



# Effects of a video feedback parent training program during child welfare visitation<sup>☆</sup>



Rhonda N.T. Nese<sup>a,\*</sup>, Cynthia M. Anderson<sup>b</sup>, Traci Ruppert<sup>a</sup>, Philip A. Fisher<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Oregon, USA

<sup>b</sup> Appalachian State University, USA

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## ABSTRACT

Behavioral parent training programs have documented efficacy for improving behaviors among parents and their children and are frequently used by child welfare agencies to prevent removal of a child from the parental home or to facilitate reunification. Although an ideal time for parent training might be during supervised visits where parents may practice skills with their children under the guidance and support of a therapist or caseworker, this is not typically the case. Most often, parents within the child welfare system receive parent training in small groups without their children present, and to date, few studies have examined effects of behavioral parent training interventions during supervised visitation. In this study, concurrent multiple baseline across behaviors design was used to examine effects of a behavioral parent training program, *Filming Interactions to Nurture Development* (FIND), on parental skill acquisition with four mothers who had lost custody of their children but were being considered for reunification. Children emitted little or no problem behaviors during baseline or intervention, so parenting behavior was the primary dependent variable. Results obtained across participants documented a clear functional relation between implementation of the FIND intervention and increases in developmentally supportive parenting behaviors. Results of social validity and contextual fit measures suggest the intervention was perceived by mothers to be positive, feasible, and appropriate within the child welfare context. Practical and conceptual implications, limitations of this study, and directions for future research are discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

An estimated 3.4 million referrals involving the alleged maltreatment of children were received by child protective service agencies across the United States during the federal fiscal year of 2012 (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014). Among the states reporting a breakdown of service type, two-fifths (38.6%) of victims who received services were placed in out-of-home care, including foster and group facilities (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014). Foster home placements are intended to be short-term responses to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, with the primary goal of reunifying foster children with their biological parents (Brook, MacDonald, & Yan, 2012).

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\* Corresponding author at: Educational and Community Supports, University of Oregon, 1235 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-1235, USA.

E-mail address: [rnese@uoregon.edu](mailto:rnese@uoregon.edu) (R.N.T. Nese).

Although approximately 50% of children nationally leave the foster care system through reunification with their parents, reunification often is not successful (D'Andrade & Chambers, 2012). Nationally, nearly 30% of reunified children return to foster care within 10 years, with the majority of children reentering within the first year of reunification (Wulczyn, 2004). Over the past three decades, researchers have identified four parenting concerns that often lead to child abuse and neglect, and the subsequent removal of children from parental custody: parental substance abuse (e.g., Barth, 2009; Besinger, Garland, Litrownik, & Landsverk, 1999), parental mental illness (e.g., Glennon, 2003; Kundra & Alexander, 2009), domestic violence (e.g., Barth, 2009; Casaneuva, Martin, Runyan, Barth, & Bradley, 2008), and child conduct problems (e.g., Burns, Phillips, Wagner, Barth, Kolko, Campbell, & Yandsverk, 2004; Fanshel, 1992). Since reunifying children with their birth parents continues to be a goal of the child welfare system, local and national agencies have taken steps to reducing the reoccurrence of these four parenting concerns through parent education and training (Beyer, 2008; Wulczyn, 2004). As noted by Barth et al. (2005), parent training is often the primary intervention that child welfare agencies provide in trying to prevent child removal or reunify families.

Behavioral parent training is an evidence-based approach for the improvement of parenting behaviors and the prevention and treatment of disruptive behaviors exhibited by children (for recent reviews see

**Table 1**  
Skills taught in Marte Meo versus FIND.

Marte Meo skills	FIND skills
Element 1. The adult seeks to identify the child's focus of attention.	Parenting behavior 1. Sharing the focus of attention
Element 2. The adult seeks to confirm the child's focus of attention or initiative and then adds her own reaction. The confirmation attempt may be verbal or non-verbal.	Parenting behavior 2. Noticing and encouraging
Element 3. The adult actively awaits the child's response to her own action.	Parenting behavior 3. Turn-taking
Element 4. The adult names both ongoing actions, events, experiences and feelings as well as anticipated ones.	Parenting behavior 4. Beginnings and endings
Element 5. The adult triangulates the child to the surrounding world by naming what is there (within the child's possible focus of attention).	
Element 6. The caregiver has the responsibility to achieve a mutually clear and satisfactory ending to present activities when possible.	

Chorpita et al., 2011 or Comer, Chow, Cooper-Vince, & Wilson, 2013). There are a number of different behavioral parent training programs but most are based upon the social-interactional model developed by Patterson and colleagues (e.g., Patterson, 1982; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). Behavioral parent training programs teach parents specific skills (e.g., prompting strategies, differential reinforcement, extinction) to provide structure, encourage desired behaviors, and decrease problem behaviors.

