problems... and do so more effectively than novices. In addition, experts are able to solve problems faster and in a more economical way, have stronger self-monitoring skills, and are able to view and solve problems at a deeper level than novices” (p. 206). Clearly, the novice educator is disadvantaged in her ability to traverse the unpredictable classroom terrain.

*Constituent #4: Needing to Balance Educating with Protecting the Individual and the Group*

Aurbach (1968) suggests, “Part of the parent educator’s role is to balance feelings with facts” (p. 92). Participants’ descriptions of responding to an unexpected

interaction revealed tension in this balance. A desire was evident to maintain the group dynamics and prevent the members involved in the unexpected interaction from feeling vulnerable. However, this was difficult to accomplish while also responding to the unexpected interaction in a way that would promote learning and growth. According to Bowman (1999), group leaders can fall into what is known as the “too nice” pitfall in which a group member might be allowed to dominate a group discussion because the leader fears interrupting would be perceived as rude. This “too nice” pitfall may relate to the difficulty participants faced in determining how to respond to the unexpected interaction in a way that was educational but also protected the individual and the group. Bowman (1999) warns that this tendency to be nice and pleasant “can undermine the quality group experience” and suggests “leading requires active involvement in determining the course of the group” (p. 4). Bowman does not address contributing factors, such as level of experience as a group leader to the tendency to fall into helping pitfalls, although this might be an interesting question to explore considering the relevancy of the “too nice” pitfall to the novice parent educator’s experience described by participants in this study.

Literature on facilitating adult learning (including parents) supports the tensions described by participants in the present study (Aurbach, 1968; Brookfield, 1986). Brookfield (1986) proposes that encouraging adults to examine their beliefs and practices without threatening the person to such an extent as to stifle growth is “perhaps the most difficult of all pedagogic balances to strike” (p. 136). Participants’ descriptions of living through this tension are characterized by consuming and contradictory thoughts about how to proceed in a way that accomplishes this balance.

Several unique characteristics of adult education in general, and parent education specifically, may contribute to this tension. First, in adult education, the group leader or educator as well as the learners are adults. The adult learner brings his or her own expertise and years of experience to the learning environment (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Second, adult education is often not mandatory, and in many cases, adult learners pay a fee to participate in the learning environment. Therefore, the adult learner can choose to leave the learning environment at any time if the experience is unsatisfactory. Finally, the topic of parenting can be controversial and emotion-laden. Each parent brings his or her beliefs, perspectives, and practices to the group. The parent educator, therefore, has a challenging role of encouraging parent growth and development in a way that is sensitive and responsive to each parent and to the group as a whole.

According to Aurbach (1968), individual contributions by parents “impinge on the leader’s consciousness” (p. 142) because they may or may not contribute to the task of supporting parent growth and development. The individual contributions or interpersonal interactions characterized as unexpected threw participants off task regardless of the relevance of the contribution to the discussion. Perhaps this challenging role of the parent educator is intensified for the novice when faced with an unexpected interaction because of their inflexibility in teaching (Berliner, 1988) and concerns about content adequacy (Fuller, 1969).

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

This study sought to investigate the lived experience of novice parent educators. Novice in this study was defined as someone with no more than three years

of experience facilitating group parent education. Each of the four constituents presented and discussed above make up the general structure of the phenomenon according to the participants in this study. However, differences in the way participants described their experience suggest that parent educators at the end of their third year of facilitating may no longer be considered novice parent educators and that the phenomenon of facing an unexpected interaction may vary with years of experience as a parent educator.

Participants in their first or second year of facilitating were more focused on how uncomfortable they were and not knowing what to do. A participant in her first year of facilitating parent education illuminates an intensity of emotionality when elaborating on her use of the term awkward:

Well for me it was awkward because my confidence in my own skills is pretty small yet because this is my first year out with my license so I don't have a lot of experience to work from to know that it is going to be okay. I feel like I really have to prove myself, both to myself and to the people I'm working with, and families because I am new, so I feel like I have this big mountain to climb kind of thing. So it's awkward because I didn't have the scripts in my head yet – okay this is what I should say or this is what I should aim to say because I don't have a textbook that tells me, if the families do this, you should try these things, because I don't have that experience to say it worked that time, maybe it'll work again. So just awkwardness with my own skill level, confidence with my own skill level.

When an unexpected interaction occurred during the third year of facilitating, the parent educator expressed discomfort but was more focused on using this moment to promote learning and growth, particularly for the parents directly involved. This participant used the term “here we go again” when describing an unexpected interaction she faced during her third year of facilitating. However, this participant

indicates that her experience of the unexpected was quite different when facing an unexpected interaction with the same parent during her first year:

Um, well first of all I kind of went *uh oh, here we go again*. Because I've had to talk to her in the past. So, I don't get uncomfortable any 2more. I did the first year I worked with her.

