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PARENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF TEMPERAMENT AND PREFERENCE FUNCTIONS OF THEIR CHILDREN

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Despite support for the existence and clinical importance of temperament differences in children, the phenomenon is not well understood. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with parents of children aged 9–15 years. The data analysis before intervention revealed that none of the parents participating in this study identified temperament as a possible variable that influenced their child's behaviour. Children then completed the prototype temperament sorter. Parents received verbal feedback regarding their children's temperament and preference functions. Interviews were again conducted. The parents changed their focus and became more aware of the child's nature and started to validate the child's unique being.

PREFERENCE FUNCTIONS OF THEIR CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM

Parents have a moral, ethical and legal obligation regarding the care and development of their children. These responsibilities include the provision of adequate nutrition, shelter, safety and protection from physical and emotional harm; exercise; opportunities for education and social development; experience in problem solving; development of social skills; moral and spiritual guidance; and being role models for effective social functioning (Barker, 2014:310). Parenting, which entails a healthy interaction between the parent and the child, is an important concept in child development (Bavolek, 2009). A prerequisite for an emotionally healthy parent-child relationship is that parents must know and understand their children (Boyd, 2004:229; Kurcinka, 2006:63-70; Rothbart, 2011:230). When parents do not acknowledge and understand their child's uniquely inborn needs, conflict may arise within the parent-child relationship (Kochanka, Friesenborg, Lange & Martel, 2004:745; Kurcinka, 2006:63; Strydom, 2006:3) that may lead to unacceptable behaviour. When children's natural temperament styles fit the requirements, needs and expectations of the parents, positive interaction and adjustment is expected, but when children's temperaments and natural processes clash with those of their parents, negative interaction occurs, which results in conflict in the parent-child relationship (Berk, 2006:417; Rothbart, Sheese & Conradt, 2009:186; Rothbart, 2011:4).

The study highlights the importance of parents understanding and respecting their children as unique human beings. The study further stresses the importance of parents being included as important role players in therapeutic processes with a child. For parents to understand and recognise their child's needs, knowledge of the child's temperament is required. Knowledge of the nature of temperament leads to parents having a better understanding of their children's behaviour and consequently fewer frustrations arise within the parent-child relationship. This article focuses on a section of the study, namely on parent's understanding of the temperament and preference functions of their children.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Temperament

Rothbart (2011:2) states that temperament refers to the biologically based individual differences shown in young children, but through the study of temperament we have also identified the processes we all share and from which personality develops. The researcher derived her own definition of temperament from the literature: temperament forms the core base for the development of personality and is linked to the inborn qualities every human being is born with. It tends to be stable over a period of time, but is sensitive to environmental influences. Furthermore, temperament is an indicator of how children react and behave. The focus is therefore on the style of behaviour and not

the content of behaviour. For example, it can refer to the way that children show their likes and dislikes, and not why they dislike something.

Temperament sorter

A temperament sorter is an instrument that assesses your natural style of engagement or functioning and behaviour within your environment. It is a self-scored instrument that consists of a questionnaire and score chart that assess temperament and preference functions (Jansen van Rensburg, 2014:296).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY DESIGN

The design and development (D & D) model was considered an appropriate design for this study because it lends itself to the use of a multi-phase research approach (De Vos & Strydom, 2011:476-487; Fraser, 2004:210-222). During Phase 1 the research problem was analysed and the project was planned accordingly. A literature study was undertaken during Phase 2 to explore and describe the different components required within a practice-based ecometric model that assesses temperament and preference functions, as well as the different dimensions required within the temperament sorter. Phase 2 was concluded after the researcher explored how the ecometric perspective could contribute to the development of an ecometric temperament sorter. Phase 3, Step 1 and Phase 4, Steps 1-3 involved a quantitative process where item analysis of the prototype was explored with the assistance of a panel of experts and designed using the Delphi method. The prototype temperament sorter was pilot tested for reliability using equivalent or parallel form reliability.

