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Community Engaged Parent Education: Strengthening Civic Engagement Among Parents and Parent Educators

We introduce Community Engaged Parent Education as a model for civic engagement in parent education. In Community Engaged Parent Education, the parent educator weaves the public dimensions of parenting into the everyday practice of group parent education. It is not a curriculum but a community-collaborative way of teaching all parenting topics by connecting parents' personal concerns to public issues. We describe the origins, principles, and core practices of this approach. Then we present evaluation data demonstrating that parent educators can learn to implement this approach to parent education, and that parents respond with a variety of forms of civic engagement.

In the half century since Orville Brim organized knowledge about parent education in his classic book *Education for Child Rearing*, parent educators have become a distinct profession working to help parents have the knowledge and skills to raise their children well in today's world (Brim, 1959). Although most parent education literature has focused on developmental and familial aspects of parenting, there also has been attention to the larger social, economic, and cultural forces that create the ecology of parenting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Myers-Walls & Myers-Bowman, 1999). As Goddard, Myers-Walls, and Lee (2004) have observed, rapid societal and even global changes are altering the landscape of parenting and, therefore, of parent education.

This paper introduces and evaluates Community Engaged Parent Education (CEPE), an approach that builds on insights in the field about the role of parents as members of communities and the larger world. In CEPE, the parent educator interweaves the personal and public dimensions of parenting when working with parent groups. It is not a specialized curriculum but a way of teaching all topics in parent education. We begin with the origins of this model and the principles and practices of CEPE. Then, we present data from a demonstration project on this approach to parent education.

CEPE emerged from the Families and Democracy Model, which emphasizes the importance of civic engagement to strengthen family life and

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the need to transcend traditional provider or consumer models of professional service delivery (Doherty & Carroll, 2002; Doherty & Mendenhall, 2006; Doherty, Mendenhall, & Berge, 2009). There have been 14 community initiatives in the Families and Democracy Project (in health care, the work is called Citizen Health Care). Projects have ranged from the Partners in Diabetes project for the engagement of individuals and families as producers of health care to the Putting Family First Project in which families and professionals engaged to address the problem of overscheduled kids and underconnected families (Doherty & Anderson, 2005). This paper describes the initiative in parent education.

Origins of CEPE

The role of community concerns in parent education in the United States can be traced to the beginning of organized parent education efforts. As early as 1815, ''maternal associations'' met regularly to discuss childrearing problems and improve child-rearing practices. The improvement of childrearing practices could, they believed, eliminate corrupt behavior in society (Brim, 1959; National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1947). By the mid-1800s, informal discussion groups gave way to collaborative, formal efforts between church and state to help ensure that children were raised according to standards that would enhance the community at large (Duncan & Goddard, 2005; Fein, 1980). The land grant university system enacted into law by the Morrill Act in 1862 and the subsequent passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914 established a system for carrying out community parent education programs by ''taking the university to the people'' through hired agents (Rasmussen, 1989, p. vii). Belief in the newly developing science of child development also created interest in forming community groups for the self-instruction of mothers. In 1897, several hundred of these ''child study'' groups formed the National Congress of Mothers, a forerunner of the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA); (National Congress of Parents and Teachers).

By the 1920s, the Progressive Era ideology of public responsibility for all children was challenging the private orientation toward childrearing that had dominated during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. John Dewey's widely accepted social philosophy stressed parents' and educators' responsibility to the larger society and called them to stimulate individuals to ''conceive of themselves from the standpoint of the welfare of the group''(Dewey, 1897, pp. 3–4; Florin & Dokecki, 1983). This way of thinking broadened the orbit of parent education beyond the private family to the best interests of all children in society. Parent discussion groups such as those sponsored by the PTA, included instructions for mothers on their political and social responsibility. The PTA urged women to adopt a role of citizen-activist because collective political participation by mothers was ''essential to the well-being of children'' (Schlossman, 1983, p. 9). Political education and action were so central that any definition of parent education that did not include political action was considered ''merely self-serving''(Schlossman, 1978). The Progressive era had another strong current–reverence for expert knowledge–that cut at cross purposes with the emphasis on grassroots citizen work (Boyte, 2004). As social reform movements waned in the aftermath of World War I and concerns grew about family breakdown, the new science of child development knowledge came to be seen as the pathway to raising successful children (Schlossman, 1983). The earlier vision of parent education as a method to promote political action and social reform (especially on behalf of the poor) virtually disappeared. Parent education shifted to a middle-class, individualistic movement, committed to transmitting empirically based child-development knowledge (Boyte; Schlossman, 1978).

