

**Development and Pilot Evaluation of the Very Important Parents Program (VIP):
An Intensive Parent Education Program for Teens**

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ABSTRACT. The personal, societal, and economic impacts of teen childbearing indicate a significant need for efforts that support young parents and their children. Despite overall downward trends in its national rate of teen pregnancy, the United States continues to have the highest teen pregnancy rate among developed Western nations. Providing research-based parent education and coaching support has proven to help young parents understand child development and safety and reduce the possibility of child abuse and neglect. This study evaluates a teen-specific parent education program, the Very Important Parents (VIP) Program. The VIP Program combines knowledge in the fields of parenting, relationships, life skills, and youth development in a year-long, technologically enhanced educational initiative for adolescent parents. Retrospective post-then-pre- surveys were used to gauge the VIP program's impact on teen parent participants' (N=30) knowledge, understanding, and use of skills related to successful parenting. The surveys also examined their understanding, comfort, and use of technology in relation to their roles as parents. Results indicate that teen parent participants experienced statistically significant gains in factors related to successful parenting and in the use of technology to support their parenting.

Keywords: teen parents, parenting education, Adlerian

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Introduction and Problem Statement

Despite overall downward trends in its national rate of teen pregnancy (Hamilton, Martin, Osterman, & Curtin, 2015), the United States continues to have the highest teen pregnancy rate among developed Western nations (Sedgh, Finer, Bankole, Eilers, & Singh, 2015). Current data estimate the U.S. teen birth rate to be 24.2 per 1,000, or about 249,000 births per year (Hamilton et al., 2015; National Campaign to Prevent Teen & Unplanned Pregnancy, 2015a). North Carolina ranks in the top 20 states for highest teen pregnancy rate (National Campaign, 2015b).

Teen pregnancy often results in hardships for teen mothers, their children, and their communities. For example, teen parents are less likely to graduate from high school, which has implications for long-term educational attainment and income (Perper, Peterson, & Manlove, 2010). Moreover, children of teen parents are more likely to have cognitive and academic difficulties, as well as lower birth weights, when compared to children born to older parents (Manlove, Terry-Humen, Mincieli, & Moore, 2012). Along with such challenges, teen childbearing has high public-sector costs, with an estimated annual national cost of \$9.4 billion in the U.S. (National Campaign, 2014).

The personal, societal, and economic impacts of teen childbearing indicate significant need for efforts that support and foster success for young parents and their children. Providing research-based parent education and coaching support has proven to help young parents understand child development and safety and reduce the possibility of child abuse and neglect (Chen & Chan, 2015). When developing programs for young parents, designers need to recognize that teens are in a state that is developmentally different from their older parents. Adolescence is a time of transition, mental and physical growth, and exploration of self-identity and relationships (Broderick & Blewitt, 2010). Teen parents are in the midst of negotiating developmental tasks of adolescence. Therefore, teen parents have different needs that may not be met by traditional parent education programs, which are geared toward adults. Furthermore, some research suggests that identity development, specifically identity resolution, plays a role in teen mothers' ability to cope with stress and be sensitive to their children's needs (Dhayanandhan & Bohr, 2016).

Although research-based parenting education classes and programs are available, and teen parenting programs have emerged to target specific needs of young parents (e.g., child health and safety practices, parent self-esteem) (Stolz, Brandon, & Roberson, 2013), programs that comprehensively address young parents' needs are lacking. *Triple P* and *The Incredible Years*, for example, are two commonly implemented evidence-based parenting programs with robust support for their effectiveness in improving parenting practices and child behavior. However, these programs lack components specific to young parents, such as navigating adolescent developmental changes, life skills, and youth development (Sanders, Kirby, Tellegen, & Day, 2014; Webster-Stratton, 2011). There is a need for more teen-specific parent education programs that expand beyond parenting theory to incorporate youth development and deliver content to adolescent parents in relevant, engaging ways (Allen, El-Beshti, & Guin, 2014). The gap in teen-specific parent education programs spurred creation of the Very Important Parents (VIP) program.