To assess if the designed temperament sorter, when used within the practice-based ecometric model, assisted in enhancing the parent-child interaction, a pre-assessment post-assessment design was followed during Phase 5. Qualitative data were obtained from parents through semi-structured interviews. Through the completion of the designed temperament sorter, qualitative data were obtained regarding the temperament and preference functions of participating children. During a feedback session each child's temperament and preference functions were qualitatively explained to parents during a 60-80 minute interview. In order to give the parents ample time to rethink and familiarise themselves practically with the given information, semi-structured interviews with the parents were conducted four weeks later.

This article describes Phase 5 of the D & D model: Evaluation and advanced development. It outlines the data-gathering and analysis of the pre-assessment and post-assessment. It aims to answer the following research question: Can parents understanding of the temperament and preference functions of their children enhance the parent-child relationship?

SAMPLING

The population for this part of the study included all married parents and their children from an intact family bond in the Western Cape Province who registered for therapy at the researcher's private practice in Somerset West during the period mid-October to end of November 2013. The service offered by the practice extends over a large area in the

Western Cape and included parents and children who reside in Durbanville, Brackenfell, Kuilsriver, Stellenbosch, Somerset West, Strand, Gordon's Bay, Malmesbury, Vredendal, Paarl, Wellington, De Doorns, Hermanus, Gansbaai, Bredasdorp and Swellendam.

Non-probability selection (Du Plooy, 2009:115,122; Maree & Pietersen, 2007:176; Strydom, 2011b:231-234) was utilised with purposive sampling (Berg, 2007:64; Maree & Pietersen, 2007:178; Strydom, 2011b:232). The sampling was criterion based (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a:79), which refers to the fact that participants were selected on the basis of defining characteristics that fitted the criteria that made them bearers of the data needed for the study (Maree & Pietersen, 2007:178). The judgement of the researcher determined if a case was suitable for sampling.

The criteria for selection for parents were:

- Parents of children (9-15 years) from both genders and of any culture who presented themselves at the practice for service to that child;
- Parents need to be a heterosexual married couple and within an intact relationship;
- Parents should not have had any previous experience with regard to temperament analysis, whether elsewhere or at the practice;
- Parents should be able to converse in either English or Afrikaans.

Seven parent groups were sampled for the study. Marshall (1996:523) indicates that a suitable sample size for qualitative research is one that effectively and sufficiently answers the research question. Data saturation was achieved with this study (Botma, Greeff, Mulaudzi & Wright, 2010:233)

DATA COLLECTION

The researcher made use of interviews as the method for data collection. The aim was to experience the world through the eyes of the participants and thereby harvest rich and descriptive data (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a:87). Semi-structured one-to-one interviews (Greeff, 2011:351-352) were conducted with the participating parent groups to gain a detailed account of the participants' beliefs, views or perceptions (Greeff, 2011:351-352) regarding their child's behaviour, functioning and the parent-child relationship. One-to-one interviews are also important when researching sensitive topics (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005:30), as was the case in this research.

During the initial intake (first-round interview) qualitative information was gathered through semi-structured interviews (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a:87-89) with the participating parent groups (mother and father). The interview was conducted at the private practice at a time convenient for the parents. An interview schedule defined the line of inquiry with some basic predetermined questions regarding the parents' perception of their child's behaviour; the here-and-now interaction with their child, and their knowledge regarding temperament and preference functions.

After that the children of participating parent groups were individually exposed to the intervention or designed temperament sorter. They had to complete only the

Uknowme88 Type Indicator for Children. The temperament sorter is a self-report questionnaire and non-judgemental; in other words, the way you prefer to act most of the time will not be judged as good or bad (Jansen van Rensburg, 2014:296). They completed the task, which lasts approximately 40-45 minutes, at the researcher's private practice. This article does not report on the participating children's completion of the temperament sorter.