As the field of parent education grew rapidly in the mid- to late 20th century, it focused on making the world better through the work of university-trained professional experts who would ''generate new knowledge and pass it on to families in the community'' (Doherty & Beaton, 2000, p. 319). The strength of this approach lay in the use of experts who could provide families with knowledge to effectively address problems when experiential knowledge was relatively lacking or when an objective view was needed to clarify a highly controversial issue. Its weakness was that it neglected the role of parents as citizens or builders of the communities in which they raise their children, and not as consumers of professional services. And even from a research perspective, without the collaboration of communities and families in the research process, the information disseminated from researchers risked becoming separated

from the real needs and issues facing families (Duncan & Goddard, 2005; Lerner, 1995).

In the past two decades, a new model of parent education has been emerging. Scholars have increasingly argued that effective parent education results from a family and community-collaborative approach to producing scientific knowledge and addressing family issues(Doherty 2000; Lerner, 1995; Myers-Walls & Myers-Bowman, 1999). In this way of working, families and professionals ''become partners in identifying strengths and needs and in mobilizing to address identified problems'' (Duncan & Goddard, 2005). The approach reflects a renewed recognition that communities are integral to parent education because they affect parents' capacity to raise their children (Connell, Kubisch, Schorr, & Weiss, 1995; Doherty & Anderson, 2005). Likewise, citizen participation and community engagement are necessary to address the social problems that undermine parenting(Wandersman & Florin, 2000).

The Families and Democracy Project provided the framework for the current project in which parent education professionals partnered with families in a democratic process of identifying and addressing social problems (Doherty & Carroll, 2002; Doherty & Mendenhall, 2006). The Families and Democracy Project grew out of the Public Work model of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at the University of Minnesota (Boyte & Kari, 1996). Public work is defined as ''sustained effort by a mix of people who solve public problems or create goods, material or culture, of general benefit'' (Boyte, 2004, p. 5). In this way of viewing citizenship, people see themselves as co-builders of a democratic society, not simply as customers, clients, voters, protestors, or volunteers.

Development of the Families and Democracy Project was influenced by initiatives that took root in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s. These were not traditional activist groups speaking out for the disadvantaged. Rather, community organizers attempted to restore local democracy and accountability by reclaiming the capacity of communities and families to organize themselves to take action on issues in their own communities. Contemporary versions of the Industrial Areas Foundation project created by Alinsky (1946) in the 1940s have influenced the Public Work Model and the Families and Democracy Project through a focus on listening to families to determine what is most important to them, mobilizing families around a problem before generating action solutions, discovering what families' resources can be brought to bear, and continually identifying and developing new leaders in communities (Warren, 2001).

Goal, Principles, and Core Practices of CEPE

The goal of CEPE is to develop the capacity of parents for citizen deliberation and action on public issues related to families' and children's well-being. In practice, in the parenting groups, the main focus is on deliberation about public issues as they interface with personal parenting concerns. Personal and collective action sometimes emerges out of these deliberations, but action is not expected out of any particular conversation.

The main principle of this work is that all personal parenting concerns, without exception, have public dimensions. Public dimensions are defined as all societal factors influencing children and families–including neighborhood, economic, political, cultural, religious, institutional, and environmental factors. CEPE aims to take seriously the public dimensions of parenting by asserting that comprehensive parent education should include the public dimension along with the personal dimension.

CEPE includes four other central ideas: First, parents can influence the world in which their children are growing. Second, parent educators can partner with parents in naming and deliberating on challenges that arise in the public sphere and identify ways to address these challenges. Third, parent educators can promote the skills of democracy through facilitating conversations where all parents have a voice, diverse perspectives are respected, and public issues are examined and addressed collaboratively. Four, providing this space and opportunity for parents requires an intentional educational process that goes beyond the traditional training of parent educators.

We have identified three main skills for parent educators to learn and practice in this work. *Surfacing* public themes involves engaging parents in identifying and articulating public issues related to children and families. Through surfacing, parent educators direct parents' attention to public themes related to their personal parenting concerns. *Deliberation* involves facilitating the

exploration of the complex ways in which public issues influence personal parenting and parents influence their world. *Encouraging citizen action* involves activating families ''as builders of their world'' to address the issues explored in the deliberation process. Citizen actions can be done either individually by parents or collectively by parent groups or communities. Individual citizen actions may include gathering information on an issue, discussing public issues with family and friends, joining community groups already working on an issue, or contacting community leaders and public officials. Collective actions may be short-term projects such as working together as a group of parents to help reduce pesticides in public playground lawn areas. Long-term action projects are those where a citizen parent group meets over time, explores a problem, defines their goals, seeks input from other interested citizens, formulates a plan, and implements it over time.

