

Inservice Education in Family Life Education

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L'éducation de vie de famille est un phénomène relativement nouveau dans nos écoles canadiennes. Vu la nature du sujet, la sélection et la formation des éducateurs de vie de famille mérite une attention particulière. De nos jours, la méthode d'éducation en atelier est la plus favorable à l'amélioration des qualifications des éducateurs de vie de famille. Cet article décrit le travail accompli dans un atelier intensif d'une semaine qui s'est tenu à Calgary, Alberta, et qui était destiné aux éducateurs et conseillers d'éducation de vie de famille. On y trouvera également l'évaluation de l'atelier par les participants. La formule intensive s'est avérée la plus réussie lorsqu'il s'est agi d'atteindre les buts fixés: c'est-à-dire acquérir plus amples connaissances sur le sujet de vie de famille, approfondir la compréhension de soi et permettre aux membres de cette même profession de faire connaissance. Certaines implications de cette expérience pour d'autres ateliers d'éducation de vie de famille sont aussi examinées.

According to surveys conducted by The Vanier Institute of the Family (1971) and by The Canadian Education Association (Déiseach, 1977), family life education is a relatively recent phenomenon in Canadian schools. A number of forces appear to have led to this development: rapid social changes which are placing new demands on individuals and on families, new knowledge which is being generated about human and family development and behavior, and the expressed concerns of many individuals and families for the quality of their lives. For whatever reason, family life education in the schools is a growing field of study and one which generates a great deal of interest and controversy.

A review of family life education literature indicates that there is no single approach to family life education in the schools (Arcus, in preparation). In general, family life education focuses on such topics as personal development, interpersonal relationships, human sexuality, family living, and human growth and development over the life cycle. Within the schools, any effort in family life education may include any one or more of these topics, offered within a number of different departments (such as home economics, guidance/counselling, social studies, health/physical education). It may be offered at any grade level from K to 12, and for any length of time, from a single special lecture to a full year's course. Family life education may be offered within the school program in credit courses or be a part of after-school, extra-curricular activities.

Regardless of the approach, however, one of the major concerns in family life education has been teacher preparation. It is clear from a

review of the literature that competent family life educators are crucial to the successful realization of the goals of family life education (National Commission on Family Life Education, 1968; Committee on Educational Standards, 1970; Somerville, 1971). Good teachers are required in all subject matter areas, but the nature of family life education is such that special attention needs to be given to the selection and training of teachers in this area. Here, more than in most other subjects, the personal characteristics of the teacher become important as they are interrelated with the subject matter of the field. Most discussions of the qualities and characteristics important in family life educators recognize this interrelationship (Committee on Educational Standards, 1970; Fohlin, 1971; Whately, 1973) and identify criteria for family life educators which include both personal and professional characteristics.

In general, there is agreement that the following characteristics are among the most important for family life educators: (1) sound knowledge in the many content areas within family life education plus the ability to bring together findings from many different disciplines and apply these to concepts and issues in the family life classroom; (2) knowledge of and identification with the broad philosophy and basic principles of family life education; (3) skill in using and evaluating family life materials and resources and in using a variety of teaching methods appropriate to family life education; (4) the ability to work effectively with young people both individually and in groups; (5) insight into one's own feelings and attitudes concerning family life topics and acceptance of one's own life experiences; and (6) awareness of and the ability to work realistically within the current local situation.

While it is an important first step to identify the kind of teachers needed to teach family life education, major efforts must be directed towards ensuring that educators with appropriate qualifications are prepared for their role in family life education. Ideally, family life educators would be selected and trained during their preservice education, with some kind of certification granted at the conclusion of this training. Kerckhoff and O'Connor (1978) surveyed *The Family Coordinator* Family Life Education Panel to determine the status of certification of high school family life teachers in the U.S. They found that few states certified family life educators and that such certification did not seem to be a high priority for the improvement of professional standards of family life teachers. It appears that a similar situation exists in Canada (Vanier, 1971; Déiseach, 1977). *The Family Coordinator* Panel, however, suggested that improvement in professional qualifications might be brought about by means other than certification. One preference of the panel was for more inservice education for family life teachers.

There are a number of possible patterns for inservice training: one-shot guest speakers or seminars, two- to three-day conferences, workshops

of one or more weeks, and credit courses. Each pattern has advantages and disadvantages and serves to satisfy different kinds of objectives.