After the quantitative temperament analysis took place, the parents were called back for verbal feedback regarding the outcome of the designed temperament sorter. Feedback consisted of qualitative descriptive data regarding their child's temperament and preference functions, and how these influenced their child's needs and expectations. Feedback was provided at the researcher's private practice and lasted 60-80 minutes. Second-round semi-structured interviews with the parents were held four weeks later. The researcher again used a semi-structured interview schedule to obtain second-round qualitative data on the parent-child relationship.

DATA ANALYSIS

A literature control was conducted as part of the data analysis so as to compare and contrast the data with themes and categories that emerged in the literature (Creswell, 2003:30-31; Delport, Fouché & Schurink, 2011:305-306). After the data analysis the researcher continued to explore the literature as there were certain aspects discussed by the participants that were unexpected. Therefore the researcher added further literature to the data-analysis process to ensure thoroughness.

Data analysis for the qualitative process (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:399-417) took place by comparing the data or outcome of the first-round and second-round semi-structured interviews in order to determine whether the designed temperament sorter effectively assisted in addressing the aim of the study when implemented within the practice-based ecometric model. Data analysis focused on assessing whether the utilisation of the practice-based ecometric model had indeed assisted in helping parents to understand their child's temperament and preference function in order for them to adjust their parenting style and enhance the parent-child relationship.

Field notes, which included the researcher's impressions and observations, were recorded during and immediately after the interviews (Greeff, 2011:359) and were added to the collected data. The notes guided the researcher especially in clarifying information during the interviews. They further assisted the researcher in making the data more substantial and also added the researcher's thoughts on what had been discussed.

Qualitative data analysis can be described as an on-going process, which involves the following: making sense of the data, conducting different analyses, representing the data and interpreting the data (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:110-115*;* Schurink *et al*., 2011:401-419). Lincoln and Guba (cited in Schurink *et al*., 2011:419-421) outline four categories for validity of qualitative research. The four categories were implemented in the following way.

Credibility: Data saturation occurred in the study and the researcher continued to edit and analyse the findings throughout the process.

Transferability: The researcher aimed to describe a detailed research process with precision in order to enable other researchers to judge whether the results are transferable to other contexts. The study made use of purposive sampling. The 'Hawthorne effect' explains how participants (especially from the practice of the researcher) may represent themselves differently when participating in research (Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007:42; Mitchell & Jolley, 2010:167). This was taken into account in order to ensure that the data were as trustworthy as possible. The researcher allowed the participating parents to feel at ease within the interviews and also ensured that the parents were anonymous (through using pseudonyms).

Dependability: The researcher focused on presenting a logical, well documented and audited research process. The research process was examined by external examiners in order to complete the research product.

Confirmability: This indicates that the bias of the researcher did not contaminate the outcome of the study and that the findings are the product of the study. The findings of the proposed research were tested against these four categories in order to prove the findings are valid.

Creswell's analytical spiral (Creswell, 2007:150-155) as integrated in Schurink *et al*. (2011:404-419) was used for data analysis in this study. The steps were the following: planning for the recording of data; data collection and preliminary analysis; organising the data; reading and writing memos; generating categories, themes and patterns; coding the data; testing emergent understandings and searching for alternative explanations; interpreting the data; and presenting the data and writing the qualitative data report.

These responses were grouped into categories, themes and sub-themes as a way to order and identify the core findings. For the purpose of this article only one category, namely the parent groups' concepts of temperament and preference functions, will be discussed.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Permission was obtained from the North-West University (NWU) ethical committee under project NWU-00060-12-A1 to undertake the research project. This study also complied with the ethical standards as set out by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (SACSSP, 2013). With the collection of data, certain ethical aspects such as anonymity, confidentiality, privacy, informed consent and debriefing were taken into account (Berg, 2007:62-72; Iphofen, 2009:28-38; Maree & Van der Westhuizen, 2007:42-43; Strydom, 2011a:127-129). Informed and written consent was obtained from the parents. The goal of the study, the procedures to be followed, the possible after-effects, as well as the credibility of the study were explained in a written document. The parents were seen for semi-structured interviews at the private practice at a time that was convenient to them all. Any possible information that could identify participants during data analysis was removed. Although the researcher used participants from her own practice, the interviews were not personal or threatening. None of the participants

received any financial compensation, but they were given feedback regarding the temperament and preference functions of their children that assisted in the enhancement of the parent-child relationship. In other words, they benefited indirectly from the research. Data obtained were kept securely locked away in a cabinet in the researcher's office and data on the computer were password protected. Parents were informed of the final results after the research was completed. The researcher did not engage with participants in further social work intervention after completion of the research.