These skills take considerable preparation and practice for parent educators. The first step is for parent educators to learn to choose questions and bring information that open up the community or public dimensions of traditional parenting topics. For example, when discussing sleep and young children, the parent educator would not only cover the basics of children's needs for sleep and standard bedtime strategies, but would also open up the conversation to how larger social forces affect bedtime and children's sleep. The educator might ask this surfacing question: ''What obstacles to sleep come from outside the home–from the broader world we live in?'' Within a short time, parents are apt to generate a list of issues such as parents' work schedules, the scheduling of children's activities, school start schedules that do not reflect children's biological clocks, and many others. In this way, the discussion moves beyond the traditional focus on personal parenting concerns (where there might be only a nod to external forces) to include the public dimension. Even if there is not extensive deliberation on the public forces or a specific action step emerging from this conversation, parents are likely to develop a more complex view of the challenge and feel less as if it is only their personal problem.

Here is an illustration of a surfacing question that led to deliberation and then citizen action. In an Early Childhood Family Education program, the parent educators asked parents in every class this general question, ''What community issues impact your family?'' The comments from parents were compiled and returned to the parenting classes in a handout. After they perused the list, parents were asked, ''Do you see any issue here that you would like to work on?'' *Deliberation* began in one class when one mother mentioned her commitment to work on the problems at Douglas Park, a small park near her home where teenagers were committing nuisance crimes and where there was more serious vandalism and possibly drug traffic. She did not feel safe having her children use the playground; other parents in the group echoed this feeling. The mother added that she had been calling the police and the park board but had received no response. The other parents in the group appreciated her individual actions but decided it would be more effective to work collaboratively, bringing neighbors together to talk about the park situation. Their *citizen action* began with making and distributing flyers for their meeting and inviting the police to come discuss possible solutions. The meeting generated additional actions: regular parent-child play dates at the park, a block party for neighbors to meet each other and the neighborhood teens, planned summer activities such as a weekly free soccer camp, and ''art in the park'' projects. Families joined together in a block club and continue to meet to address issues of neighborhood safety.

As noted earlier, most conversations in this community-collaborative approach to parent education do not lead to direct action and certainly not to collective action. Instead, the process involves surfacing and deliberating on one issue after another in classes over many months (a process we call ''weaving threads'') as parents learn to think and speak about the public dimensions of their concerns and consider the well-being of all children in the community. Sometimes an issue sparks deeper concern and lends itself to action by individual parents or a group of parents. The parent educator encourages this energy of parents for action when it arises and crystallizes into a plan.

The CEPE Demonstration Project

The overall purpose of the CEPE Demonstration Project was to determine whether parent educators could learn this new process and how parents would respond to it. The project was carried out from January 2005 to January 2008,

with three specific objectives. The first objective was to develop the capacity of the participating parent educators to engage parents in reflection on public issues related to children and families and teach them the skills of civic dialog. Development of the model over 6 years made it clear that this process is best accomplished through mentoring rather than traditional workshop training, which is not sufficient for the kind of developmental process required for this work. In CEPE, mentoring allows for ongoing, face-to-face coaching by an experienced mentor as parent educators develop CEPE skills and a new identity as a citizen professional working alongside fellow citizens in the public domain. For parent educators, internalizing the identity and skills of a ''citizen professional'' cannot be accomplished through traditional episodic workshop training methods alone.

Thus, the second objective was to develop and evaluate a mentoring approach for developing parent educators' capacity. The third objective was to develop the capacity of parents for citizen deliberation and action. Six seasoned parent educator mentors worked to develop the project, provided the training for parent educators in the project, and participated in the evaluation process. The project was funded primarily by the McKnight Foundation with additional support from the Bremer Foundation.

Demonstration Project Participants

To recruit potential parent educators into the CEPE project, an invitation was sent to all licensed parent educators teaching in Early Childhood Parent Education (ECFE) programs in Minnesota. ECFE, which is offered in almost every school district and attended by about 250,000 families each year, has a history of engaging parents in collaborative learning in parent education groups. A group of 31 parent educators from across the state's ECFE program volunteered to join the intern CEPE group. All the participants had completed Bachelor's or Master's degrees in ECFE prior to becoming parent educators. They ranged widely in experience from fresh parent educators to over 25 years of experience in parent education, but all the interns had been teaching for 7 or more years. One of the parent educators was White, Hispanic. All the other interns and mentors were White, non-Hispanic. All interns completed CEPE training for 1 year, and 28 completed the second year.

Over the 2-year period, these educators collectively taught group classes for 4,099 parents of children aged 0–4 years. The estimated percentage of low-income parents who participated was 25%. Criteria for determining low-income status were obtained from the ECFE program and included whether parents reported an annual income of $30,000 or less, were exempted from paying for ECFE classes, received free or reduced lunches or any combination of these. Five of the classes involved immigrant Hmong and Hispanic populations.

