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FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION — IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLORS

Although the concept of formal family life education has been in existence in the United States for over 20 years, it is an area of specialization which is only vaguely understood by most North Americans. In early 1969, there were eight American, but no Canadian, universities offering the doctorate in Family Life Education. Landis (1951) in discussing the role of Family Life said:

A well planned and balanced program will include all phases: the biological, psychological, and economic aspects of family life, household tasks, cultural changes in the family, and training for parenthood . . . In family life education there should be a strong emphasis upon the personal and social adjustment of the individual as basic to successful marriage and parenthood (pp. 9-10).

An examination of the courses suggested for those who aspire to become family life educators reveals that such courses as child development, psychology of family relations, parent education and parent counselling, family economics, marriage and family counselling, and human sexual behavior are common to the programs of most of the eight American universities offering doctoral preparation in this field. The affinity with their counsellor education programs is pronounced. While there is a large degree of commonality in the course work of the various departments under consideration, the emphasis is somewhat diverse. That fact can be demonstrated by indicating several of the universities concerned, together with the names of the department which administers the program of family life.

<i>University</i>	<i>Department</i>
Teachers College, Columbia	Home and Family Life
University of Connecticut	Child Development and Family Relations
University of Minnesota	Marriage and Family Study
Oregon State	Home Economics

Sex education, (which is probably the most controversial aspect of family life education), is an important part of such a program. Kobler (1968) estimated that within a year 70% of American schools would be offering sex education classes. As is often the case, Canadians, in general have adopted a more cautious "wait-and-see" approach. The large number of clients who had emotional problems with sexual implications prompted the writer to investigate the acceptability of sex education in the schools of Alberta.

The definition of sex education used in the study stated that it should include:

1. The physiological, psychological and sociological aspects
2. Information aimed at helping young people to get along better with members of the opposite sex

3. Information which would help prepare young people for marriage and for life in general
4. Opportunities for students to ask sex-related questions
5. Opportunities for student discussion of sexual matters

The sample for the investigation was drawn from the 40 schools in the province which have grades 7-12 exclusively. Four schools were lost due to lack of support from two superintendents. Of the remaining 36 schools, 24 took part in the survey. They represented an excellent geographic distribution. In a given school the potential respondents consisted of the principal; a home room teacher from each grade level, selected at random where possible; two randomly chosen students of each potential teacher respondent; the father of each selected boy student; and the mother of each selected girl student. Table 1 illustrates the response to the investigation.

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGE OF THE RETURN OF QUESTIONNAIRES
FOR PARENT, TEACHER, AND STUDENT GROUPS

Group	Percentage
Parents	73.0%
Teachers	79.8%
Students	75.3%

The first five items on the parent, teacher, and student forms were identical. Table 2 sets forth the information established regarding that portion of the study.

TABLE 2
PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS AGREEING TO EACH OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Statement	% of Repondents Agreeing		
	Parents	Teachers	Students
I. In order that Alberta schools could better assist parents in the sex education of their children, the schools should offer classes in which the physiological, psychological, and sociological aspects of sex are presented.	84.6	85.7	90.8
II. In some places, students' questions regarding sex are answered, in a simple way, up to the grade five level. In grade six, sex education courses begin. As the students mature, subject matter, which is becoming important for them, is introduced. Alberta schools should do something similar.	80.7	83.5	86.6
III. If sex education courses do become a part of the school program, boys and girls should attend the classes together.	27.5	41.4	48.1
IV. If sex education courses are introduced into the schools, they should be taught as a special subject, rather than having them made part of existing courses such as: Health, Literature, Social Studies, etc.	62.4	60.1	69.9
V. A person who conducts a class in sex education should be married.	67.7	36.9	47.7

The data presented establish the fact that a large majority of respondents in the Alberta study believe that sex education in the schools is necessary. Some of the data from the investigation suggests that many students

want a source of sex information which will be a reliable auxiliary to their parents as a source. The conclusion was arrived at by considering the fact that while 50.7% of the students respondents expressed satisfaction with the amount of sex information provided by their parents, 90.8% of them stated that they thought there should be sex education classes in the schools. The need for such classes is further exemplified by the finding that only 54.2% of the student respondents felt that they had received, from all sources, a sufficient knowledge of all of the aspects of sex.