FINDINGS

The data analysis and findings will be discussed below. Table 1 gives a profile of the participating parents and their children.

TABLE 1
PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

PARENT-GROUP PG	CHILD	TEMPERAMENT TYPE & PREFERENCES	GENDER	AGE	RACE GROUP
A Mother **PGA1** Father **PGA2**	Child **1**	Introverted intuition with extroverted thinking INTJ	Male	9	White
B Mother **PGA1** Father **PGA2**	Child **2**	Introverted sensing with extroverted thinking ISTJ	Male	10	White
C Mother **PGA1** Father **PGA2**	Child **3**	Introverted sensing with extroverted thinking ISTJ INTJ	Female	9	White
D Mother **PGA1** Father **PGA2**	Child **4**	Introverted intuition with extroverted thinking ISTJ	Female	9	White
E Mother **PGA1** Father **PGA2**	Child **5** Child **6**	Introverted thinking with extroverted intuition INTP Extroverted intuition with introverted feeling ENFP	Male Male	11 13	White
F Mother **PGA1** Father **PGA2**	Child **7**	Introverted sensing with extroverted feeling ISFJ	Female	12	White
G Mother **PGA1** Father **PGA2**	Child **8** Child **9**	Introverted intuition with extroverted thinking ISTJ Extroverted intuition with introverted feeling ENFP	Female Female	14 11	White

Table 1 shows that seven parent groups participated in the research. The groups are numbered from A to G, while the children are numbered from 1 to 9, indicating their temperament and preference.

RESULTS FROM INTERVIEWS

During the semi-structured interviews, the parent groups expressed their opinions and perceptions on different aspects connected to temperament and the parent-child relationship. These responses were grouped into categories, themes and sub-themes as a way to order and identify the core findings. For the purpose of this article only one category, namely the parent groups' concepts of temperament and preference functions, will be discussed. In presenting the data it is important to bring the voice of the participants into the report. The researcher made use of short, eye-catching quotations (Delport & Fouché, 2011:426; Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:115) to enrich the findings.

Qualitative data obtained during the semi-structured interviews of the pre-assessment and post-assessment will be discussed under each theme. See Table 2 for data analysis before intervention or implementation of the designed temperament sorter.

PRE-ASSESSMENT

TABLE 2
THE CONCEPTS OF TEMPERAMENT AND PREFERENCE FUNCTIONS BEFORE INTERVENTION

THE CONCEPTS OF TEMPERAMENT & PREFERENCE FUNCTIONS	
Theme	**Sub-themes**
Theme 1: Parents' understanding of temperament and preference functions	**Sub-theme 1:** Temperament is learned
	Sub-theme 2: Temperament is fixed and cannot change
	Sub-theme 3: Temperament refers to emotions
Theme 2: Parents' knowledge regarding their own child's temperament and preference functions	

Theme One: Parents' understanding of temperament and preference functions

The parent groups were asked to reflect on their understanding of temperament and preference functions. Different viewpoints were expressed, as discussed below.

Sub-theme 1: Temperament is learned

Two parent groups (PGB and PGF) stated their opinion that temperament is learned. They argued that whenever a child reacts in a certain way, the more the child learns to behave in such a way. PGB2 explained: "*The more the child learns that he receives attention when he throws a tantrum, he will throw more tantrums in order to get what he*

wants." PGF2 mentioned that "*temperament is learned and develops as a person grows older*."