Literature Review

Parent Involvement

Warm, nurturing parental involvement improves social competencies and communication skills (Connell & Prinz, 2002). Through relationships and interactions with adults, children develop opinions and ideas of self, including self-concepts and self-esteem (Brooks-Gunn, Fuligni, & Berlin, 2003). When parents and caregivers are aware of developmental norms, foster appropriate play and exploration, and support the child's growth, the child's learning is improved. Children living in poverty have less access to such supportive parenting (Marshall, Noonan, McCartney, Marx, & Keefe, 2001).

Annette Lareau (2003) argues that regardless of parental income level, parents love their children and want the best for them. How parents raise their children, however, looks quite different depending on parents' socio-economic levels. A Pew Research Center study (2015) supports Lareau's research. The Pew study found that while parents across all economic levels want their children to be healthy, happy, ethical, honest, and caring, the ways they parented to reach these outcomes varied greatly. Parents from higher income brackets tended to show love and commitment to parenting through provision of various extracurricular activities, reading, and nurturing the child's mental health. Parents from poorer families tended to work more hours, experience more time with extended families, and live in communities where parents fear for their children's safety. In other words, there is great inequality among children raised in different economic levels.

Lareau's (2003) research suggests that parents from higher income families tend to practice *concerted cultivation*, or the act of preparing children for success in the working environment and traditional higher paying systems by practicing soft skills that promote success. Conversely, Lareau points out that parents from lower income families view the process of growing up as natural, do not see themselves as essential to the process of child development, and thus do not practice concerted cultivation. However, children from lower economic levels tend to have more freedom from scheduled activities, more time with extended families, and more independence than do more affluent children. Lower-income parents are less likely to have resources to enroll their children in extra curricula activities and often do not see long-term value in such activities.

Parenting Education

Although not all children are born into families with warm and supportive parenting skills, parenting education can improve the family system's dynamics. Teen parents lack many of the parenting skills needed for optimum development. For example, they tend to have less sensitivity and lower responsiveness to their children and show more signs of aggression when feeling frustrated (Beers & Hollo, 2009; Culp, Applebaum, Osofsky, & Levy, 1988). However, when teen parents receive parenting support and parenting education, research shows that their parenting practices improve, leading to positive outcomes for parents and children (Lundahl, Nimer, & Parsons, 2012; Lundahl & Harris, 2006).

According to the National Parenting Education Network (1996), parenting education is a “process that involves the expansion of insights, understanding and attitudes and the acquisition of knowledge and skills about the development of both parents and of their children and the relationship between them.” Parental involvement helps a child thrive and parent education links to a host of positive outcomes. For example, parenting education is connected to stronger academic and social skills (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010), improved academic achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), and children’s positive behavior (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Powell et al., 2010). Effective parenting is also linked to reduction of poverty (Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006), which is a major issue for young parents. Furthermore, parenting programs have been shown to reduce child maltreatment, neglect, and corporal punishment, while also increasing use of positive parenting practices and improving parent confidence (Chen & Chan, 2015). Positive parenting approaches yield the best results for children’s outcomes and address social problems including child abuse, academic success, and teen pregnancy (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2006).

Relationship and Life Skills

Relationships are a natural part of youth development, yet there is often a deficit of information available to youth on the process of developing healthy relationships and life skills. Such skill development is critical to success of adolescent programming and youth development, and lays the foundation for effective, supportive parenting practices. Involvement of both parents is one protective factor for children born to teen parents (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). When parents are positively engaged in the child’s upbringing, parenting stress and psychological distress decrease (Kalil, Ziol-Guest, & Coley, 2005). Negative co-parenting is linked to lower psychological wellbeing for the child (Florsheim & Smith, 2005). Young parents are often in need of relationship skills development to successfully co-parent their child. Furthermore, young parents who understand various life skills, such as family financial management, home safety, healthy eating and activity, mental and reproductive health, job skill development, and relationship skills have an advantage for creating positive adulthood for themselves and their children. Adolescent parenting is a time of great stress, but skill development can help combat some negative outcomes associated with teen parenting.