The purpose of this paper is to describe and to evaluate an inservice education workshop in family life education presented by the author in Calgary, Alberta, and to identify some of the implications of this experience for other inservice education for family life educators.

In a statement on Family Life and Sex Education in 1975 (Board Advisory Committee, 1976), the Calgary Board of Education had recognized the importance of the family unit in helping to achieve the board's stated aim for education, "the fullest possible development of the individual," and had affirmed that the school "has a role to play in strengthening family ties and developing wholesome attitudes" and "should provide an open climate for the discussion of questions and problems raised naturally by pupils in their quest for understanding of themselves and their relationships with brothers and sisters and friends." Earlier, the board had established a Board Advisory Committee on Family Life and Sex Education which included both school personnel and community citizens. This committee was asked, early in 1976, to provide advice and suggestions for a summer course designed for inservice training credit for Calgary teachers to help equip them to carry out family life education in the schools.

The committee, in co-operation with the University of Calgary Division of Continuing Education in Social Education and with student representatives from the Calgary system, identified the following considerations for developing an introductory training program for family life teachers:

1. Family Life Education is broadly defined to involve assisting students in improving their effectiveness in relating to others and in living a full life in a meaningful way. Awareness, understanding, attitudes, skills, and knowledge are tools by which students may improve their effectiveness.
2. Training programs for Family Life Education teachers must recognize the political context of Family Life Education and help teachers develop plans and strategies which take this context into account.
3. A training program should give recognition to the fact that a number of Calgary teachers and community persons presently have skills and experience in this field. The program should make maximum use of and build upon these skills and experiences.
4. Innovative and new programs are often adopted by others in the system once they have been seen as successful and useful. Therefore, an introductory training program should provide support to those who are initially innovating and thus involved in some element of risk.
5. As an ideal, Family Life Education is an ongoing process which permeates all aspects of education in all grades. Therefore, a training program should be open to all teachers in the school system.
6. Training in Family Life Education should assist participants to better understand their own values, attitudes, personal comfort with content, etc., and should encourage them to examine their personal commitment for further involvement in Family Life Education programs, including seeking additional training.

7. Training programs for teachers should help participants recognize the total system in which they operate (i.e., including parents and others in the community) and identify opportunities for involving these other parts of the system in Family Life Education program planning.
8. Although a considerable amount of time in a training program for family life educators will focus on process, opportunities should be included for teachers to become aware of specific curriculum materials and packages on Family Life Education and to determine their potential use and value in a classroom setting.
9. Although the focus of an introductory program will undoubtedly be on values, attitudes, and discussion skills, the provision of information is also seen as a valid area of instruction. (Board Advisory Committee, 1976)

From these considerations, the Board Advisory Committee identified five broad goals for an introductory inservice training program for family life education teachers. These goals were:

1. to become knowledgeable about the overall philosophy, approaches, and social and political context and realities of Family Life Education in schools in Calgary and be able, as a result of this knowledge, to develop plans for implementation which takes these into consideration.
2. to be more aware of their own values, attitudes, sense of comfort, and potential long-term interest in functioning in Family Life Education settings in Calgary schools in a variety of ways including facilitating discussions, planning programs, presenting material, etc.
3. to be able to apply basic communication and discussion skills in a classroom setting with attention to the needs of the participants and to establishing a wholesome and acceptable environment so that students can openly discuss issues of concern to them, whatever these may be.
4. to have familiarity with a basic range of curriculum in Family Life Education available to teachers and ascertain those materials which, in keeping with the participants' own personality as well as the nature of the setting, have potential and value for furthering the understanding of students in the field of family life.
5. to have developed a plan for implementing a specific course of action and tested it within the course for (1) introducing or furthering a Family Life Education approach of their choosing in the school setting, and/or (2) improving their effectiveness in skills, attitudes, and knowledge as a teacher involved with Family Life Education. (Board Advisory Committee, 1976)

Plans were made to offer the introductory inservice workshop during July of 1976. Enrolment was limited to 30 participants in order to provide a workshop which emphasized experiential learning. All places in the workshop were reserved for teachers in the Calgary system. As the board was concerned that secondary school become involved in family life education immediately, enrolment was limited to junior and senior high school teachers for this experience.