Participant descriptions suggest a continuum of intensity of emotionality, which varies based on experience with an unexpected interaction. This continuum ranges from highly intensive emotionality for the educator who has no experience with unexpected interactions to low intensity of emotionality for educators with more experience facing unexpected interactions. In a study of social justice educators' reactions to triggering events, Obeir (2000) found "a relationship between the ends of the continuum [intensity of reaction] and the length of experience of the educators" (p. 193).

A veteran children's teacher wrote an article about coming to expect the unexpected (Hill, 1994). She describes a paradox of familiar–unfamiliar because the content may be unexpected but the occurrence of something unexpected happening as a teacher of children has become expected or familiar. Therefore, parent educators with more years of experience may continue to face unexpected situations, but the familiarity with experiencing the unexpected may defuse the intensity of emotionality represented in the constituents of this phenomenon. With experience, parent educators learn ways of handling these situations, they are more flexible in their ability to respond to unexpected interactions, and this gives them confidence. Further investigation is needed to substantiate the idea of a continuum of intensity of

emotionality for each constituent based on exposure to or familiarity with unexpected interaction.

The findings of this study are suggestive of the transition out of the novice stage of development for parent educators happening around the end of the third year of practice. Future studies should explore further this idea of parent educator stages of development. Additional studies on parent educators' experience with unexpected interactions should include parent educators with various years of experience and familiarity with facing unexpected interactions.

The data raises another question concerning the difference between constituents representing the phenomenon of facing unexpected interactions from other situations in facilitating that may be characterized as difficult or challenging. This is a valid question and one that requires further investigation. The participants in this study described each of their lived experiences as unexpected precluding any clear differentiation between unexpected and other related interactions that may not be characterized as unexpected. The notion of a continuum of intensity of emotionality presented above may relate here as well.

One possible difference between unexpected interactions and challenging situations is that unexpected interactions are always challenging, but that challenging situations are not always unexpected. The differences may be in the intensity of each constituent describing the phenomenon of facing unexpected interactions. This difference may be particularly evident in constituent #1: being surprised by the unexpected. Perhaps when educators are faced with challenging interactions that are not unexpected, they are surprised because we can never completely anticipate

individual contributions, but the experienced parent educator may not be “thrown off track” as described by participants in this study. Future studies should investigate further the unique phenomenon of unexpected interactions against those that are just challenging or difficult.

### *Implications for Parent Educator Preparation*

Within the current study, novice parent educators described multiple tensions that impaired their ability to respond to unexpected interactions in a way that encourages parent learning and growth. Participants in this study experienced judgmental thoughts about the parenting practices or the human behavior brought out by the unexpected interaction. According to Obear (2000) and Landix (2005), group facilitators’ personal histories or strongly held beliefs related to topics of discussion may have influenced facilitators’ reaction and response to a triggering event. This finding suggests that a critical examination of personal histories and beliefs relevant to the type of education provided may help educators react and respond to future triggering events more effectively. Perhaps a critical examination of personal histories with and beliefs about parents and parenting practices would help the novice parent educator focus less on his or her personal reaction and more on responding effectively to the unexpected interaction. Parent educator preparation programs can play a vital role in guiding parent education students through this critical self-examination.

Parent educators also noted being shocked and caught off guard by unexpected interactions because they had not anticipated the occurrence of such an event. Literature in parent education that speaks to difficult or challenging moments

in group parent education focuses on providing guidelines for managing these situations. This reinforces the need for preparation of novice educators that prepares them for anticipating unexpected interactions and becoming familiar with the experience of facing unexpected interactions in order to perhaps better utilize the facilitation techniques described in the literature they have read about, practiced, and learned during their preparation.

The novice stage of educator development is unavoidable, but understanding what it is like to be a novice educator prepares persons at this stage for what to expect. Anticipating unexpected interactions may lessen the intensity of emotionality in reaction to these situations. Understanding the novice educator's experience has implications for parent educator preparation programs as well. By understanding how the novice parent educator experiences unexpected interactions, teacher educators and trainers can better prepare and support future parent educators for their work with parents. Moreover, this study adds to the literature illuminating the complex role of the parent educator. In order for the field of parent education to raise standards for parent educator preparation, literature needs to demonstrate not only the need for this work but also the complex and demanding responsibilities of the parent educator.

#### *Limitations*

Although this study offers a unique contribution to the field of parent education by focusing on the parent educator, it also has limitations. First, interviewing only Minnesota licensed parent educators working in an Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program may limit the relevancy of the findings from this study. A state teacher license in parent education is unique only to

Minnesota. Additionally, ECFE is a unique parent education program in that ECFE (a) is accessible to all families with children between the ages of birth to kindergarten entrance, (b) is located in nearly every school district across the state of Minnesota, and (c) requires parent educators to hold a state teaching license in parent and family education.