Designing the Program

Theoretical Overview

Adlerian theory, whose concepts have long been used as foundations for parent education programs, also provided the basis for the VIP program (Allen, El-Beshti, and Guin, 2014). Adlerian theory employs a systems-based approach with a focus on parenting education to increase wellbeing of the child and family (Croake, 1983). Dreikurs and Soltz (1964) identified the Adlerian parenting concepts of (a) Encouragement, (b) Goals of Misbehavior, (c) Natural and Logical Consequences, and (d) Family Meetings as essential to parenting success. The VIP Program incorporates these concepts and introduces them through various learning opportunities.

While Adlerian theory is the foundation for VIP, concepts from the National Extension Parent Education Model (NEPEM), the National Extension Relationship & Marriage Education Model (NERMEM) and the Targeted Life Skills Model were also used. NEPEM is a framework based on research informing critical parenting practices. It was originally developed by parenting specialists in Cooperative Extension (Smith, Cudaback, Goddard, & Myers-Walls, 1994) and is still a common model for parenting education. NEPEM is broken into six principles that are imperative to quality parenting practices (a) Care for self, (b) Understand, (c) Guide, (d) Nurture, (e) Motivate, and (f) Advocate (DeBord, et al., 2002). Like the NEPEM model, the NERMEM model was also the result of a Cooperative Extension specialists' review of literature on healthy relationships and marriage education. The NERMEM team identified seven core components needed for relationship education: (a) Choose, (b) Know, (c) Care, (d) Care for Self, (e) Share, (f) Manage, and (g) Connect (Futris & Adler-Baeder, 2013).

The Targeted Life Skills Model is a youth development framework intended to provide a format for helping youth reach their full potential by offering positive skill-based knowledge in a variety of measurable outcomes (Hendricks, 1996). This model pays specific attention to ages and stages of development, which are important for teen parents and their children. Life skills targeted in VIP include empathy, conflict resolution, communication, goal setting, problem solving, stress management, healthy lifestyle choices, and marketable skills.

Pedagogical Considerations of Working with Youth

VIP developers included instructional design elements tailored to meet the specific educational and learning needs of the young participants. As such, learning activities in the VIP curriculum are based on Bioecological, Component Display, and Experiential Learning Theories. Although various pedagogical factors were considered, all were grounded by Positive Youth Development (PYD) practices. PYD programming provides youth with opportunities that promote optimal development by helping them identify and achieve their goals. The most successful PYD programs include partnerships with parents and the community (Bonell et al., 2016). A proven change strategy for working with youth (Bonell et al., 2016), PYD is a strengths-based approach, which suggests all youth have potential to develop successfully (Lerner, Lerner, & Phelps, 2008).

Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecology (1979), and later his bioecological theory, states that humans do not live in a vacuum. Instead, they are part of a family, community, and society. Understanding that young parents are part of a larger system was a central focus in creation of this program. Incorporating systems of care, such as grandparents, childcare providers, and community partners is an integral component of teen programs and should be included in teen parenting programs.

Component Display Theory (CDT), a model of instruction, proposes that students learn best when they are exposed to concepts that fit with their frame of reference, particularly through the use of storytelling (Merrill, 1994). The effectiveness of this approach is supported in family life education (Duncan & Goddard, 2011). The VIP curriculum uses CDT through four instructional actions in the following manner: (1) instructor explains a concept or principle, (2) instructor gives an example of the concept, (3) instructor asks the learner to explain what they

have heard or what they understand about the concept, and (4) participants share an experience or tell a story that incorporates the principle. Similarly, Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) suggests that youth do best with hands-on learning. Kolb (1984) identified five elements of experiential learning: experience, share, process, generalize, and apply. VIP participants engage in many hands-on learning experiences and have ample opportunities to process those experiences as part of group learning.