During the first year of training, interns received one-to-one mentoring each week via email, phone, or in person from one of the six seasoned Community Engaged Parent Educator mentors. They also participated in regional group meetings where they received training and instruction in small groups. In addition, two statewide training meetings were held to disseminate materials and provide training to the entire group of interns. During the second year of training, interns continued to receive mentoring via email, phone, or in person on a bimonthly basis, participated in regional groups or virtual on-line discussion groups with mentors, and received additional training in at least two larger statewide meetings. Training materials included a Handbook of CEPE and demonstration DVDs, which are available at www.CommunityEngagedParentEducation.org.

Evaluation of the CEPE Project

Evaluation of the CEPE Project began with a logic model addressing three research questions that stemmed from the study's objectives. Because the project was unique in its goal and focus, new assessment tools for multiple sources, including parents, parent educators, mentors, and observers were developed. At the end of the first year of the project, outcomes from each of these evaluation tools were evaluated and used to guide changes in the mentoring process during the second year. This formative evaluation process complemented outcome evaluation and enabled improvements to be implemented while the project was ongoing. At the end of the second year, another formal outcome evaluation was performed using the developed tools.

Evaluation of First Research Question. Mentor evaluations and intern self-evaluations were used to evaluate the first research question: To what extent did the CEPE Project develop the capacity of participating parent educators to engage parents in reflection on public issues related to children and families and teach them the skills of civic dialog? Measures were administered after the first and second years of training to compare development of knowledge and skills across the 2 years. The measures were not used at baseline (prior to the beginning of training) because the interns at that time had no background knowledge of the language and skills of this approach on which to rate themselves. Instead, the assessment procedure involved parent educators retrospectively rating their baseline knowledge and skills. For consistency of evaluation procedures, the mentors evaluated the intern-parent educators in the same way: At the end of Year 1 they rated interns' baseline competency and then Year 1 competency. At the end of Year 2, both interns and mentors rated changes from Year 1 to Year 2.

We decided to use this approach after discovering that interns had to learn and practice the skills, say, in facilitating deliberation about public issues, before understanding what the skill set actually involves and being able to rate their abilities. Some newly recruited parent educators came to the project assuming they were more proficient in the public domain of parent education than they later realized was the case. A ''response-shift bias'' can occur when participants develop a deeper understanding of the constructs they are being measured on over time and conclude that their pretest evaluations were not accurate, thus invalidating pretest and post-test comparisons (Howard & Dailey, 1979). Therefore, we did not use baseline self-evaluations of CEPE prior to participation.

Mentor evaluations of interns after Year 1 asked mentors to rate each assigned intern on these dimensions: understanding of the philosophy and core ideas of CEPE; understanding of skills and ability to apply them; ability to identify the community dimensions of parenting issues and ability to practice effective CEPE and the intern's *sense of identity as a citizen professional* working with other citizens on matters of public concern. Ratings for each item ranged from 1 = *very limited* to 10 = *very well*. The mentors were then asked to rate the intern on specific skills through the following question: ''Please rate your intern on the following skills: *Prepared Lesson Planning, Environment, Ritualized Practices, Surfacing Skills, Deliberation Skills,* and *Encouraging Action Skills.''* Each skill received its own rating ranging from 1 = *very limited* to 10 = *very well*. There were two ratings for each question: a retrospective rating for baseline, and a rating of current knowledge and skill. The same items were used in the evaluation after Year 2 with the additional statement at the end of each question: ''Last year you gave the score of___. Using that as the base score, please indicate where you see your intern now.'' This allowed for a comparison of progress made in Year 1 relative to Year 2.

The intern's self-evaluation after Year 1 asked about the same dimensions beginning with the question, ''Rate your *understanding of the philosophy and core ideas of Community Engaged Parent Education*.'' The four questions that followed asked about the same aspects evaluated through the mentor evaluation, and the ratings similarly ranged from 1 = *very limited* to 10 = *very well*. The interns were then asked to rate themselves on the specific skills through the following question, ''Please rate yourself on the following skills: *Prepared Lesson Planning, Environment, Ritualized Practices, Surfacing Skills, Deliberation Skills,* and *Encouraging Action Skills.''* Similar to the mentor evaluation, each skill received its own rating ranging from 1 = *very limited* to 10 = *very well*. Each item was rated for baseline and current status. The same items were used in the evaluation after Year 2 with the additional statement at the end of each question: ''Last year you gave the score of___. Using that as the base score, please indicate where you see yourself now.''

