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**Parenting education  
history and modern  
trends: Self-efficacy as a  
methodological base for  
the development of  
educational programs  
for parents**



HIGHER SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS  
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The report is aimed at identifying categories and approaches which are appropriate for designing contemporary educational programs for parents through the analysis of its history and current trends. The authors consider the main stages in the development of educational programs for parents in Europe, USA and Russia and trace changes in the programs content from the emergence of the first schools for Mothers focused on informing parents in the field of hygiene and health issues, to the emergence of parenting training for the development of parental competencies and skills. Currently the main trends in the development of educational programs for parents are orientated to the needs and requirements of a parent, to parent's personal, inner resources. This article explains the use of the category of parental self-efficacy for designing educational programs.

**Key words:** parenting, parenting training, parenting education, parent education, parent self-efficacy.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM FIELD OF MODERN PARENTING

Today, the market of educational services for parents consists of a large number of programs, training schemes and courses. The importance of educating parents and involving them in the education of their children is postulated in a number of state programs as the school system begins to involve more parents. In this article we intend to analyze the main milestones in the development of parental education from mother's schools appeared in the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century till contemporary educational programs. Through identifying current trends we aim to choose a methodological framework for the development of educational programs for parents which will be consistent with actual parent's needs.

Parenthood is understood as a complex cultural phenomenon whose boundaries and content are formed through discourse. At the present time parenthood can be considered as a phenomenon that is actively being rethought and reconstructed. New values, meanings, comprehension and the fixation of new practices of parenting challenge the old and new emerging categories describing the experience of motherhood and fatherhood. Educational scholars say that this process can be called a "turn to parenthood" during which the old notion of "parenthood" is being revised and filled with new content, this content primarily relates to the processes and outcomes of education and to the desire and willingness of parents to invest large resources in the development of their children [Daly, 2013]. This turn has been especially relevant in the past few decades. Today, this is particularly the case in Russia. Currently in Russia there is a "parenting boom" characterized by the rapid growth in the number of activities targeted at the whole family, which in turn, increases the demand for psychological counselling and training for parents, epitomized by the growing number of books and journals on parenting issues

and the emergence of specialized TV and radio channels [Mayofis, Kukulin, 2010].

Rethinking active parenthood generates a set of discursive patterns that are not always consistent with one another. Parenthood is described on the one hand in the traditional categories of reproductive functions or public debt, and on the other hand in terms of realizing life project or processes of self-actualization [Chernova, Shpakovskaya, 2013].

In previous studies different types of parenthood are discussed, this includes: modern parenting, new parenting, natural parenting, traditional parenting, and these epithets are not the full list of possible definitions. The authors discuss the formation of a non-mandatory parenthood associated with understanding family relationships as a result of the cooperation of all members of the family, bringing pleasure to all [Mayofis, Kukulin, 2010]. At the same time, one of the significant trends is the emergence of intensive parenting. Proponents of this approach consider that needs of the child are paramount and maternal involvement in the upbringing process is crucial for the future well-being of the child [Hays, 1998].

The coexistence of a large number of parenting models and parenting cultures requires parents to build their position actively. These models are not mutually exclusive, but rather overlap, making it difficult for parents to make any decision. Our hypothesis is that building one's own position regarding various models of parenthood is a social challenge. The answer to this challenge for parents applies to the educational programs which are designed to work with specific characteristics of each parent, such as; personality traits, confidence levels and the ability to make independent decisions.

Further in the article we will consider the main stages in the development of parental education. We will focus on the features of the modern parent programs and will offer guidelines for developing such programs.

## PARENTING EDUCATION AS A FORM OF PARENT'S SUPPORT: FROM MOTHER'S SCHOOLS TO TRAININGS

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries throughout Europe and the United States government programs on parenthood were actively developed. Countries differ in the amount and quality of social and economic assistance provided to parents, but nevertheless there are extensive programs to support parenting in the most developed countries and investment in this area has increased in recent years [Kameran, 2000].

Educational programs for parents are a form of such support. Parental education policies are supervised by various governmental bodies in different countries: in the UK and New Zealand parenting education is supervised by the Ministry of Education, in Canada — by the Ministry of Health, in Finland — by the Ministry of Social Affairs, etc. [Shulruf et al., 2009]. In Russia nowadays educational programs for parents are initiated by the Ministry of Education and Science, but at the same time, there are many private programs in the educational services market.