The fact that one-third of the parents in the study admitted that it is usually difficult for them to discuss sexual matters with their children, coupled with the fact that less than one-third of them felt qualified to teach their children regarding the physiological, psychological, and sociological aspects of sex, is a strong argument for the establishment of family life courses in more schools. Only 1 school, out of 24 in the study, had a formal sex education program.

The findings of a study in the United States suggests that students prefer a sex educator with whom they are not in daily contact (Calderwood, 1965). It seems that parents and their children are too emotionally involved with each other to permit an ideal exchange of views on such a sensitive topic as sex education. While it should be emphasized that the subject of sexual intercourse constitutes only a small part of a course in human sexuality, it must be admitted that it is the topic which is usually the most emotionally charged for all concerned. Perhaps one of the biggest drawbacks regarding the general inability of parents to do a thorough job of educating their children regarding sex-related considerations is the belief by parents that their offspring regard what they say as a revelation of the parents' personal experience. If such is the case, it is understandable that both parties should feel embarrassed when such personal matters, which have been executed behind closed doors, and which have been a taboo subject of discussion during the child's entire lifetime, are suddenly the subject matter for a heart-to-heart talk. If the child has come to believe that sexual intercourse is dirty and/or sinful, he may be reluctant to admit that dear old mom and dad engage in such activities to any extent, and, as a result, seek to avoid any discussion which might confirm the fact that his parents do have an ongoing sexual relationship which is considerably influenced by the sex act *per se*.

It is generally agreed that sexual intercourse is a natural act. The point has also been made, however, that humans do not learn it naturally. Evidence supporting that statement include the fact that some couples claim that it takes years to make a satisfactory adjustment, and the fact that some couples never become sexually compatible. A partial solution to the problem does not lie in the introduction of lab courses! However, one wonders how much apprehension, misunderstanding, and downright human misery might be prevented if more young people were given some enlightenment regarding the difficulties they may experience. The fact that Alberta students are being short changed regarding their sex education is demonstrated by the finding that only 18.2% of the parents in the study expressed satisfaction with the sex education their children are receiving from all sources.

Family life education deals with the essentials of living a healthy, creative, and enjoyable life. As such it should enjoy the benefits of the most

competent teachers and the best instructional techniques. In order to maintain student interest in the topic, the students should be allowed meaningful participation in the decisions regarding what the curriculum should be. Some indication that the public would not oppose such an idea is contained in the data of the Alberta study which showed that only 6 parents, 6 teachers, and 7 students, out of the 561 respondents, would place any restriction on the subject matter of sex education courses. There seems to be a great deal of merit in staying away from a fixed curriculum and in allowing family life programs to evolve spontaneously in keeping with the needs of the students and the adults of a given area.

The discussion group approach seems to be an ideal method of approaching the broad topic of family life. A person who contemplates conducting family life courses would be well advised to become proficient in that method of communication. That brings us to the question of who should conduct such courses in the school. Public acceptance of the various sources of sex information is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Percentage of Respondents Accepting Various Sources of Sex Information
for Parent, Teacher, and Student Groups

Source of Sex Information	% of Respondents Accepting Source		
	Parents	Teachers	Students
Books	70.9	79.4	75.4
Doctors	93.1	93.2	79.6
Father	69.9	65.9	52.0
Friends	5.1	11.5	22.3
Gym Teachers	14.6	30.5	24.2
Magazines	10.2	16.7	23.6
Ministers or Priests	58.3	60.6	28.8
Mother	84.2	70.3	71.2
Movies	14.8	29.5	25.0
Newspapers	4.6	9.8	5.5
Radio	4.1	12.3	4.2
Relatives	8.1	11.4	17.2
School Counsellors	56.4	65.4	49.6
School Nurses	76.9	85.0	63.5
School Teachers	39.9	43.6	38.2
Specialists in Sex Education	92.2	95.5	93.6
T.V.	13.1	30.3	19.4
Youth Leaders (Scout or Girl Guide, etc.)	20.2	27.5	16.6