Engaging Youth Through Technology

Family life and parenting professionals have long known that providing programs in venues where participants already convene is an effective way to recruit and retain audiences. Since most parents and families are online, programs that engage families in online settings as part of program development have advantages over face-to-face only programs (Allen, Huff, Kelly, Bearon, & Behnke, 2014). Approximately 81% of American adults are online and actively use the Internet daily (Pew Research Center, 2012). This is even more true of youth, since 95% of teens use the Internet on a daily basis (Madden, Lenhart, Duggan, Cortesi, & Gasser, 2013). Whether it be through using smart phones, which is on the rise, or via traditional computing, more than 90% of today's learners use the Internet to find information. How learners obtain information online varies, with 71% watching videos, 67% using social networking sites, and 53% looking for "how-to" and "do-it-yourself" information on web searches (Pew Research Center, 2012a). Today's learners also seek educational programs that offer connections to others through online communities (Pinder-Grover & Groscurth, 2011).

In response to specific needs of young parents, including learning to be effective parents and developing relationship and life skills, and based on the literature on how to best teach young parents, VIP was created as a teen parenting educational intervention. Although some teen parenting educational programs exist (Pfannenstiel & Honig, 1991) and some were developed to address teen co-parenting (see Fagan, 2008 and Lewin et al., 2015), there was no satisfactory model of a teen parenting program incorporating adolescent specific-pedagogy along with much needed relationship and life skill development. The following is a description of the VIP program, which incorporates parenting education and relationship and life skill development. These are taught through technology and face-to-face instruction methods, using Positive Youth Development programming strategies.

Very Important Parents Program

The VIP Program combines knowledge in the fields of parenting, relationships, life skills, and youth development in a year-long, technologically enhanced educational initiative for adolescent parents. The program was designed at North Carolina State University with financial support from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, United States Department of Agriculture, through a cooperative agreement with North Carolina State University under award number 2011-41520-30579. Curriculum for the VIP Program was designed in year one of a five-year grant, with revisions occurring throughout the program based on participant feedback and with the goal of combating organizational changes. Piloting for the program occurred in five rural and urban counties over the span of four years. Target participants were people who became parents between the ages of 14 and 19 years of age and were not yet over the age of 25

years. The program was based on the literature of teen parenting needs and on data from focus groups with teen parents in the communities served. Program activities were carried out by parent coaches who provided face-to-face and online instruction and coaching support.

Core lessons of VIP are taught in a 14-week period, with one face-to-face class being taught each week by a trained parent coach. This 14-week program includes a launch session for group introductions and data collection, face-to-face instruction of 12 core lessons, and a final celebration session for recognizing success of participants and completion of data collection. The 12 core lessons are experiential and include hands-on activities, discussion, and peer-interaction exercises. Adolescent parent participants are expected to participate in the classroom activities and are provided tablet computers for use inside and outside the classroom. Computer tablets enable participants to view videos, social media, and websites related to class instruction. Technology strategies included researching quality parenting information, blogging about their classroom experiences, and participating in structured Facebook group interactions. The technology-based activities of the program are closely monitored and facilitated by the parent coach. These core lessons, which are part of the VIP Curriculum, include these topics: self-knowledge, parent roles, stress management, child development, parent styles, communication and emotion coaching, empowerment and encouragement, guidance and discipline, problem solving, creating and maintaining positive relationships, co-parenting, and recognizing and engaging support systems.

The VIP Program also includes optional modules as part of a second phase that includes monthly program activities following the 12 core lessons in which participants would meet once a month for classroom-based activities for one full year. These modules include a core monthly face-to-face lesson as well as two to three weekly technology messages designed to reinforce core information and guide exploration of additional topics related to parenting, relationships, school advocacy, physical safety, reproductive and mental health, and self-care. These messages, selected by the parent coaches and the state program leadership team, included research-based information related to parenting and current topics related to parenting in the media. For example, a message about the importance of never leaving a child unattended in a vehicle might follow a television news report about such an incident. Not all programs implemented the full year program; therefore, this article focuses on participants who completed the 12 core VIP lessons.

Research Questions

1. Does adolescent parents' knowledge of quality parenting practices (e.g., positive discipline, emotion coaching) increase as a result of their participation in the VIP Program?
2. Does an adolescent parent's ability to use the Internet to find trustworthy parenting information increase as a result of participation in the VIP Program?