### Mother's schools

Parenthood has never been a completely natural or unmanaged process. Parenting skills are transferred through family communication. Parenting skills are manifested in traditions and customs like those that were described in treatises on education or found in works of art. However, by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the first specialized schools for mothers appeared in France and England designed to teach parents the basics of handling a child and hygienic practices in order to reduce the rate of infant mortality. a similar process went on in the Russian Empire where in 1904 the Union to overcome child mortality in Russia appeared. The organization was aimed at educating young mo-

thers. Throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the education of parents was carried out mainly through health facilities and community organizations.

In 1955 in Hamburg and in 1959 in Paris two large conferences devoted to the issues of educational programs for parents were conducted by the UNESCO Institute for Education [Stern, 1960]. These conferences can be considered the official recognition of the importance of parenting education on the national and international level.

## Parenting trainings

By the late 1960s and early 1970s in Europe and the US parenting education changed significantly under the influence of the human potential movement based on humanistic ideas of philosophers and psychologists [Stone, 1978]. Information-based lectures for parents gave way to training, during which attention was paid to building a harmonious relationship in the family, establishing personal boundaries and practicing communication skills. By the end of 1970's competence-based training became the most popular form of educational programs for parents.

Between 1970 to 1980 in Soviet Russia there were a number of educational programs for parents which were carried out mainly through schools. The so-called Parent Universities existed from the 1940s until the 1980s [Petrenko, 2006]. Training began to develop rapidly only in the early 1990s. In Russia today, within the educational services market there are different types of parenting education programs.

## Methodological foundations of parenting trainings

First, it is necessary to mention the humanistic approach of Carl Rogers. Rogers developed T-groups aimed at improving communication skills and building respectful relationships with partners were ideological and methodological basis for a number of popular training programs. For example, Parent Effective-

ness Training (P.E.T.) developed by Thomas Gordon. Gordon's program is based on the idea of an 'effective' parent. An effective parent is considered to be the one that can solve or prevent problems in the child's upbringing (such as aggressive behavior, conflict, poor communication skills), be able open up the child, respect his or her feelings and thoughts, "as if he or she, too, were a human", set an honest relationship with a child, based on explanation rather than on the praise and punishment. During the workshops parents learn specific skills and practical techniques that can be applied in dealing with children [Smith et al., 2002; Gordon, 2008].

Second, Alfred Adler's ideas about the need to overcome one's own inferiority complex is an important consideration, as the importance for a person to feel his or her importance and involvement in close relationships also become the basis for the development of parenting training. Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP), created in 1976 by Don Dinkmeyer and Gary McKay, is another example of a competence-based educational program for parents [Dinkmeyer, McKay, 1989]. The authors proceed from the assumption that usually a child does not know why he or she behaves badly, a child is just trying different behavioral strategies to achieve parental attention, care and recognition (or sometimes demands excessive attention who wants to show power or revenge). Understanding the main causes of such behavior gives parents the opportunity to adjust the relationship with the child and make it more positive. During the training, parents are being taught active listening and I-statements skills, these include; verbal and nonverbal ways of providing positive feedback, how to show their love and joy, and, how to respect child's feelings and thoughts.

Thirdly, B.F. Skinner's theory of learning became the basis for many behavioral competence-based parenting trainings, such as Parental Behavior Training (PBT) or Confident Parenting Program (CPP) [Alvy, 1994; Graziano, Diament, 1992]. Behavioral programs are aimed to reduce the existence of undesirable behavior. Participants are being taught how behavior is governed

by its consequences. So first, parents have to learn to describe a child's behavior through specific actions, rather than judging or criticizing, and then parents learn how to manage consequences using special communicative strategies [Smith et al., 2002].

All these methodologies are still quite spread in the market of educational programs for parents. But since the human potential movement there have been severe social changes that should be taken into account speaking about parenthood in general and about parenting education in particular. Next we will consider current social trends and its influence on educational programs for parents.

## TRENDS IN PARENTING EDUCATION: WHAT SHOULD BE LAID AS THE BASIS OF TRAININGS AND PROGRAMS FOR PARENTS?

Diversification is one of the main trends in the development of parenting education. In other words, now the educational programs for parents are not only for mothers, devoted not only to babies, not only covering the issues associated with health information [Daly, 2013]. Among the whole range of programs there are programs for a wide parent's audience and specialized ones: programs for different ethnic groups, divorced parents, parents of children with serious mental illnesses, children with emotional problems and learning difficulties, there are also special programs for fathers and workshops for grandparents raising children [Fine, Lee, 2000].