According to the literature (Rothbart, 2011:3; Thomas & Chess, 1977:9), temperament is an inborn quality that is biologically based and not something children learn over a period of time as they grow older. Rothbart (2005:1) noted that temperament refers to individual differences that exist before many of the more cognitive abilities of personality developed. Although temperament is linked with behaviour, Thomas and Chess (1977:9), Keogh, (2003b:15), Joyce (2010:4) and Rothbart (2011:36) have argued that it refers to how children react rather than why they react. The researcher also understood it as such: it is not whether children experience anger for some other reason, but rather how they react when they felt angry. The question is whether they usually react with a tantrum or verbal outburst, or do they most of the time react with more quiet, passive aggression. The difference in reaction to the same feeling reflects the child's individual inborn temperament.

From the above it is clear that 10 out of 14 parents misunderstood temperament and this could easily lead to confusion and inappropriate expectations. These parents' opinions reflect their view that children can learn or for that matter unlearn certain temperamental traits.

Sub-theme 2: Temperament is fixed and cannot change

Parent-groups PGC and PGE expressed their opinion that temperament is more or less fixed and cannot change. PGE1 mentioned: "*I don't think temperament can easily change. That would take great effort*." PGC2 said: "*If your child's temperament is to forget easily, you can't unlearn that trait*."

It is clear that parent-groups PGC and PGE understood some aspect of temperament correctly. Sheppard (2000:1) suggests that temperament refers to those aspects of personality that are genetically based and inborn; it is also relatively stable, but could also be influenced by environmental factors (Berens, 2000:4; Chess & Thomas, 1989:35; Reed-Victor, 2004:62). The researcher understood that although the natural tendencies and preferences are inborn qualities, the environment could easily pressure the child to adapt to the expectations of the environment and therefore, even though temperamental preferences are fixed, the environment could still influence the child's behaviour. This situation correlates with Jung's concept of the falsification of type (Meisgeier & Murphy, 1987:7). According to Jung, children's psychological health is promoted when they are able to express their natural preferences (Joyce, 2010:10), but sometimes the environment forces the child to suppress a natural tendency (Joyce, 2010:26; Tieger & Barron-Tieger, 1997:11-13). The researcher assumes that such reactions can cause children to try to change their temperamental patterns of behaviour (behavioural style) accordingly in order to fit in with their environment.

Sub-theme 3: Temperament refers to emotions

All parent groups were of the opinion that temperament reflects emotions and more specifically negative emotions such as anger and temper tantrums. PGG2 explained this

as follows: "*I regard my child's anger and tantrums as his temperament*." PGB1expressed the view: "*His anger is part of his temperament*."

Temperament is linked with behaviour and therefore it is linked with how an individual experiences and shows emotions (Allport, 1961 in Joyce, 2010:4). But the literature indicates that temperament does not imply the reflection of exclusively negative emotions such as anger or temper tantrums. According to Prior, Sanson, Smart and Oberklaid (2000:3) the term "temperament" implies "The individual differences in attentional, emotional, and behavioural self-regulation, along with the relative level of emotional reactivity, which together give a unique flavour to an individual. Temperamental style tends to remain similar for an individual across life, but it is nevertheless modifiable, not fixed." Therefore, it rather refers to an "individual's emotional nature, including his susceptibility to emotional stimulation, his customary strength and speed of response, the quality of his prevailing mood, and all the peculiarities of fluctuation and intensity of mood" (Joyce, 2010:4).

From the above it is clear that temperament rather indicates how a child will experience all aspects of different emotions and not only whether the child has a tendency to be angry, bad tempered or frustrated.

Theme 2: Parents' knowledge regarding their own child's temperament and preference functions

Parents were asked a specific question regarding their knowledge of their child's temperament and preference functions. Parent-groups PGA, PGD, PGF and PGG indicated that they had no idea whatsoever. The parent-groups PGB and PGC indicated that they had done some prior reading on this matter and that influenced their knowledge. PGB1 explained: "*I've read something about an introverted child and I think my child is an introvert*." The father, PGB2, elaborated further: "*Yes, I think his shyness indicates he's an introvert*." PGC1 also mentioned that she used a manual for parents on which to base their understanding of their child's temperament when they commented: "*According to Hettie Brittz's book, she is a palm tree but that's all I know*." PGE1 indicated that they had only a vague idea on this matter, but could not ground it more specifically as she said: "*We think our one child (child 5) is an introvert and our other child (child 6) is an extrovert*."