Methods

Sample

The VIP Program was conducted in North Carolina, beginning in the Fall of 2012 and ending in the Spring of 2016. During this time, nine cohorts completed the program. Targeted participants were young parents who became parents between 15 and 19 years of age. Participants were referred to the program through community health departments, high school guidance counselors, and other young parents. All participants were invited to participate in the evaluation process. The sample for the present study included those who (a) agreed to provide their parent with a letter explaining the program and evaluation, (b) provided assent to participate or consent if over the age of 18, and (c) completed post-measures for the program. Ninety-eight participants enrolled in the program. The mean age of these participants was 18 years, with an age range of 15 to 24 years. Of these 98 participants, 18 (18.6%) were male; 26 (27.4%) reported their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino; 49 (50.0%) reported their race as Black or African American; 31 (31.6%) reported their race as White; 3 (3.1%) reported their race as American Indian or Alaskan Native; and 15 (15.3%) did not report race information. Not all participants completed the evaluation. For various reasons, such as scheduling, staff turnover, and timing, a sample of 30 adolescent parents who met all the above criteria completed the evaluation. Of these 30 participants, 5 (16.6%) were male, 23 (76.7%) were female, and 2 (6.7%) did not report gender. The mean age of these 30 participants was 18.0 years with an age range of 15 to 22 years. Eleven participants (36.7%) reported their race as Black or African American; 9 participants (30%) reported their race as White; and 10 participants (33.3%) did not report their race. Nine participants (30.0%) reported their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino.

Procedures

Participants who agreed to participate in the program were invited to a launch event in one of the pilot counties. At this event, participants met with program staff. Parent letters were provided and youth assent was obtained during the launch event. A common measures survey required by the national Children Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) grant program, which included items to measure youth program quality as well as demographic items, was completed (either online or in paper and pencil format, depending on availability of Internet connections) during this launch event. Results of the common measures survey are not included in this article. Surveys were administered by the program's evaluator in accordance with the approved IRB procedure. Participants were provided with schedules of when face-to-face educational classes would meet and were assigned Google Nexus Tablets they would use for the duration of the program.

At the end of the program during the celebration event, the post-common measures survey, as required by the national CYFAR grant program, along with the VIP Parenting Assessment and the VIP Technology Assessment, were administered by state program staff, either online or in paper and pencil format, depending on availability of Internet connections. VIP assessments are retrospective post-then-pre surveys created to assess program-specific

outcomes. Open-ended survey questions were also administered during this time to acquire deeper perspectives on experiences of young parent participants with VIP Program activities.

The decision to administer a retrospective post-then-pre outcome evaluation survey was based on two factors. First, program facilitators believed that the length of time to administer an additional measure beyond the CYFAR common measures would interfere with other activities program facilitators wished to offer during the program launch. Second, a retrospective post-then-pre survey design can reduce the response-shift bias that occurs during a traditional pre-then-post-test survey administration. According to Howard (1980), this type of bias occurs because the knowledge gained through a program changes the way participants understand and evaluate knowledge they had before participation in the program. Therefore, the participant's evaluation in a traditional pre-test may reflect an inaccurate representation of their knowledge because of their limited understanding of the knowledge available on a given topic (Rockwell & Kohn, 1989; Stolz, Brandon, and Roberson, 2013).

Instrument and Measures

VIP retrospective post-then-pre surveys were delivered during the celebration event at the end of the program. The two-page evaluation instrument included two assessments: the VIP Parenting Assessment and the VIP Technology Assessment. Each is discussed briefly below.

The VIP Parenting Assessment. The VIP Parenting Assessment is intended to measure participants' knowledge, understanding, and use of skills related to successful parenting. There are 15 items on this scale, created specifically to match objectives within the VIP Program (e.g., "I understand that being an active part of my child's education is important for my child's school success"). Items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree). Items were averaged to create a VIP Parenting Assessment score. Cronbach's alpha for the VIP Parenting Assessment is between .91 and .93, indicating moderate to high internal reliability.