A further trend from the 2000s is the transition from programs aimed at informing parents and development of certain skills, to programs aimed at the parent's identity, his or her experience, beliefs and perceptions, confidence and anxiety [Smith et al., 2002]. And that is quite understandable: in the situation when information is easily accessible 24/7 it is necessary to work on

parent's position, to elaborate decision making and information processing skills.

There are some concepts which are being used for describing a parent's ability to solve upbringing problems independently, e.g. self-sufficiency, perceived parental efficacy, subjectivity, self-management, etc. [Coleman, Karraker, 1998; Montigny, Lacharité, 2005]. However, we will elaborate on the concept of parental self-efficacy which has become more and more popular recent years.

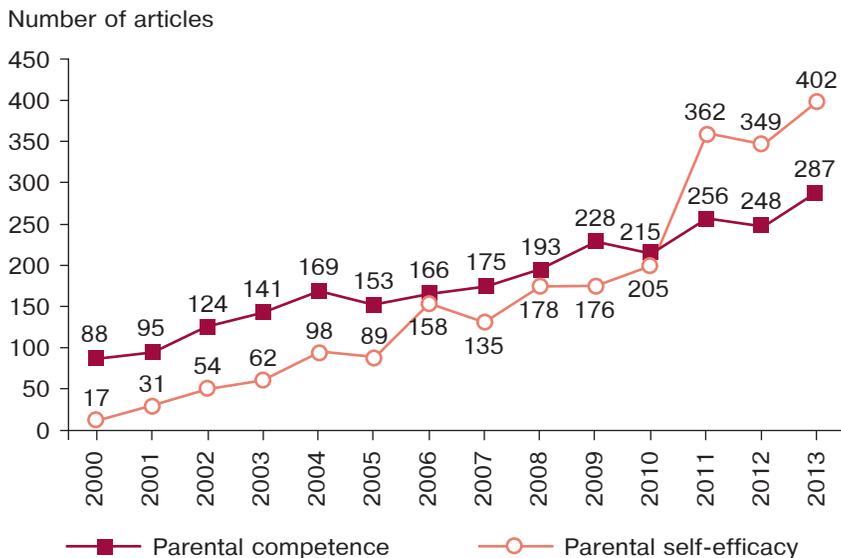
The concept of self-efficacy was introduced in the 1970s by A. Bandura [Bandura, 1977]. Self-efficacy refers to person's expectations that his or her actions will lead to the desired result and that the efforts will not be useless. The concept of parental self-efficacy is the parent's belief that he or she will be able to cope with child rearing tasks. Using this concept as the basis for developing parenting programs is definitely a trend: this approach has gained popularity in the scientific literature recently and has become even more mentioned compared with a widely spread category of parental competence.

Thus since 2010 the number of references of "parental self-efficacy" has exceeded the number of references of "parental competence" in English scientific articles (Fig. 1). Also there is the similar trend in the analysis of monographs references (Fig. 2).

A positive relationship between the level of parental, and especially, maternal self-efficacy and educational practices have been shown in several studies. Parents with a higher self-efficacy tend to use less harmful practices such as strict discipline, punishment by the lack of contact and attention, instead, parents with a higher self-efficacy are more likely to use positive parenting practices — sensitivity, responsiveness, stimulating and non-punitive parenting [Bohlin, Hagekull, 1987; Unger, Wandersman, 1985]. Parental self-efficacy levels are a mediator that reduce negative impacts of maternal depression [Coleman, Karraker, 1998].

The appeal to these inner personal resources is an important feature of parenting programs for adults. The concept of self-efficacy is being developed in modern research on education in