The above discussion indicates that the parents lack a clear understanding of their child's exact temperament and preference functions. PGB and PGE referred to a certain dimension of temperament when they described their children as introverted and extroverted. According to Jung, individuals tend to focus their energy and be energised in two different ways, namely through introverted energy or extroverted energy (Harkey & Jourgensen, 2004:35-36). PGC1's knowledge of their child's temperament is based on a description in a specific temperament manual for parents, where the metaphor of different saplings (the rose bush, the palm tree, the ornamental tree and the pine tree) is used to introduce different temperaments to parents (Brittz, 2008). The literature review reveals that books (Brittz, 2008; Harkey & Jourgenson, 2004; Neville & Johnson, 1998; Penley, 2006; Tieger & Barron-Tieger, 1997) that focus on temperament analysis

present parents with a questionnaire with multiple questions to help them determine which temperament characteristics correspond with the child's behaviour. According to the literature, this method lacks validity and the objectivity of parents cannot be guaranteed (Kagan, 1994:55; Matheny, 2000:82; Vasta, Miller & Ellis, 2004:456-457).

A clear understanding of the child's temperament and preference functions is therefore essential in the parent-child relationship. The more parents succeed in identifying with their child's unique temperament and behavioural style, the more they become able to relate to their child in a way that creates harmony, warmth and spontaneity (Harkey & Jourgensen, 2004:330.) This results in creating a sense of mutual understanding that is likely to build self-esteem and security in both parent and child (De Haan, Prinzie & Dekovic, 2009:1695; Greenspan, 1995:299).

Concluding the data analysis of the pre-assessment, the researcher found that participating parents had little understanding on temperament as a concept. Their responses further revealed they had no clear understanding of their child's temperament and preference functions. Therefore temperament as important variable in the parent-child relationship went unnoticed.

POST-ASSESSMENT

Quantitative analysis of temperament and preference functions took place after the participating children completed the designed temperament sorter. After that the parent groups received qualitative verbal feedback on their children's temperament and preference functions. A period of four weeks passed before the second-round (post-assessment) semi-structured interviews with the parents took place in order to give parents ample time to rethink and familiarise themselves practically with the information provided. The data analysis based on these interviews will be discussed below.

TABLE 3
THE CONCEPTS OF TEMPERAMENT AND PREFERENCE FUNCTIONS

THE CONCEPTS OF TEMPERAMENT AND PREFERENCE FUNCTIONS	
Theme	**Sub-themes**
Theme 1: Parents' understanding of temperament and preference functions	**Sub-theme 1:** Temperament is inborn
	Sub-theme 2: Underestimate the importance of taking temperament into account
Theme 2: Parents' knowledge of their child's temperament and preference functions	

Parents again were asked during the post-assessment to reflect on their understanding of temperament and preference functions. The researcher intended to explore whether the parents had developed a better understanding of the temperament and preference functions of their child. Two themes and sub-themes were identified.

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Theme 1: Parents' understanding of temperament and preference functions

Sub-theme 1: Temperament is inborn and cannot be changed

All parent groups indicated their understanding that temperament is an inborn trait and therefore cannot be changed. PGA1 and PGF2 shared the view that "*temperament is something the child has been born with*." PGB1 and PGG1 both highlighted their understanding that "*one cannot change your child's temperament*." PGE1, PGF1 and PGF2 expressed their opinion that temperament is "*part of their children's inner working*."

According to Buss and Plomin, temperament refers to inherited personality traits that appear early in life (in Goldsmith, Buss, Plomin, Rothbart, Thomas, Chess, Hinder & McCall, 1987:508). Temperament therefore refers to the biologically based individual differences in people (Rothbart, 2011:2).