Evaluation of Second Research Question. Intern evaluations of one-to-one mentoring, regional group meetings, and statewide training meetings after Year 1 were used to evaluate the second research question: To what extent did the mentoring approach develop parent educators' capacity to provide CEPE? One-to-one mentoring was evaluated through a series of questions beginning with, ''How much has the one-to-one mentoring contact improved your understanding of the philosophy and core ideas, facilitated the process of seeing yourself as a citizen professional, improved your understanding of Community Engaged Parent Education skills and ability to apply them (preparation, surfacing

skills, deliberation, transition to action skills), given you the opportunity to participate in co-creating Community Engaged Parent Education, provided you a safe place for exploring Community Engaged Parent Education issues and challenges?'' And finally, ''Overall how helpful has the one-to-one mentoring contact been in your development as a Community Engaged Parent Educator?'' Ratings could rate from 1 = *not at all* to 6 = *a great deal*. A similar set of questions evaluated the effectiveness of the regional group meetings and the statewide training meetings. After Year 2 all the same items were used with the additional statement at the end of each question: ''Last year you gave the score of___to indicate how helpful this was during the first year of the project. Please indicate how helpful mentoring was during the second year.''

Evaluation of Third Research Question. Parent educator reports and parent self-reports of parent citizen action were used to evaluate the third research question: To what extent did CEPE develop the capacity of parents for citizen deliberation and action? After each 6 months, interns were asked to ''list *any citizen actions* taken in class or that parents took outside of class.'' Examples included evidence of parents researching issues outside of class, discussing public issues raised in class with family and friends outside of class, contacting civic leaders to discuss issues raised in class or gather information about issues, or organizing collective action around an issue. After the lists were gathered, the actions were categorized as follows: *Evidence of In-Class Deliberation, Evidence of Deliberation Outside of Class, Evidence of Outside of Class Research on Public Issues, Evidence of Deliberation with Civic Leaders, Evidence of Civic Action,* and *Evidence of Civic Personal Responsibility.*

Parents responded to the following questions: (a) Did your parent education class address the societal/community dimensions of parenting concerns? (b) Do you think that discussing and thinking about the societal/community dimensions of parenting was valuable to you? Why or why not? (c) Have you, as a result of class discussions, talked to someone outside of class about a societal/community dimension of any of your parenting concerns? (d) Have you, as a result of class discussions, taken any personal actions on an issue of societal/community concern? and (e) Have you, as a result of class discussions participated in any type of community action concerning your parenting concerns? The yes or no responses to each of these questions were totaled, and open-ended responses about actions taken were categorized.

Results of the Demonstration Project Evaluation

The results are organized around the three research questions. First are findings on whether parent educators learned this approach to parent education. Second are findings on the effectiveness of the mentoring process and which components seemed to be most useful. Then we present findings on parents' responses to being part of classes incorporating principles and practices of CEPE. All findings contain multiple perspectives: parent educator interns and mentors for the parent educator findings, and interns and parents for the parent findings. Although we prefer to use the full name Community Engaged Parent Education at this stage of professional awareness of the model, rather than the acronym CEPE, for brevity we used CEPE in presenting the findings.

Evidence of Intern CEPE

Mentor evaluations of interns and intern self-evaluations provide evidence of substantial learning of CEPE knowledge and skills in both Year 1 and Year 2. Paired sample *t* test analyses confirmed that gains were statistically significant for every comparison. For Year 1 and Year 2, ratings revealed significant gains for interns in all five learning areas: (a) understanding philosophy and core ideas, (b) understanding and ability to apply CEPE skills, (c) identifying community dimensions of parenting issues, (d) practicing effective CEPE, and (e) integrating their identity as citizen professionals into their role as parent educator. As expected, Year 2 evaluations were not as dramatic as the Year 1 gains. Table 1 presents mean ratings of ability from interns' self-evaluations and mentor evaluations. The greatest gains in Year 1 were in understanding the philosophy and core ideas and in understanding and applying the skills. The greatest gains in Year 2 were in identifying community dimensions in parenting issues and practicing CEPE.

Significant gains were also seen in intern self-evaluations and mentor evaluations of specific

Table 1. *Mean Scores of Intern Self-Ratings and Mentor Ratings of CEPE Understanding*

		Before Mentoring		After Year 1		After Year 2	
Aspect	Rater	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*
Understanding of CEPE philosophy & core ideas	Intern	3.6	2.0	7.6***	1.3	8.7***	1.0
	Mentor	4.8	2.0	7.3***	1.3	8.7***	0.9
Understanding of and application of CEPE skills	Intern	3.6	2.0	7.0***	2.0	7.9***	1.1
	Mentor	4.0	1.9	6.7***	1.6	8.1***	1.4
Ability to identify public dimensions of parenting issues	Intern	3.9	2.0	7.0***	1.6	8.2***	1.4
	Mentor	4.7	1.9	7.1***	1.7	8.7***	1.1
Ability to practice effective CEPE	Intern	3.3	1.5	6.6***	1.7	7.8***	1.0
	Mentor	4.1	2.0	6.5***	1.9	8.0***	1.3
Strength of identity as a citizen professional	Intern	4.0	2.2	7.0*	1.8	7.5*	2.3
	Mentor	4.6	1.8	6.3***	2.3	8.0***	1.7

Significant differences identified through paired sample *t* test comparisons of interns' and mentors' scores before and after Year 1 and between Year 1 and Year 2.