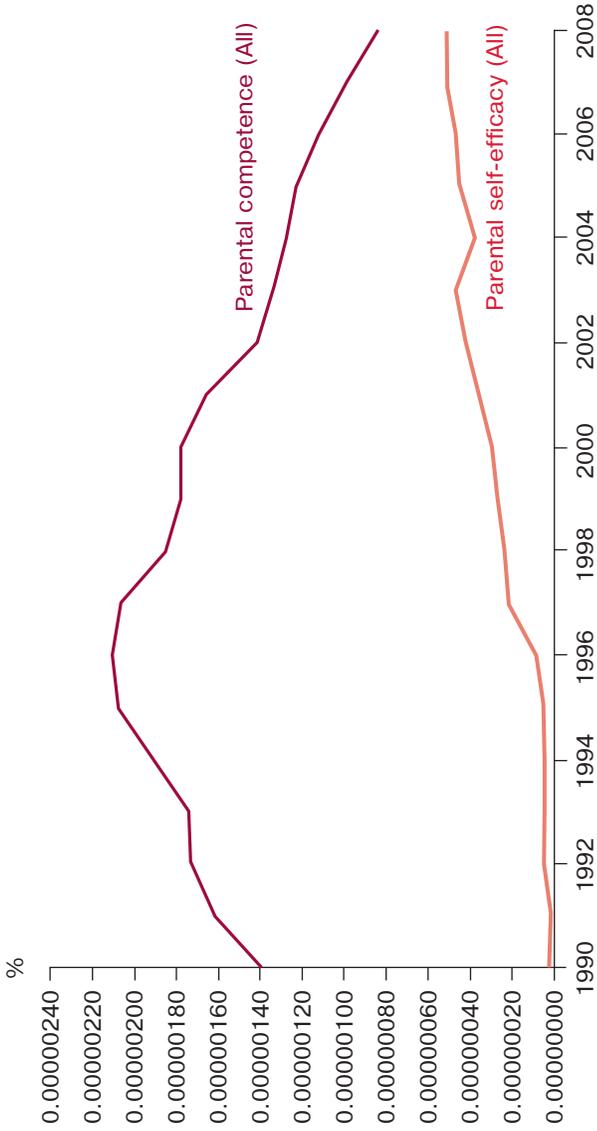
## Trends in parenting education: what should be laid as the basis of trainings...



**Fig. 1.** Dynamics of the number of articles containing the concept “parental self-efficacy” and “parental competence” according to Google Scholar, 2000–2013

*Note:* The data was obtained using Google Scholar Service <<https://scholar.google.ru/>>. We have counted the number of articles containing the concept “parental self-efficacy” and “parental competence” in title and in the body of article for each year.

general, not regarding only parenting programs. For example, [Caprara et al., 2008] is based on the results of the longitudinal study of relationships between self-efficacy and academic successes whereby it is necessary to pay more attention to the internal mechanisms of coping and forming high self-efficacy in developing educational programs. In a modern society with easy access to information it is inner personal resources which determine success [Ibid.]. That is why we decided to choose the concept of parental self-efficacy as the methodological basis for designing parenting programs.



**Fig. 2.** Dynamics of the references share of “parental self-efficacy” and “parental competence” in monographs according to Google NGram Viewer, 1990–2008

Note: The data was obtained using Google NGram Viewer <<https://books.google.com/ngrams/>>.

## SELF-EFFICACY AS A BASIS FOR DESIGNING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR PARENTS

Several studies have shown that the most adequate form of self-efficacy development is through training. In particular, active learning methods help to reduce stress and improve the quality of interaction between a child and a parent [Gross et al., 1995]. However, forms of psychological assistance are important for increasing parental self-efficacy but also the content of this assistance. According to A. Bandura, self-efficacy is being developed through the following: the successful performance and analysis of personal experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion (receiving feedback and support from important people), and, emotional arousal (obtaining vivid emotional experience) [Bandura, 1986]. Also we will focus on tolerance for uncertainty as an important component of enhancing self-efficacy. Next, we'll consider this in detail.

### Successful performance and analysis of personal experience

The parental audience has a number of features and one of such features is that whilst raising children people tend to consider themselves experts in this sphere. Those who discredit this experience such as a teacher or psychologist who had a completely different up-bringing may cause parents to protest and be abrasive to such views. In contrast, the personal experience of parenthood is an important resource for increasing the level of self-efficacy if this experience is discussed and evaluated by a reference group. It is important that the discussion of personal experience is possible only if there is a comfortable environment and the parent feels safe. Academic scholarship has been published on specific personal examples that promote the readiness to meet new challenges [Wilson et al., 2014].

## Self-efficacy as a basis for designing educational programs for parents

During training parents also have a lot of opportunities to take active part in exercises and taking part in parenting scenes/reenactments. Such active techniques allow parents to acquire their own behavioral experiences in new or difficult situations.

### Vicarious experience

Group work allows participants to get acquainted with the experience of other parents. Watching other people successfully solve new challenges in a similar situation increases a parent's confidence as he or she is able to cope with a wide range of parental tasks. Independent decisions are being checked by other parents as the participants of the training become aware of their motives and possible consequences.