Sub-theme 2: Underestimate the importance of taking temperament into account

Parents indicated that they underestimated the importance of taking temperament into account in their parenting task. PGA2 admitted their ignorance: "*We never even once consider temperament*." PGB1 expressed the same view: "*I never considered temperament before*." Both PGD1 and PGE2 commented that they "*never realised temperament is such an important aspect when raising a child*."

Knowledge of temperament guides parents with knowledge about the uniqueness of every child and the way in which the child interacts with the world (Harkey & Jourgensen, 2004:8-9). The literature highlights the fact that each child is born with a factory-installed wiring system (temperament) that determines whether the child will be easy or challenging to raise (Greenspan, 1995:7; Joyce, 2010:3; Neville & Johnson, 1998:23). The researcher argues that parents can make use of this knowledge to empower themselves in the parenting task.

The data analysis above indicated that parents gained sufficient awareness and knowledge of temperament and preference functions and their value in the parenting process.

Theme 2: Parents' knowledge of their child's temperament and preference functions

Parents were asked specific questions regarding their child's temperament and preference functions. All of the parents indicated that they gained better understanding of their child's temperament. They all shared the belief that they were better prepared with knowledge of the way that their children preferred to interact with their environment.

Parents indicated a better understanding of their child's introverted energy flow process and their need for reflection, time away from others, and time to adapt to new situations. PGA2 expressed their understanding that their child "*needs some quiet time away from his sister*." PGC1 and PGF1 noted that they understood that their children need "*some time to adapt to new situations*." PGG2 expressed a similar response "*not to rush her into doing something*." PGD1 understood that it was necessary not to pressure their child "*to play with friends if she doesn't want to*." PGE1 understood for the first time "*why it is such a struggle to go to school on a Monday*."

PGE and PGG expressed that they had a better understanding of the social-interactive needs of their extroverted energy flow children. PGE1 mentioned they understood "*why the school frequently complains about their child's talking*." PGG1 also understood their child's "*loads of energy and sometimes she has no off button*." PGG2 understood the "*reason their child struggles to play on her own*."

PGB, PGC, PGD, PGF and PGG expressed that they had a better understanding of a certain temperament need for security, structure and closure regarding decision making. PGD1 stated: "*We'll prepare her in advance*." PGF1 mentioned that "*they realised their child does not like any change of routine*." PGG2 noted their "*understanding of her need for structure*."

Parents expressed a better understanding of their children's thinking preference and logical way of decision making: "*I now understand that he doesn't mean to be rude*" (PGB1); "*He wants us to explain things to him in logical terms without any emotions involved*" (PGE1).

PGA and PGE expressed a better understanding of their children's particular temperament preference to engage in dialogue and the need for parents to explain the reason for each and every limit and rule in logical terms: "*We know we need to give him time to engage in a conversation with us*" (PGA1); "*I now know better not to say to him: because I said so*" (PGA2).

PGE expressed a better understanding of the particular temperaments of their children, who function with a feeling preference that results in high empathic emotions towards others: "*We now understand why he so acts emotionally sensitively*" (PGE2); "*I now understand he needs time for sharing his emotions with me in his way*" (PGE1); "*We understand our child's emotions and where they come from*" (PGE1).

According to the literature, temperament is connected with the *how* of behaviour rather than the *what* (Joyce, 2010:4; Keogh, 2003b:15; Rothbart, 2011:36; Thomas & Chess, 1977:9). In order to understand and recognise their children's behavioural and emotional

needs, parents require sufficient knowledge of their temperaments and preference functions (Rothbart, 2011:4; Strydom, 2006:6). Knowledge of temperament empowers parents to respond with greater understanding to their children's behaviour; therefore fewer frustrations are experienced, which may in turn lead to a more effective parent-child relationship (Greenspan, 1995:285; Keogh, 2003a:13; Kurcinka, 1998:187; Rothbart *et al*., 2009:184,186; Rothbart, 2011:5).