In order to qualify for inservice credit for the Calgary Board of Education, workshops such as this one must meet for a minimum of 30 contact

hours. The original proposal of the Board Advisory Committee called for a two-week workshop, meeting for four hours per day, four days per week. However, as the instructor was only available for a period of one week, the decision was made to offer a more intensive workshop, meeting for seven to eight hours per day for five days. It was recognized that this more intensive experience might require some modification of the goals of the workshop (for example, there would likely be little opportunity for teachers to develop specific plans as suggested in goal 5), but to the extent possible, the goals were to remain the same.

Five discussion leaders were hired to assist the instructor in providing the experiential learning. All discussion leaders came from the Calgary area and were skilled in group processes and were familiar with at least some aspects of family life education.

Information was sought from the participants to assist in planning relevant and challenging content and experience. Approximately one-third of the participants indicated that they had practical expectations of the workshop — that is, they expected to gain factual information, learn new methods of teaching, get new ideas for content and activities, and find out sources for materials and resources. Two-thirds reported workshop expectations which reflected broader concerns — the opportunity to examine one's own value system, to gain a more realistic and up-to-date perspective and to consider more carefully one's commitment to and role in family life education. Seventeen of the teachers/counsellors taught in junior high schools and 13 in senior high schools. These teachers came from 24 different schools and taught in many different subject areas. Ten of the participants had 5 years or less teaching experience, while 2 had more than 20 years of teaching experience. There were 22 female and 8 male participants.

The workshop content was organized around five topics: Family Life Education; The Family Life Educator; Values and Family Life Education; Content Areas in Family Life Education; and Planning for Family Life Education. It was considered important that there be some major presentation on each topic, in order to provide some input, as well as the opportunity for involvement of the participants in large and small group experiences. Although all plans and arrangements were made prior to the workshop, it was anticipated that the content would be modified and adapted as the needs of the group emerged and changed.

A number of "get acquainted" activities were used at the beginning of the workshop. These were designed to help participants become comfortable with the instructor and with each other and to involve them in discussions from the beginning of the experience. Although this was not a workshop on group processes, attention to group dynamics was considered to be essential, both for meeting the goals of the workshop and for modelling effective family life education.

Although many participants were already working in family life education, it was expected that there was a need for updating and for expanding their knowledge of this field. At least some of the participants had indicated that they were new to family life education. Four objectives were established for the first topic: to know more about the field of family life education; to gain a sense of identification with family life education; to consider and take a position with respect to family life education issues and concerns; and to examine one's own attitude about family life education. Activities and experiences planned to help meet these objectives included an instructor presentation on family life education history, philosophy and principles, and current issues and challenges; interaction with a panel of community citizens who held differing views concerning the school's involvement in family life education; and small group discussions focused on an analysis of and reaction to selected family life education definitions and statements.

In one sense, the entire workshop dealt with the topic *The Family Life Educator*. Specifically, however, participants were expected to identify the important qualities and characteristics of family life educators; to consider their own qualifications for becoming family life educators; and to appreciate the importance of qualified family life educators in sound, successful family life education. Experience related to these objectives included small group discussions aimed at identifying the criteria participants believed should be used for choosing family life educators for the Calgary school system; a review of the current literature on this topic; and the opportunity to respond individually to a number of questionnaires and checklists concerning their own qualifications for becoming (or remaining) family life educators.

Values are a major issue in family life education. Although this topic arose throughout the workshop as participants considered the many aspects of family life education, particular attention was given to the following objectives: to consider the role of values in family life education; to investigate different approaches for dealing with values in family life education and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of each approach; and to gain experience with some techniques for dealing with values in family life education. Three different approaches to values education were included: values clarification, moral development, and values analysis. Exercises were used to help clarify each approach, to help distinguish between the approaches, and to highlight the most appropriate use of each approach.

The general topic of *Content Areas in Family Life Education* was introduced through group discussions and exercises planned to help identify the changing nature of individual and family living; to explore one's personal feelings about these changes; and to consider the implications of these changes for family life education programs. Attention was then turned to a consideration of selected content areas within family life edu-

cation. Those considered to be most relevant to this particular workshop included alternative forms of the family, family/marital conflict, death education, and communication concepts and skills. A variety of exercises and activities were utilized to meet objectives of identifying appropriate content for secondary school courses, exploring one's own attitudes and feelings about the content, and identifying and experiencing some ways in which this content might be taught.

