

Preparation for parenthood. a masculine view

Derek Troth

Chief Moderator for Child Development
East Anglian Examination Board

"It is unfortunate that more men are not actively teaching in courses concerned with parenthood education; after all, 50% of parents are male... The norm is that courses concerned with preparation for parenthood or family life education are taught by women... however, I detect that in a significant number of cases this task is encompassed somewhat reluctantly."

As a man teaching within a female-dominated area of the curriculum, I can legitimately claim minority status, a situation confirmed by Professor Whitfield's study.

Over the past five years, this state of affairs has, for me, been compounded by the interesting reactions of some female colleagues, who, when visited in my capacity as Examiner or Moderator for Child Development, appeared to view me either with suspicion or as some sort of novelty. On one memorable occasion I was greeted with the irrefutable statement "But you're a *man*". To this day I'm not sure whether this was an accusation or an expression of regret; I should hastily add that I wasn't called upon to prove my gender! Happily, things are now somewhat different, even if some schools still insist on ignoring my title of "Mr" when contacting me following official notifications of moderation visits. Some decide to use "Miss", occasionally "Mrs", and lately the more fashionable "Ms". Why "Miss", I wonder?

A "down-market" area

It is unfortunate that more men are not actively teaching in courses concerned

with parenthood education; after all, 50% of parents are male. It is, of course, easier for some than for others to opt to work in this field. The more established you are, the easier it may be to be adventurous, as you are less likely to feel threatened if colleagues regard your work as distinctly down-market. Against a background of decreasing promotion opportunity, however, it is certainly not an area to choose if, as a young man, you are actively seeking that elusive promotion. There are few posts for Head of Department for Child Development or Parenthood Education — and would a male applicant really be seriously considered, anyway? As a Deputy Head seeking a move I am aware that I may not be as attractive to selectors as other candidates who have continued to specialise in the teaching of legitimate academic subjects. Perhaps I should send a photograph with my application, to dispel any possible misconceptions! In education, prophets are sometimes viewed as eccentrics rather than as serious curriculum innovators and developers with a firm belief in the importance of their chosen specialism, even if it does currently lack traditional academic respectability.

The norm is that courses concerned with preparation for parenthood or family life education are taught by women, and in particular by those with a background in home economics. However, I detect that in a significant number of cases this task is encompassed somewhat reluctantly. Some teachers feel insecure, having had little if any initial training in this subject area. Additionally, they are usually faced with the less able girls, who are not always as co-operative as they might be. (Many senior managers in schools regard child development courses as being primarily for the less able. Whether this value judgment is based on the erroneous premise that only those of lower academic ability should be "taught" how to be a parent, or that the desperate need is to cater for them in option programmes, is open to debate.)

A compulsory curriculum component?

Through my contacts with teachers in schools, and via membership of CSE and 16+ Child Development subject committees, I am made increasingly aware of the growing plea for recognition and legitimisation of parentcraft education. Parenthood is a role which the majority of our pupils will sooner or later assume, and, as it will be problematic for both more able and less able alike, parentcraft education should be compulsory for all. If present practitioners, whether pressed or not, assume the role of curriculum-change agents, setting out to convert senior management to the cause, it is inevitable that education for parenthood will become respectable. There is much support in recent official pronouncements from the DES and the Inspectorate: against a growing clamour for relevance in the curriculum, how much more relevant can you get than by providing for a study of parenthood as part of the core curriculum for all pupils?

Some of the mistrust which currently exists emanates from the nature of some examination courses in child develop-

ment of teachers involved are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the "cuddly bunny" image which stems from those causes which contain large elements of toy-making and housecraft skills. In these cases it seems that product is more important than process, demanding skills which are – to use somewhat dated subject designations – more appropriate to needlecraft and cookery. Home economists are striving hard to rid themselves of these very titles, but some of those responsible for child development cling to them, perhaps for some sort of security. No wonder that boys are rare participants in child development option groups!

Seeking institutional respectability

Embodied within our pupils is a unique view of being a parent, which is often discounted. They have experienced parenthood as recipients and consumers, and, if given the opportunity, can reveal many valuable insights into that process. A chance of sharing feelings about relationships and family interaction with their peers should be the essence of parenthood education.