From the above data analysis it is clear that the parents had gained knowledge and understanding of their children's unique way of being. This could enhance the parent-child relationship.

DISCUSSION

Concluding the data analysis on the pre-assessment regarding Category One, the researcher found that participating parents had little understanding of temperament as a concept. Their responses further revealed they had no clear understanding of their child's temperament and preference functions. Parents' general knowledge regarding the concepts of temperament and preference functions was inadequate. Parents' viewpoint ranged from a belief that temperament is a learned action, and that temperament refers to strong emotions, to the view that it is fixed and therefore not able to change. Before the intervention the parents had focused in their parenting on discipline and behaviour, with the intended outcome being to produce obedient and well-behaved children. Therefore temperament as important variable in the parent-child relationship went unnoticed. None of the parents participating in this study identified temperament a possible variable that influenced their child's behaviour. The assumption of Carey and McDewitt (1995 in Vogel, 2003:3) that "despite abundant support of the existence and clinical importance of temperament differences in children, the phenomenon is not well understood by the general public or by health and educational professionals" still holds true.

The data analysis after intervention indicated a parental change in attitude, awareness, knowledge and behaviour. It is clear that the information given to parents about their child's temperament and preference functions had changed the way the parents' interacted with their children. Parents reported a better understanding of temperament in general and indicated that they grasp their children's temperament and preference functions. This knowledge affects the parents' awareness and understanding of the child's uniqueness. Furthermore, it affects parental awareness of the needs of their children and guided the parents' expectations and their reactions to their children's behaviour. It was only after the feedback session, during which the parents received a thorough explanation of the concepts of temperament and preference functions, that they were able to grasps the concepts with greater understanding. They indicated that they understand that temperament referred to inborn qualities and not some characteristics the child chooses to adopt.

Participants further indicated that they underestimated the importance of taking temperament and preference functions into account in the parenting process. The parents changed their focus and became more aware of the child's nature and started to validate the child's unique being. Parental responsiveness towards the child therefore increased. Parents reported that they consciously focused on understanding their children's unique

inborn qualities with their preferred needs and expectations, and guided their own parenting to accommodate this. Even although other factors in the environment could have played a role in the improvement of the parent-child relationship, the researcher asked the participants specific questions in this regard. The period of four weeks after the parents were informed of their children's temperament type was also not long enough for other factors to have an influence.

Children reacted to this change in a positive way. The parents reported that their children had shown more respect towards them and there was less conflict noted in the parent-child relationship. Parents therefore reported a sense of control and felt more empowered in the parenting process. Parents reflected on the intervention process and expressed a need to understand their own temperaments and preference functions, and acknowledged the role these play in their parenting and interaction with their children. Parents further expressed a need to also understand the temperament and preference function of the other children in their family unit, as they grasped the concept that the family system acted as a closed system in which members influenced one another. Parents indicated this intervention to be helpful for all families with children and reported that they had achieved a positive interaction with their children and felt more prepared for the parenting process.

The data analysis indicated that parents felt more competent in the parenting process and therefore were more able to be responsive to their child's preferred needs and expectations. In answering the research question, it emerged that parents' understanding of the temperament and preference functions of their children can enhance the parent-child relationship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

With the abovementioned considerations in mind, the researcher recommends the following:

- For all social workers, counsellors and therapists working in the field with families and children to consider the abovementioned argument and approach parents as important role players to be included within the therapeutic process, in other words the systems approach;
- For all social workers, counsellors and therapists working within the field with families and children to equip themselves with knowledge regarding temperament and how temperament shapes the parent-child relationship through the extensive literature studies and formal training available.

SUMMARY

It is clear from the above account that the parents had gained knowledge and understanding of their children's unique way of being. This could enhance the parent-child interaction.

Post-assessment data analysis indicated that the designed temperament sorter (9-15 years), when implemented, assisted the researcher to create awareness and better understanding amongst participating parents regarding the temperament and preference functions of their children.

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