The VIP Technology Assessment. The VIP Technology Assessment is intended to measure parent comfort with, understanding, and use of technology in relation to their role as a parent. There are 8 items on this scale, created specifically to match objectives within the VIP Program (e.g., "I understand where to go online for trustworthy information"). Items were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = Never; 2 = Very Little; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Often; 5 = Always). Items were averaged to create a VIP Technology Assessment score. Cronbach's alpha for the VIP Technology Assessment is between .88 and .93, indicating moderate to high internal reliability.

Statistical Analyses

Analyses were conducted using paired t-tests within the SPSS statistical analysis software. Cohen's effect size was calculated for each of the VIP Assessments. After analyses of overall scale scores, additional analyses were conducted to determine whether changes were seen in each item within each of the VIP Assessments, because the items in each scale reflect different program objectives.

Results

The VIP Parenting Assessment

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics and test statistics for the overall VIP Parenting Assessment scale and for individual item analyses. The paired t-test for the scale indicates a statistically significant increase in participants' reported knowledge, understanding, and use of skills related to successful parenting after program participation in comparison to before participation in the program. Cohen's effect size value for this measure ($d=1.45$) supports the existence of a high practically significant difference between pre- and post-program scores. Follow-up t-tests on each item on the VIP Parenting Assessment also indicate a statistically significant increase in participants' reported knowledge, understanding, and use of skills related to successful parenting on each of the 15 items after program participation in comparison to before participation in the program.

The VIP Technology Assessment

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics and test statistics for the overall VIP Technology Assessment scale and for individual item analyses. The paired t-test for the scale indicates a statistically significant increase in participants' reported comfort with, understanding, and use of technology in relation to their role as a parent after program participation in comparison to before participation in the program. Cohen's effect size value for this measure ($d=0.98$) supports the existence of a high practically significant difference between pre- and post-program scores. Follow-up t-tests on each item on the VIP Technology Assessment also indicate a statistically significant increase in participants' reported knowledge, understanding, and use of skills related to their use of technology for parenting related activities on each of the 8 items after program participation in comparison to before participation in the program.

Discussion and Implications

For youth who become parents, the tasks of daily life become burdensome and difficult as the typical process of identity formation is stunted; there are enormous consequences for the youths and their families (Spieker, Larson, Lewis, Kelly, & Gilchrist, 1999). The VIP Program was created to assist youth with complexities of identity development and the tasks of raising children. The program includes lessons on the intersection of identity and parenting and provides opportunities for young parents to learn and grow through the use of various learning strategies. VIP participants reported statistically significant knowledge gains in understanding how their identity development shapes who they are as parents. Parental stress and the use of appropriate discipline are important determinants of child abuse (Barth, 2009). In the VIP Program, participants reported significant knowledge and skill gains with respect to managing stress, finding help in their community, using appropriate responses to child behavior, and responding to difficult situations. Emotion regulation, emotion coaching, and active participation in a child's school success are known to impact social, emotional, and academic performance in schools (CDC, 2009). Parent participants in the VIP Program showed statistically significant gains in all these areas.

Although program gains can be specifically attributed to content covered, how content was covered was a critical component in this program. Research on serving adolescent audiences clearly shows that *how* teens are reached is critical to adolescent program development, specifically when reaching young parents is the goal (Lewis et al., 2012). Theoretical components of this program included Adlerian parenting strategies (Dreikurs & Stolz, 1964), along with Cooperative Extension Models of Parent Education (NEPEM and Relationship and Marriage Education (NERMEN). Pedagogical considerations included theories of PYD (Lerner, Lerner, & Phelps, 2008), Component Display (Merrill, 1994), and Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984). These theories contributed to the specific needs of adolescents in various ways. Program parenting and relationship education content is consistent with other family education programs. Essential capacities covered included the basics of parenting styles, child development, couple communication, co-parenting strategies, and many other family science skills common to parenting and relationship education. Traditional Adlerian parenting strategies such as positive discipline, natural and logical consequences, and the goals of misbehavior were addressed.