Against a background of an increasingly high divorce rate, a study of parenthood surely deserves greater priority than it at present enjoys. We need to work towards a situation where courses have institutional respectability, with pupils, staff, and parents seeing them as important elements in the curriculum. In an ideal situation, where all pupils have an education in parenthood, a team of teachers drawn from different disciplines would work together to produce a course suited to their school. There are no set rules for parenthood, with attitudes towards family life differing in different parts of the country; perhaps parents from outside the school environment could be encouraged to participate in the teaching programme, to enhance its relevance.

Child Development courses

If a core programme of this kind is mounted, option courses in child develop-

ment to external examination level make more sense for those who wish to widen their understanding – note the emphasis on *child development*, not on *child care*. There are signs of a distinct move in this direction, while the growing popularity of Personal & Social Education programmes which contain Family Life Education modules are helping the cause. Ever-increasing numbers of candidates are being entered for CSE examinations in Child Development and for the few O-Level syllabuses on offer. In addition, it seems that possible 16+ examinations are being looked to with interest, so that the demand appears to be there with those teachers who are wanting to "do it better".

What we need now, to help this impetus, is more training support. Nationally, the DES course on Education for Family Responsibility is to be commended, as are the initiatives of the Open University. Hopefully, we shall see more local in-service courses, which allow teachers to examine the philosophy of parenthood education and to discuss teaching strategies. An evaluation of available resources is also needed: there are many about, some good, but a great deal of questionable value. I hope, also, that before too long we shall see more local authorities appointing Advisers with particular responsibility for developing education provision in this area. In the meantime, I am happy to share my ideas and experiences with those interested. The image is beginning to change, and I hope that this will gather momentum – perhaps collecting more male support on the way!

Forum

Continued from page 56

mailed directly to individual teachers who are interested in, and are teaching, health education. In this way, I am able to ensure that they reach the personnel at the "chalkface" who are in a position to

make them available to other interested colleagues.

As a Health Education Officer, I find this a very useful method of maintaining contact with teachers. These regular mailings enable me to send out to the teachers information such as recently-compiled teaching notes, advance notification of in-service training courses, and lists of useful television programmes for the next term. The response from the teachers has been enthusiastic.

(Mrs) Madeleine M. Savage
Health Education Officer
Wigan Health Authority
Bryan House
61 Standishgate
Wigan WN1 1UP

Health education and the science teacher

Alan Beattie's article in the January issue of *Education and Health* is an excellent analysis of current paradigms of school health education, and is a valuable contribution to the literature. However, I should like to take issue with his claim that "science teachers... are often... unsuited to the demands of contemporary health education".

He supports his argument by claiming that evaluation of the results of providing scientific information and advice (the KAB model) has "proved to be extremely disappointing", and then cites the HEC *My Body* project as an apparent example.

In fact, along with its US antecedents, this project has been highly successful in altering both parent and child behaviour (not to mention knowledge and attitudes) towards smoking.¹⁻³ On the other hand, a recent controlled study – admittedly under unfavourable conditions – has shown that a typical "personal growth" model project, the Schools Council/HEC 5-13 project, had no effect on smoking.⁴

Direct comparisons of KAB-style approaches with personal growth models among 12-year-olds in the USA have recently suggested that there may not be

much to choose between them, as far as smoking is concerned.⁵⁻⁶

As an ardent supporter of "education for personal growth", it gives me no great pleasure to draw these facts to your readers' attention. However, our conclusion must be that since health goals can be achieved by either method, teachers should choose the approach most suited to their circumstances. The personal-growth model may be superior on general educational grounds, but science teachers should not abandon their enthusiasm for health education if they do not feel able to use it in science lessons.

Donald Reid

Assistant Director, Schools and Further
Education

Health Education Council
78 New Oxford Street
London WC1A 1AH

References

1. Gillies, P. A. and Wilcox, B.: Reducing the risk of smoking amongst the young, *Public Health* (London), 1984: 98,49-54
2. Murray, M., Swan, A. V., and Clarke, G.: Long-term effect of a school-based anti-smoking programme, *J Epidem Comm Health*, 1984 (in press)
3. Andrews, R. L., and Hearne, J. T.: Effects of primary grades curriculum project on student and parent smoking attitudes and behaviour, *J School Health*, 1984:54 No.1, 18-20
4. Murray, M., *et al*: The smoking and dietary behaviour of Lambeth school children I and II, *Public Health* (London), 1984 (in press)
5. Arkin, R. M., *et al*: The Minnesota Smoking Prevention Programme, *J School Health*, November 1981:611-616
6. Perry, C. L., *et al*: High school smoking prevention: the relative efficacy of varied treatments and instructors, *Adolescence*, 1983: XVIII, No.71:561-566