Topics related to human sexuality had also been planned for the workshop but were eliminated due to the lack of time. This area was selected for exclusion because there were already in Calgary a number of qualified persons in human sexuality who might provide inservice education for teachers on this subject at another time.

Objectives for the final topic, Planning for Family Life Education, were to examine one method for curriculum planning as it relates to family life education, to explore further some bases for curriculum development, to gain some experience in applying systematic planning procedures to family life education, and to appreciate the role of adequate planning in effective family life education. An overview of one approach to systematic planning was presented and attention focused on the bases for making such plans. These bases included current social conditions, needs of students, local situations and conditions, developments in the subject matter field, and philosophical issues related to family life education. Each small group selected a single family life education concept to use as a focus for working through this planning process.

As well, a panel of family life educators working in Calgary presented and discussed their current programs and experiences in order to help participants become aware of the variety in content, programs, and approaches which is possible in family life education and become aware of the breadth of resources available in the Calgary community.

Throughout the workshop, reference was made to available resources on family life education topics. Some of these resources were used during the workshop while others were made available for examination in a browsing area. Participants were encouraged to share ideas and materials of their own with other workshop members.

The final session of the workshop was a summary and evaluation session and served both as a wind-up and a wind-down. The wind-up gave participants the opportunity to evaluate the week's work, to consider their further commitments to family life education, and to articulate their current philosophy of family life education. The wind-down was a most important part of the week's experience, as the intensity of the workshop had contributed to feelings of fatigue and of elation. A wine and cheese party was scheduled for the last session in order to help participants deal with these feelings and to further solidify feelings of rapport which had developed during the workshop.

Two written evaluations of this workshop were sought. The first one was obtained during the final session of the workshop. The second evaluation was sought one year after the workshop had occurred and was obtained by mail.

In the first evaluation, 88% of the participants reported that, given their own reasons for attending the workshop, they had found it very worthwhile. Comments from participants reflected three major themes: an increased knowledge of family life education, increased self understanding, and getting to know others involved in family life education in Calgary. As well, nearly two-thirds of the participants reported that, given the instructors' objectives, they found the workshop very valuable. These individuals agreed with the objectives set for the workshop and believed that these objectives had been met. Participants who found the workshop less valuable indicated that they had a preference for different objectives or for a different workshop format. A number of conflicting evaluations were noted: some wanted more lectures and fewer discussions; others wanted more discussions and fewer lectures; still others indicated that there had been a good balance of lectures and discussions. As well, some reported that they had gained new information while others had "heard it all before." Comments from participants also indicated that some small discussion groups had been used for personal purposes while others had not.

Of particular interest to the instructor and to the organizers of the workshop were comments concerning the intensity of the workshop. Most participants found the intensity both stimulating and valuable, and a few reported that they would not have taken the workshop had it been for a longer period of time. Some, however, found the intensity exhausting.

The perspective of time is important in assessing the impact of a workshop such as this one. Therefore, participants were approached again one year later in order to provide additional feedback on the workshop and its impact on them. This evaluation focused on the participants' involvement in family life education during the preceding year; the participants' assessment of the impact of the workshop on themselves and their work from the vantage point of a year's experience; and specific evaluations of the content and the organization of the workshop. Eighty-two percent of the participants responded to this questionnaire.

Nearly two-thirds of these respondents reported that they had been involved in family life education during the 1976-77 school year and that their involvement was different than it had been during previous years. Some had been involved for the first time in family life education; others reported that their courses were now more experiential and discussions were more meaningful, and that they themselves were more accepting of people with different backgrounds and were better organized and made a greater use of community resources. Among those not involved in family life education during the 1976-77 school year, the majority reported that

this was primarily due to administrative rather than personal decisions. However, at least one person chose not to be involved in providing family life education. Nine respondents anticipated offering new courses/new options or upgrading content approaches during the coming year.

Sixteen teachers reported that they had been involved in other inservice experiences relevant to family life education since the summer workshop.