Although most behavioral parent training involves in-vivo instruction and rehearsal, video feedback has been used in multiple studies (e.g., Fukkink, 2008; Hitchcock, Dowrick, & Prater, 2003). In such programs, parents are filmed interacting with their child, typically practicing newly learned skills. Parents then observe all or part of the recordings with a therapist. This allows therapists to focus parental attention on specific parent behaviors and to see the effects of those behaviors on their child (Fukkink, 2008). Meta-analytic reviews of video feedback document significant positive effects of video feedback on parenting behaviors, attitudes of parents toward parenting, and the development of their children (Fukkink, 2008; Fukkink, Trienekens, & Kramer, 2011; Hitchcock et al., 2003).

Another variation of behavioral parent training involves an explicit focus on parent and/or child strengths (e.g., Buchanan, Chamberlain, Price, & Spengelmeier, 2013; Wulczyn, 2004). A strength-based approach to parent training targets behavioral skills currently in a parent's repertoire and seeks to reinforce those skills and provide prompting to encourage generalization of those skills to others in the same response class. Strength-based practice in child welfare work has a strong theoretical foundation as an effective helping strategy for developing prosocial skills and appropriate behaviors in at-risk children and adults (Brun & Rapp, 2001; Buchanan et al., 2013; Fisher, Kim, & Pears, 2009).

Although behavioral parent training programs are frequently used by child welfare agencies when caseworkers are attempting to prevent child removal or reunify families (Barth et al., 2005), the use of parent training programs for families in the child welfare system has received little examination, and few studies have examined the use of such practices during supervised visitation time (Beyer, 2008). In this study, the effects of a strength-based parent training program, *Filming Interactions to Nurture Development* (FIND; Fisher, 2012), were evaluated with four mothers who had lost custody of their young children due to neglect, substance abuse, or threats of harm to the child. FIND was adapted from an empirically validated parenting program called *Marte Meo* (Aarts, 2000). In *Marte Meo*, the therapist videotapes everyday caregiver-child interactions and then edits the videos, pulling out brief snippets illustrating the caregiver engaging in a desired behavior. The therapist describes the skill to the parent and highlights how the child responded (Aarts, 2000). *Marte Meo* has been shown to be effective in reducing

teacher reports of child problem behavior in schools (Axberg, Hansson, Broberg, & Wirtberg, 2006), improving supports for new adoptive parents (Osterman, Moller, & Wirtberg, 2010), and facilitating healthy mother-infant interactions in an effort to combat postnatal depression (Vik & Rohde, 2014); however it has not previously been examined in the context of child welfare visitation.

FIND was adapted from *Marte Meo* in the following ways. First, FIND targets between one and four skills depending on the needs of a specific parent whereas *Marte Meo* targets six parenting skills (see Table 1 for skills taught in Marte Meo versus FIND). Second, FIND is time-limited, lasting 10 weeks with sessions running for no more than 45-min in duration (*Marte Meo* is not time limited). Third, FIND is structured such that skills are taught and practiced by parents in a specific sequence, rather than simply identified and recorded when they happen to occur. The sequence of the four parenting behaviors is based on the concept of "Serve and Return" that was developed at the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2007). Communication and social skills are supported in the developing brain when children's behaviors, whether verbal (cooing, giggling) or nonverbal (gesturing), are responded to in a nurturing manner (smiling, returning the coo, verbally acknowledging). Such back-and-forth interactions between young children and their caregivers shape the architecture of the child's brain (Center on the Developing Child, 2007). If an adult's responses to a child are inconsistent, absent, or punitive, the developing architecture of the child's brain may be interrupted and may potentially lead to childhood impairments (Center on the Developing Child, 2007). Therefore, FIND, just like *Marte Meo*, focuses on developmentally supportive parenting behaviors that aim to increase the likelihood that caregivers will notice and respond to child behaviors in appropriate and nurturing ways.

The FIND adaptations were made to (1) allow for specific instruction on core parenting behaviors, (2) maximize the efficiency of the intervention by sequencing skills, and (3) limiting the time of the intervention as well as the time of each therapy session. The goal of these modifications was to make the intervention more structured for training, more feasible to implement, and a better fit for the context of child welfare.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a preliminary investigation, using single-subject methodology, of the FIND intervention on developmentally supportive parenting behaviors exhibited by mothers who had lost custody of their children. The goal for using FIND during supervised visitation time was to support participating mothers in building the necessary parenting skills needed for fostering healthy development, communication, and attachment with their children, in an effort to bolster some of the skills necessary for family reunification. Specifically, this study addressed the following research question:

1. Is there a functional relation between implementation of FIND and an increase in developmentally supportive parenting behaviors across 4 at-risk mother-child dyads?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Setting and participants

#### 2.1.1. Setting

This study took place at the Department of Human Services (DHS) in a suburban county in Oregon. Visitation meetings between participating mothers and their children occurred at three DHS facilities in the participating county. These meetings were scheduled and conducted by the DHS; the schedule, duration, frequency, and location of these meetings were not adjusted or altered for this study. Additionally, participation or lack of participation in this study did not affect visitation rights or other matters related to custody or DHS. Visitation meetings were held as per the DHS guidelines, in a private room that was stocked with toys, books,

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