A PYD Approach was central to the VIP program, prompting participants to identify goals and to partner with community resources and personal coaches to create plans and action steps to reach those goals. Unlike family life education programs designed for adults, the lessons were taught in a deliberate, age-appropriate manner. For example, it was understood that teens often have multiple co-parenting relationships. Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio ecological model, programming was offered to extended family members as part of the lessons on co-parenting to reach the various systems of the young parent's life. Parent educators talked with youth parent participants about difficulties and strategies for including grandparents and held sessions for parents to bring in their child's co-parent to receive the same education.

Knowing that teens respond well to storytelling and to references to their own view points, the Component Display Model (Merrill, 1994) was used in each lesson to encourage growth at the individual level through the use of stories. Similarly, experiential learning activities were an essential component of each lesson for getting the young parents up and moving around, and even using technology to engage participants actively in the learning process. These theories often combined to create an engaging learning environment for young parents. An example of such engagement occurred in a lesson on positive discipline. An eighteen-year-old parent posted a video of a redirection on the group's private Facebook page. His baby was on the floor getting into baby wipes and he redirected her by picking her up, putting her into her high chair, feeding her Cheerios, and saying "Silly baby, we eat Cheerios, not baby wipes." Rather than scolding her for getting into the wipes, he utilized a positive discipline strategy of redirection. A younger parent, age 15, mirrored that activity and posted her own positive redirection. This example shows how young parent participants gained knowledge built on content from various learning theories within one activity.

Parents are increasingly using the Internet as a source of parenting education (Hughes, Bowers, Mitchell, and Ebata, 2012). For young parents, there is a critical need to understand what constitutes credible sources for information. Parents in the VIP Program reported statistically significant increases in their comfort using technology to search for information, and in their use of technology to search for parenting information, communicate with their child's

care provider, and connect with others to obtain information about family life. Furthermore, parent participants in VIP gained understanding of how to use technology to find trustworthy information.

Within parenting education, it is well-established that programs for parents are most effective when they are parent-focused, holistic, and include a variety of engagements (Samuelson, 2010). Research also shows that engaging youth through PYD is critical to positive outcomes (Lerner et al., 2008). The VIP Program developers felt it was essential to use multiple pedagogical approaches, perspectives, and theories to create a program that addressed adolescent parents as adults needing parenting, relationship, and life skills information, and as youth with unique learning needs. Through use of experiential learning and the component display model, the young parents were able to engage in education and coaching support on family life topics that impact their stress and overall wellbeing.

Even with its strong research foundation and ties to multiple pedagogical approaches, the VIP Program encountered challenges in working with teen parents. Teen parents have complex lives. Just like adult parents, multiple activities and responsibilities constantly compete for their time. There was a high rate of attrition within the VIP Program, with only about one-third of participants completing final program evaluations. This is not an easy problem to solve and VIP creators continue to consult teen and parenting experts to figure out new and innovative ways (such as teaching more content online) to better serve young parents.

Results from this study show that the process and content offered through the VIP Program is effective in helping young parents change their attitudes and improve protective factors for children. The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013) program compiled a list of program characteristics that were found predictive of parent training efficacy. These include programs that (a) are strengths-based and family-centered, (b) use both individual and group approaches; (c) emphasize targeted service groups, (d) incorporate an ecological approach and parent partnerships, and (e) employ qualified staff and a strong program evaluation. Other parent training strategies deemed crucial by the same group include promoting positive family interactions, involving fathers, using interactive learning, practicing new skills, teaching emotion coaching and communication skills, and encouraging peer support. VIP covers each strategy and characteristic listed here; results of this pilot showcase positive evaluation results. However, there is a need for additional research to better understand efficacy of the VIP Program. To truly understand efficacy of VIP, there needs to be a randomized control trial that looks specifically at risk and protective factors.