Eighty percent of the respondents reported that the workshop had influenced their family life education courses. Changes included the use of new resources, the adoption of new and more open approaches to teaching, the addition of new areas of content, and increased confidence in teaching. As well, 75% indicated that the workshop had influenced them as persons. They reported feeling more confident and comfortable with family life education topics, being more aware of issues and alternatives, and being more accepting of others. One person indicated that, although she was not involved in family life education, she had gained a "tremendous respect for the people involved in these programs," and "was glad to be able to comment in defense of family life education to members of the community who had read articles critical of family life programs in the schools."

Two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they preferred the one-week workshop while one-third would have preferred a two-week, less intensive arrangement. Those who preferred the one-week workshop reported many positive experiences with the workshop intensity — in particular, the development of strong group feelings and cohesiveness and the opportunity as well as the necessity for some inner reflection. They reported that a high level of involvement and interest was maintained throughout the week. Those who preferred a two-week period felt that this might provide for more dialogue, be less tiring, and give participants more time to think. They also felt it might allow for some normal, outside-of-workshop routine.

The most valuable aspects of the workshop were reported to be the small group activities, open discussions in both large and small groups, and the Content session on death. Other aspects noted as being valuable were becoming aware of local resources and an introduction to new facts and new approaches. Participants also appreciated the flexibility of the instructor and the group leaders in responding to the changing needs of workshop participants.

Nearly all of the respondents indicated that they would recommend a similar workshop to others. It was also suggested that advanced courses be offered to workshop participants.

From the preceding evaluations, it appears that this intensive workshop was successful in meeting a number of the goals of the Board Advisory Committee and in meeting the individual needs of many of the participants.

A number of implications for inservice training for family life education can be drawn from this experience. It appears to be possible to meet a number of inservice education goals in a short, intensive workshop format. This approach appears to be particularly useful in helping participants to meet goals related to becoming more knowledgeable about family life education philosophy, principles, and politics; becoming familiar with curriculum materials and resources; becoming more aware of and gaining insight into their own attitudes, values, and life experiences; and making decisions concerning future involvements in family life education. An intensive format would appear to be less appropriate for goals related to developing or enhancing classroom skills, to developing curriculum plans, and to updating knowledge on specific content areas in family life education. Work on such goals might be initiated in such a workshop, but meeting these goals would generally require a longer, less intensive experience.

It seems obvious, then, that a single workshop such as this one is not sufficient for preparing effective family life educators. This experience needs to be followed by additional and different educational experiences planned for the goals not met adequately in this workshop, and for meeting additional goals which might be identified at a later time.

A workshop such as this one seems most appropriate for an introductory experience. It may even serve as an experience which helps participants to determine whether and under what conditions they wish to continue in family life education. It also would appear to help supervisors/co-ordinators to identify the additional kinds of training desired and/or required by the participants.

Introductory, however, does not necessarily mean that all participants will be new to the field. Many who are already involved in family life education may need to update and to expand ideas and understandings in order to work more effectively in a particular community. As workshops will likely include both the experienced and the inexperienced, attention must be given to ensuring that potential participants are aware of the focus and the approach of the experience in order to make decisions about enrolling. One of the most challenging tasks in family life education teacher training will continue to be meeting the differing needs and expectations of participants. One way of meeting the differing needs is to provide for flexibility in content and activities as the inservice experience proceeds.

Regardless of one's previous experiences with family life education, however, it would appear to be valuable that all family life educators have the opportunity to meet and work with others in the same field of interest. Good teamwork relationships, as well as good personal friendships, are likely to emerge from common training experiences. One of the advantages of this particular workshop was that all participants taught in the same school system and could potentially work together and support each other's efforts in family life education. This sharing and support is extremely valu-

able in the development of sound and successful family life education programs.

It should be expected that some participants may choose not to be further involved in family life education. This should not only be accepted but possibly even be encouraged. As teaching family life education is sometimes an uncomfortable task, this role may not be appropriate for every teacher. However, it should be recognized that such persons may still be effective supporters of family life programs even though they do not offer such programs themselves.

As more schools become involved in offering family life education programs, more attention will need to be focused on preparing teachers for this role. Some teachers may receive such preparation as part of their pre-service training, but many teachers will require some kind of inservice training in order to become more adequately qualified as family life educators. The workshop described in this paper is seen as one way of improving both the personal and the professional qualifications of family life educators.

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