$n = 28$ interns.

*$p < .05$. ***$p < .001$

Table 2. *Mean Scores of Intern Self-Ratings and Mentor Ratings of CEPE Knowledge and Skills (*n = *28*)

		Before Mentoring		After Year 1		After Year 2	
Skill	Rater	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*
Plan effective CEPE lessons	Intern	2.2	1.1	6.7***	1.6	7.8***	1.0
	Mentor	4.0	2.2	6.6***	2.0	8.2***	1.5
Create a CEPE environment	Intern	2.1	1.2	6.0*	1.8	7.2*	1.7
	Mentor	4.1	2.6	6.1***	2.4	7.7***	1.8
Implement CEPE ritualized practices	Intern	3.8	1.8	7.2*	1.5	8.3***	1.1
	Mentor	3.5	2.4	5.7***	2.5	7.5***	2.0
Surface the public dimension of an issue	Intern	2.9	1.5	6.2***	1.7	7.4***	1.1
	Mentor	4.1	2.3	6.5***	1.9	8.2***	1.8
Deliberate on the public dimension	Intern	3.9	1.7	6.5***	1.6	7.6***	1.2
	Mentor	4.1	2.4	6.4***	2.0	7.9***	1.5
Encourage civic action	Intern	2.3	1.4	5.1***	1.7	6.6***	1.3
	Mentor	2.8	1.9	5.0***	2.4	6.3***	2.3

Significant differences identified through paired sample *t* test comparisons of interns' and mentors' scores before and after Year 1, and between Year 1 and Year 2

*$p < .05$. ***$p < .001$.

CEPE skills including (a) lesson planning, (b) creating a CEPE environment, (c) ritualized practices, (d) surfacing public dimensions, (e) facilitating deliberation on public issues, (f) transitioning to citizen action, and (g) addressing critical incidents. Table 2 presents mean ratings on specific skills. According to intern self-evaluations and mentor evaluations of interns, the greatest gains in Year 1 were in lesson planning, creating an effective CEPE environment, and in surfacing public dimensions of personal parenting issues. In Year 2, the greatest gains were identified in using ritualized CEPE practices (example: having a check-in that asks about community concerns) and surfacing public dimensions of personal parenting issues.

Evidence of Effective Mentoring

Table 3 presents overall evaluations of each of the learning components of the mentoring process. These include one-to-one mentoring, regional group meetings, statewide trainings or mini-group classes, observations, and consults.

Table 3. *Intern Evaluation of Effectiveness of Components for Year 1 and Year 2*

	Year 1		Year 2	
Component	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*
One-to-one mentoring	4.8	1.2	5.2	1.1
Regional group meetings	4.5	1.2	4.9	1.0
Statewide training meetings	4.5	1.1	4.7	1.0

No significant differences between Year 1 and Year 2 ratings.

All the components, with the exception of the observations, were rated as having greater effectiveness in Year 2 than in Year 1. Changes made in the mentoring process following the Year 1 formal evaluation seemed to be as effective as the mentoring in Year 1 and may have been even more effective in Year 2. As expected, one-to-one, continuous mentoring was identified as the most effective way to develop the capacity of parent educators to provide this community-collaborative approach to parent education. Qualitative evaluation of this mentoring (not reported here) provided further evidence of effectiveness.

Evidence of Parents' Civic Engagement

Intern Reports of Parents' Civic Engagement. In tern reports of citizen action revealed increased capacity of parents for citizen action. The reported civic actions were categorized into five groups: (a) in-class deliberation on topics related to civic issues (166 reports), (b) deliberation with others outside of class on civic issues discussed in class (187 reports), (c) research outside class on civic issues discussed in class (127 reports), (d) deliberations with civic leaders on civic issues raised in class (82 reports), (e) organized civic action among groups of parents (102 reports), and (f) increased citizen responsibility in personal and community responsibilities (120). Table 4 presents the most frequently reported topics related to civic issues that were discussed and the most commonly reported civic activities across the 2 years.