A second limitation of this study is that the results of this study are based on five interviews. Although, a structure of the phenomenon was elucidated, the small number of participants may limit the applicability. Phenomenology as a methodology does not seek generalizability in the positivistic sense of representing the experience to as much of the population as possible. However, phenomenology does seek to describe a phenomenon in a way that touches the experience of others. A third limitation may have been in inclusion of participants with three years of experience facilitating group parent education, which may have modified the phenomenon of the novice parent educator's lived experience facing unexpected interactions. The final limitation presented here relates to my own level of experience conducting phenomenological research. My novice-level of experience conducting phenomenological interviews may have limited my ability to draw out rich descriptions of lived experience from my participants.

### Conclusion

Parent education programs like those in Minnesota have acknowledged the complex array of competencies needed to provide high-quality education and support for today's parents. This study contributes to two components of the challenging aspect of facilitation – being a novice educator and facing unexpected interactions.

This study provides insight into what it is like for a facilitator to face these challenging, difficult, disruptive, and problematic situations. This study adds a layer to this discussion by looking at the unexpected nature of these interactions for the novice parent educator. The findings provide insight into a potential distinction between the experience of interactions that are unexpected and challenging versus interactions that may be challenging but are no longer unexpected. Understanding what it is like to facilitate group parent education from the novice educators' perspective contributes to needed research illuminating the complexity of the parent educator's role as they touch the lives of parents, families, and children.

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Appendix A  
Recruitment Email

**Recruitment email: Round One**

New Parent Educators Wanted:

For Participation in a Study About the Experience of Facilitating Unexpected Parent Group Interactions!

Are you a newly licensed parent educator in Minnesota with less than three years of experience? Has an interaction occurred during group parent education that you did not expect? If so, I would like a chance to speak with you about your experience.

Examples of unexpected interactions might include, a parent saying or doing something unexpected, an interaction between two or more parents that you did not expect, or an interaction involving you and one or more parents that you did not expect. This experience could have occurred during your student teaching, while subbing, or with your own group of parents during a parent discussion time that you were facilitating.

Participation will involve a one-hour interview regarding this unexpected interaction.

By sharing your experience, you will be a part of one of the first studies about the parent educator. The interview time and location will be scheduled at your convenience. I am happy to travel anywhere in the state of Minnesota. For more information and to participate in this study, please contact: Heather Cline at (612) 624-1294 or, [cline048@umn.edu](mailto:cline048@umn.edu).

**Recruitment email: Round Two**

1. Are you a licensed parent educator?

2. Have you been working as a parent educator for 1, 2, or 3 years?
3. Have you had something unexpected happen while facilitating group parent education?

If you answered "yes" to all of the questions above, I would love to speak to you about your unexpected experience.

I am conducting a study about the parent educator's experience with the unexpected. By participating in this study you will contribute to expanding research in the field of parent education.

Participation will involve a one-hour interview about your unexpected experience(s).

The interview time and location will be scheduled at your convenience. For more information and to participate in this study, please contact: Heather Cline at (612)

695-1899 or, [cline048@umn.edu](mailto:cline048@umn.edu).

## Appendix B

### Consent Form

#### **Consent Information Sheet**

Experiencing the Unexpected while Facilitating Group Parent Education

You are invited to be interviewed for a study about your experiences of facilitating unexpected interactions during group parent education. You were selected as a possible participant because you have indicated that you have had something unexpected happen within or between parent group members related to parenting or family life, while facilitating group parent education. Please read this form and ask any questions you might have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Heather Cline, a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Minnesota.

#### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to understand what it is like for new parent educators to facilitate group parent education when something unexpected has occurred.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in one or two interviews, each about an hour in length. The interview will be conducted in a quiet place that is agreeable to you (for example, a conference room at a coffee shop). The interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed. No identifying information will be collected or used on the tapes or transcripts.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

The study has a minimal risk. You may experience some degree of discomfort in speaking about your unexpected experience. If at any point you feel you do not want to answer a question, you may choose not to answer. You may also choose to stop the interview at any point.

#### **Confidentiality**

The record of this study will be kept private. In my Master's thesis or any report published, I will not include any information that would make it possible to identify any of the research participants. The interview tapes and transcripts will be stored securely and only I will have access to them. All the tapes and transcripts will be destroyed after three years.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision about whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationship with the University.

#### **Contacts and Questions**

The researcher conducting this study is Heather Cline. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact Heather Cline, 245 Peik Hall, 159 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, telephone 612.624.1294, e-mail [cline048@umn.edu](mailto:cline048@umn.edu). If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk with someone other than the researcher,

you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware Street SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, telephone 612.625.1650.

***You may keep this copy of information for your records.***