The pilot of the VIP Program provided a foundation for understanding potential impact of a parent education program designed specifically for the complexities of being a teen and being a parent simultaneously. Although results from the pilot are promising, several limitations temper those results. Internal validity, or the ability to claim that the program alone was responsible for the impact on parent learning and growth (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), was limited by the research design, which did not include random assignment or a comparison group (Rovai, Baker, & Ponton, 2014). External validity, or the ability to expect other members of the same population group to respond similarly to the intervention (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), was limited by the sample in several ways. These included participant self-selection, high attrition

rate, small sample size, and the limited geographic area where the program was implemented (Rovai, Baker, & Ponton, 2014). Steps are underway to strengthen the evidence base for the VIP program. For example, several agencies that serve adolescent parents received training to deliver VIP to teen parents they serve. The VIP development team hopes to gather more data from these groups as they provide the VIP Program to teen parents. The VIP development team also plans to conduct a randomized control trial to more closely examine the impact of the VIP Program on factors associated with child abuse and neglect.

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Table 1.

VIP Parenting Assessment Means (Standard Deviations) and Results of Paired t-tests

Construct/Item	Post	Pre	t	df	Effect Size
Overall Score: VIP Parenting Assessment	4.58 (.46)	3.63 (.70)	7.94***	29	1.45
I understand that my identity development shapes who I am as a parent.	4.63 (.67)	3.93 (.83)	4.83***	29	
I can find people and places in my community that provide help for people like me.	4.70 (.47)	3.43 (1.04)	7.35***	29	
I know how to use several techniques for managing stress.	4.60 (.86)	3.13 (1.11)	7.48***	29	
I understand the stages of child development.	4.77 (.43)	3.60 (1.10)	5.18***	29	
I know which parenting styles provide the healthiest development for a child.	4.60 (.50)	3.33 (1.06)	7.35***	29	
I understand how to use appropriate positive responses to child behavior.	4.73 (.52)	3.60 (1.07)	5.78***	29	
I know how to use active listening skills (emotion coaching).	4.73 (.52)	3.43 (1.19)	6.04***	29	
I use positive encouraging words in emotionally difficult situations.	4.53 (.63)	3.77 (.86)	4.68***	29	
I am confident in my ability to respond appropriately during difficult situations.	4.33 (.80)	3.50 (1.04)	4.81***	29	
I understand the importance of positive, supportive relationships.	4.57 (.73)	3.77 (1.07)	3.69***	29	
I regularly use positive conflict resolution skills in relationships	4.43 (.77)	3.67 (1.09)	3.70***	29	
I can use the Internet to find trustworthy information about parenting.	4.43 (.90)	3.67 (1.21)	3.52***	29	
I regularly communicate with my child's care provider.	4.40 (.86)	3.80 (1.13)	3.84***	29	
I feel connected to people who can help me become a better parent.	4.57 (.63)	3.57 (.86)	6.29***	29	
I understand that being an active part of my child's education is important for my child's school success.	4.73 (.58)	4.30 (.95)	2.90**	29	

Note * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$

Table 2

Table 2.

VIP Technology Assessment Means (Standard Deviations) and Results of Paired t-tests

Construct/Item	Post	Pre	t	df	Effect Size
Overall Score VIP Technology Assessment	4.34 (.65)	3.76 (.65)	5.27***	29	0.98
I am comfortable using technology to connect to search for information on the Internet.	4.45 (.83)	3.97 (.87)	2.99**	28	
I use technology to search for information about parenting.	4.59 (.63)	3.93 (.84)	3.93***	28	
I use technology to find activities for my child.	4.31 (.93)	3.76 (1.15)	2.91**	28	
I enjoy using technology to search for information on the Internet.	4.52 (.69)	4.14 (.74)	2.64*	28	
I use technology to communicate with my childcare provider.	4.10 (1.08)	3.52 (.99)	3.83***	28	
I use technology to connect with others to gain information about family life.	4.17 (1.04)	3.52 (1.02)	3.62***	28	
I use social media to connect with others to gain information on family life.	4.10 (.98)	3.59 (.98)	3.20**	28	
I understand where to go online for trustworthy information.	4.52 (.63)	3.69 (.97)	4.30***	28	

Note * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$