The expansion of the parental behavioral repertoire of interaction with the child strengthens their faith that the most difficult parenting tasks can be solved. The positive effect of programs is based on the joint analysis of problems and discussion of personal experience of the participants is shown in articles [Niccols, 2009]. Moreover, about 40% of modern parents experience exchange and support from other parents and rather than the acquisition of new knowledge, as an effective strategy for mastering parenthood [McGaw, Lewis, 2002].

### Verbal persuasion (receiving feedback and support from important people)

Self-image perception of one's capabilities and the effectiveness of one's own efforts are strongly influenced by the opinions of others. Modern family is often nuclear and its members do not always share traditional values. Modern parents significantly more often listen to the media, the opinion of peers, friends, other parents, and not to the members of their family [Sobkin et al., 2013]. Thus, a group of parents discussing common problems, engaged in collective pedagogical work, focusing on; up-bringing, attitudes, stereotypes, and, beliefs is essential for effective parental support and maintenance.

## Emotional arousal (obtaining a vivid emotional experience)

Collective group work in the company of like-minded parents brings more positive emotions and vivid experiences than passive listening to lectures does. Active methods allow participants to communicate with each other, to express their own points of view, feelings and emotions, to take part in unusual exercises, to laugh and sometimes even to cry. So training for parents under the guidance of a professional moderator is a good organizational form which provides positive emotions and increases parental self-efficacy.

## Increasing tolerance for uncertainty

Parenting is similar to the problem of many unknowns. It is difficult to accurately predict what innate qualities will be manifested in a child, and, what would be the impact of genetic factors and the role of the social environment. It is difficult to predict what will be the criteria of success in 15–20 years, and, when the child will become an adult. So parents can never guarantee the results of their child's up-bringing or their educational work.

Therefore, tolerance for uncertainty and the ability to act in uncertain conditions are an essential condition for increasing the self-efficacy of modern parents. Active training methods allow people to develop this quality. Parents face new people whose attitudes and behavior are difficult to predict as parents perform unexpected creative tasks not always knowing the purpose of the exercise, in addition to answering open-ended questions and making mistakes or discoveries.

Thus, the development of self-efficacy is possible through reflection, creative exercises and through building parenting strategies and making independent decisions in the context of a supportive environment.

## CONCLUSION

Education for parents has undergone a number of changes in its development, which were discussed in this article. Originally Mother's schools were aimed at informing and educating young mothers about basic principles of childcare. The main purpose of these schools was to reduce child mortality in the context of urbanization, when more and more people move into the city and were cut off from traditional culture. The main methods of work in these schools were lectures and distribution of leaflets. Then after the World War II personal trainings became popular and the new epoch of parenting education started. One of the main goals of parent training was improving the quality of life, building relationships that would be enjoyable for all family members, the designation of boundaries in communication, etc. Of course, the methods changed substantially: much more emphasis was on active teaching methods, group discussions, art techniques, development of communication skills.

Nowadays lectures and training techniques are still widely used in different types of education and in parenting education as well. This is not surprising, since there are cases when each of these techniques is effective. For example, lecture format classes are convenient for data inserts, for rapid elaboration of a particular topic. Training methods work well for learning new communication and group work skills, discussing emotionally important topics.

But still there is a question what should be the emphasis of contemporary educational programs for parenting? What should they take into account and how should they be organized? We suggest that answers for these questions derive from the analysis of the situation faced by today's parents. The social environment of modern parenthood is characterized by the multiplicity and ambiguity of common parenting models and theories. New parental conditions and practices are emerging changing divergent trajectories of development and challenging age norms. There are lots of information which is easily available but quite controversial so it could be very difficult for parent to decide to believe or not, to fol-

low one advice or another, to continue searching for information or stop. In this situation the parent's belief whether he or she will cope with their parental role or not, the focus on the feelings and personal characteristics becomes more and more important.

Therefore, the category of parent self-efficacy is key in discussing the challenges of parenthood in modern world, as self-efficacy sets the frame for conducting future empirical research and provides a methodological basis for the development of educational programs for parents. Taking into account diversification of parenting educational programs centered on the parental self-efficacy could become suitable for parents of different groups adhering to different models of parenting. So we suppose that the concept of parental self-efficacy is very promising for designing parental educational programs.

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