In-class and out-of-class deliberation on topics related to civic issues was the most frequently reported civic activity. Topics that were deliberated in class became the topics that were most commonly addressed out of class. The civic issues that were deliberated reflected public dimensions of the topics addressed in the parent education classes such as child nutrition and child discipline. Civic dimensions of these topics that were raised in class discussions included cultural norms around food consumption and school lunch food choices and cultural norms around overindulgence of children.

Other civic issues that were raised reflected public dimensions of personal parenting concerns. For example, neighborhood safety including park violence and bullying were concerns parents themselves raised in discussions about their own personal parenting issues. During deliberations about the public dimensions of these personal concerns, parents discussed organizing themselves into neighborhood blocks and working together with local park authorities to increase neighborhood safety. Another source for discussion around public issues included topics raised in the media. Extensive media attention around the issue of out-of-control birthday parties, for example, generated civic deliberations during parent education classes. These issues were then raised in conversations with friends, neighbors, and family members outside class.

In some cases, parents volunteered to find out more information on the topics raised in class deliberations and bring information back to class. With issues raised around school lunch choices, for example, several parents volunteered to contact school lunch representatives to learn more about school lunch options and channels for decision making around food options. These parents then reported to the class what they had learned about the issue. On other occasions, parents arranged to have community leaders or professionals come to their class to provide information on particular issues such as school safety or mental health in the community.

Parents also reported contacting civic leaders to discuss issues around topics discussed in class. Civic leaders who were contacted included school state representatives and senators, school board members, local police departments, park boards, and city officials. In some cases, discussions with civic leaders were part of organized

Table 4. *Categories of Parents' Civic Engagement*

Category	Percent of Responses ($N = 1, 304$)	Most Frequent Topics and Activities:
In-class deliberation	166	(a) Nutrition of children: changing food choices at school; (b) Overindulgence of children; (c) Lack of family time, over-scheduling, demanding work schedules; (d) Neighborhood safety: bullying, park violence, sex offenders and laws around sexual abuse; (e) Fashions and role models for girls: sex-charged state of the nation; (f) Parents feeling overwhelmed, judged, pressured; (g) Media influences on children: I-pods, cell phones in schools, screen time; (h) Societal expectations around birthday parties.
Parent deliberation outside the class	187	(a) Neighborhood safety and formation of neighborhood watch groups; (b) Influence of television on children; (c) Cell phone use among adolescents; (d) Lack of available nonsexualized clothing for young girls; (e) Overindulgence and discipline of young children; (f) School referendum; (g) Marketing to young children; (h) Children's nutrition; (i) Pressures around birthday parties.
Parent research outside the class on public issues	127	(a) Talked with school lunch representatives; (b) Researched political issues including the transportation bill; (c) Invited a mental health service speaker to discuss community issues of mental health in class.
Parent deliberation with civic leaders	82	(a) Discussed issues surrounding drugs in high schools with the liaison office from the police department and the district office; (b) Discussed neighborhood park safety with park boards; (c) Contacted city officials regarding community concerns; (d) Contacted school board members about issues of equity; (e) Met as a group with civic leaders to discuss immigration concerns.
Organized citizen action by parents	102	(a) Joined with civic leaders to organize community action around violence; (b) Met as a group with the school board to discuss healthy food options with director over school lunch; (c) Organized and contacted education administrators to reinstate parent education classes for next year; (d) Organized a neighborhood to hire a local trash hauler to reduce traffic and pollution in alleys; (e) Attended a rally on immigration issues and discussed them with civic officials as a parent group; (f) Attended precinct caucuses and town meetings; (g) Organized with 120 parents to stop placement of TV Karts as entertainment for children in local grocery stores.
Increased personal responsibility among parents	95	(a) Personal changes regarding overscheduling; (b) Recycling; (c) Decreased TV watching; (d) More environmentally sensitive in purchasing; (e) Wrote letters to the editor of local newspapers; (f) Had children tested for lead poisoning; (g) Changed family eating habits; (h) Attended more community events; (i) Donated food and toys; (j) Provided food for families in need.

citizen action on a particular issue. One group of parents organized to understand and address the issues around school lunch choices. Their organized civic efforts involved meeting together with the local school board. Another neighborhood of parents organized together to hire a local trash hauler in order to reduce the traffic and pollution in their community alleys. One parent education class organized 120 other parents to gain support through signatures, letters to the editors, and contacting store owners to prevent placement of TV Karts as distractions for children in local grocery stores.