While doctors are widely accepted by the public as sex educators, the truth of the matter is that they have some serious limitations. Many of them are not educated to be teachers. Few of them know very much about the psychological and sociological aspects of sex. In addition, they are already overworked. The supply of specialists in sex education is so small that the possibility of enlisting their aid, on a large scale, is not possible. School nurses enjoy a considerable degree of acceptance. In their case, lack of knowledge regarding the psychological and sociological aspects of sex would have to be overcome. The fact that not everyone in the school would be willing to conduct the sex education aspect of family life education courses is suggested by the fact that only 55.7% of the teachers in the Alberta study indicated that they would do so if qualified, or if they could become so.

Regarding the ideal sex educator, Lowes, (1967) the chairman of the Metropolitan Toronto School Board says:

. . . find someone who can listen, who honestly tries to respect and appreciate the young people's feelings and point of view. Someone who can communicate with them and can carry on a dialogue with the young (p. 45).

That type of person sounds suspiciously like a counsellor. In the future, counsellors may include course work in their programs which would enable them to become specialists in family life. The type of personality which they should ideally have, and the educational background which they should have attained, should make counsellors, of all the professionals considered, the most suitable group for additional education in the field of family life.

What needs to be done is to convince the universities of the necessity of initiating courses in family life which would pave the way for counsellors, and other interested professionals, to become specialists in that field. With that accomplished, family life classes could be established in schools with a minimum risk of losing the confidence of the public by reason of unfortunate incidents precipitated by ill-prepared instructors.

Community counselling is closely associated with family life education. Some of the respondents in the Alberta study indicated that they felt that parents should attend sex education classes and discussion groups. It is a self-evident fact that many adults could benefit from courses in consumer education, courses in how to get along with people, and tips on how to manage a home, etc. The question is, how many adults would take advantage of such courses?

To some extent, the adults who might attend such courses would be doing so for the purpose of relieving unfortunate conditions which already exist. In their case, the sessions would be mostly therapeutic in nature. In the case of the students, what is intriguing, what offers great possibilities, what seems to be within our grasp, is the opportunity to prevent many emotional problems from ever occurring.

The extent to which the emerging counsellors in Canada are further able to prevent problems or to further assist in their elimination where they do exist, as opposed to merely reconciling clients to accept their state of affairs, will be one method of measuring how successful counsellors are in becoming more professional and more altruistic in their relationships with their counselees. Involvement in family life education should prove to be a particularly fertile field in which to attain those more lofty ideals.

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L'ÉDUCATION FAMILIALE ET SES IMPLICATIONS POUR LES CONSEILLERS

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Cette présentation a tenté de clarifier le concept de l'éducation familiale en regroupant quelques idées mises en valeur par huit universités américaines qui offrent un Ph. D. spécialisé en ce domaine. Le fait que les gens d'Alberta veulent que *l'éducation sexuelle* devienne partie des programmes scolaires, même si cet aspect de l'éducation familiale port à discussion, est mis en valeur par l'auteur, dans sa thèse *A Sample Survey of Parent, Teacher, and Student Opinions Regarding Sex Education in Alberta Schools*. Des statistiques tirées de cette étude nous amènent à penser que les bâtisseurs de programmes devraient revoir leur façon de penser dans ce domaine. Certaines statistiques suggèrent aussi que le public devrait être renseigné. L'éducation familiale devrait se voir accorder un statut bien spécial et l'auteur essaie de démontrer par des exemples appropriés que cette éducation familiale bien présentée aux étudiants pourrait avoir un effet préventif et libérateur du côté émotionnel. Ceci n'éliminerait certes pas les conseillers. L'auteur suggère que les conseillers canadiens prennent une part active à l'élaboration des programmes d'éducation familiale, qu'ils aillent au-delà de leur position actuelle quand cela est nécessaire et quand il s'agit de corriger des comportements et des attitudes indésirables, et qu'au moins ils s'intéressent à créer des attitudes constructives chez les plus jeunes soit par des cours, soit encore plus par des discussions en petite groupes.