Two longer-term collective initiatives also emerged out of the CEPE Project during the second year of implementation: (a) Concerned Parents for School Nutrition Initiative involving a group of parents who have worked together for a year to evaluate and present recommendations for changes in school nutrition to the school board and (b) Birthdays without Pressure Project launched a local, national, and international conversation about the cultural trend toward out-of-control, hyper-consumerist birthday parties. The response from the media to the birthday initiative was substantial, including NBC (The Today Show), USA Today, CBS Morning News, Associated Press, Time Magazine, and international sources in England, France, India, Ireland, Canada, the Philippines, Iran, and others. The public responded strongly, with 339,334 page views of the website and over 1,400 blog and email responses over a 6-month period.

Focusing on public dimensions of personal parenting concerns further contributed to increased personal responsibility among parents. Parents reported changing their personal family patterns around recycling and TV watching, for example. They also reported more community building activities such as donating food and toys, providing food for families in need, and distributing information on community resources to new families.

Parent Self-report. Parent self-report of citizen action also revealed increased capacity for citizen action. Of the 1,259 parents who took the surveys, 91% answered ''yes'' to the question asking if their ''parent education class addressed the societal/community dimensions of parenting concerns.'' Of those parents, 93% reported that discussing and thinking about the societal and community dimensions of parenting was valuable A majority of parents (69%) also reported that they had talked to someone outside the class about a societal or community dimension of their parenting concerns. Nearly half the parents (48%) said they had taken personal actions on an issue of societal or community concerns raised in class discussions.

Content analysis of parents' qualitative responses to the question ''Do you think that discussing and thinking about the societal/community dimensions of parenting was valuable to you? Why or why not?'' yielded seven categories for the 1,304 responses to this question. Table 5 presents the categories, the percentage of parents with responses in each category, and examples of the responses typifying the category. The largest category (46%) was increased awareness of the influence of communities and the larger society on personal parenting concerns. As one parent wrote, ''Issues in the community impact everyone who lives in the community, so being informed about these issues is important for making decisions that affect our family.''

Discussion

It is important to keep in mind that this was a demonstration project, not a controlled experiment that could prove that changes in parent educators were caused by the project or that parents' community actions were a product of their parent education experience. And this paper provided only a brief description of what the CEPE approach looks like in practice, including the multiple parent educator skills involved and the challenges parent educators experienced in learning this new way of working. (Details on these matters are available at www.CommunityEngagedParentEducation.org along with a demonstration video.) Of particular value in the future would be controlled studies to determine whether parents increase their civic engagement relatively more after taking classes informed by CEPE as compared to traditional parent education classes. More comprehensive data from parents would also be valuable in future studies.

With these limitations in mind, this paper provides evidence that parent educators can learn to combine the personal and public dimensions of parenting in everyday parent education and that parents respond positively to this approach as parents and community members. This evidence is strengthened by the fact that the findings converged between multiple raters

Table 5. *Categories of Parent Responses to Community Engaged Parent Education*

Category	Percent of Responses ($N = 1, 304$)	Example Responses
Increased awareness of influence of community on parenting	46	''Issues in the community impact everyone who lives in the community so being informed about these issues is important for making decisions that affect our family.''
Provided source of ideas for how to address community concerns	17	''It is especially helpful to get other parents' views on the same concerns and how they deal with them.''
Increased awareness of community resources and activities	15	''Keeps you aware of all the resources and support in the community.''
Brought awareness of parents' capacity to unite to influence communities	10	''Finding out about how much power a community has. I used to think it was all about the higher-ups, but as a community we can make a great impact.''
Increased awareness of negative community influences	6	''It makes me more aware of what happens around me and helps me keep a more watchful eye on my child.''
Increased awareness of commonality of concerns	3	''I was able to know I was not alone in my own parenting concerns.''
Increased ability to better raise and teach children	3	''It is important to teach my children to be good citizens. It will help them to make the world a better place.''

and respondents: parent educators, parents, and mentors. The findings also suggest that other forms of family life education might benefit from the intentional use of community issues in the curriculum. For example, premarital education classes could combine interpersonal skills training with ''citizen conversation'' about the challenges and pressures facing engaged couples in today's environment and what they might do to counteract these pressures both personally and collectively (Doherty & Thomas, 2007).

We encourage others in the field to develop and evaluate new models of family life education that incorporate public issues. Ten years into our own work in this area, we believe that this way of working is especially a good fit with the evolving field of parent education whose leaders have been calling for a wider lens in work with parents and a good fit with current interest in civic engagement at many levels of government and society. We are developing a formal training program, including distance learning, for parent educators who want to learn this approach, which, as noted earlier, requires more direct mentoring than some other methods of parent education.

Jane Addams is credited with the observation that to be a good parent means having one foot in the home and one foot in the community, because the community also raises our children. In the same way, the vision statement of CEPE calls upon the historic ideals of the field to this effect: that parent education classes will provide a public space for parents to claim their voice as citizens to improve our communities and renew our democracy.

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