

Characteristics of Family Life Education in British Columbia

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The purpose of this study was to investigate family life education in secondary schools in British Columbia. It was estimated that approximately half of the secondary schools offered some family life education, primarily in Home Economics and Guidance departments. Most programs were relatively new, were widely scattered throughout the province, and were more likely to be offered as parts of other courses rather than as separate. Wide variation was found in content and organization, both within departments and among departments. Speakers and films were reported to be the most used resources, while class discussions were the most successful teaching technique. Little evaluation of programs was reported. Most teachers had had some training in family life education content areas, but little training in family life education philosophy and methodology. Few generalizations can be made concerning family life education in B.C. secondary schools, suggesting the difficulty of making global statements of support or condemnation for such programs. Suggestions for additional studies are made.

Cette étude visait à l'examen de la nature des cours sur la vie familiale dans les écoles secondaires en Colombie-Britannique. On a estimé qu'environ la moitié des écoles secondaires offraient quelques enseignement sur la vie familiale, principalement dans les départements d'économie domestique et d'orientation. La plupart des programmes étaient assez récents et dispersés dans toute la province. Il était plus probable que cette matière soit offerte dans le cadre d'un cours déjà existant qu'en tant que cours indépendant. On trouvait une grande diversité quant au contenu et à l'organisation du cours, tant à l'intérieur des départements qu'entre ceux des différentes écoles. Les rapports de cette étude indiquent que films et conférenciers se révélaient être les sources d'informations les plus utilisées, et que les discussions en classe étaient la méthode d'enseignement connaissant le plus de succès. Ces rapports démontrent que les programmes n'étaient que rarement évalués. La majorité des professeurs a reçu une certaine formation dans des domaines relatifs à l'enseignement sur la vie familiale, alors qu'en philosophie et en méthodologie leur formation était beaucoup moins approfondie. Il y a peu de généralisations à faire à l'égard de l'enseignement sur la vie familiale dans les écoles secondaires en Colombie-Britannique, ce qui suggère qu'il est difficile de se prononcer en faveur ou contre de tels programmes de façon globale. On présente des suggestions visant à des études complémentaires.

INTRODUCTION

A recent trend in Canadian schools is the introduction of family life education courses into the curriculum. While earlier generations did not consider this kind of education fit for school curricula, now "Family Life Education, of one kind or another, is taught in hundreds of schools in Canada and

has been the subject of consideration in hundreds of others" (The Vanier Institute of the Family, 1971, p. 1). Several reasons may be suggested for this trend: rapid social changes which place new demands upon individuals and families; new knowledge generated about human and family development and behaviour; and many individuals' concern for the quality of their own lives.

Those who promote family life education in the schools believe that the school has a role to play in responding to these needs and concerns, and that it can help to meet these important human needs. At the same time, however, critics of these programs believe that, as family life education may deal with sensitive and controversial material, such education should be left to families or churches. They claim that schools cannot deal with such material without doing violence to important individual and family beliefs.

Such judgments about family life education in the schools, whether supportive or critical, are generally based on little or no evidence, and are thus primarily impressionistic and speculative. Little objective data is available about family life education programs in the schools and even less is known about the effects of such programs. There is a need for more precise data in order to understand this trend in Canadian schools and to make sound judgments and decisions concerning its growth and development.

FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION IN CANADIAN SCHOOLS

Findings from three national surveys provide some general information about family life education in Canadian schools. In 1964, the Canadian Education Association surveyed all provincial departments of education and 55 urban school systems concerning the nature and extent of sex education in the schools.¹ None of the provincial departments reported curriculum provisions for the separate teaching of sex education, although most indicated that sex education topics were included in other subject areas. Reasons for the lack of provincial programs included a lack of demand for the subject, adequate coverage in other areas, or the school's unwillingness to accept responsibility for the subject.

All 55 school boards indicated that sex education was not taught as a separate course, although one board reported that such a course was to be introduced on a limited, trial basis in the coming year. Thirty-five of the school boards reported the inclusion of sex education topics in other subject matter areas (health, science, guidance, home economics, social studies, or personal and family living). Thirteen topics in sex education, encompassing both physical development and social relationships, were listed in the questionnaire. Of these, the topics most frequently taught were physical changes at puberty (for girls) and dating manners, followed by physical changes at puberty (for boys). Contraception was the least mentioned topic. Reports indicated that most topics were considered at the

senior high school level, but neither the method used nor the time spent was indicated.

A survey of family life education in Canada was conducted by The Vanier Institute of the Family during 1968–69. For this survey, family life education was defined as “any activity by any group or medium aimed at imparting information concerning family relationships and providing the opportunity for people to approach their present and future family relationships with greater understanding” (The Vanier Institute of the Family, 1971, foreword). Groups surveyed were the mass media, the schools, and voluntary organizations.

In the school survey, schools were sampled which included Grade 7 or higher. A total of 11,661 questionnaires were mailed, with 38% (4,475) returned. English schools showed higher returns than did French schools, but the returns covered a wide range of regions in Canada.

Of the schools represented in the survey, 29% offered family life education in the curriculum with an additional 3% offering it as an extracurricular course or informal subject. The great majority of these schools had only recently begun to offer family life education, with more than half reporting their first course since 1965. Schools which offered *composite* courses (i.e., including family life education as part of another subject) tended to introduce the subject earlier than did schools offering it separately.

Schools in Ontario, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia were most likely to include family life education in the curriculum, with 36%, 35%, and 30% respectively. The larger the community, the larger the school enrollment; the more senior the grades in the school, the more likely schools were to offer this subject. Of the courses offered, 83% were composite – often in health, physical education, guidance, counseling, and home economics. A wide range of topics was included in these courses, the most frequent being sex education, dating or boy-girl relationships, and parent-child or inter-generational relationships. These topics were offered at all grade levels. While family life education was usually offered to both boys and girls, they generally did not take the course together.

Teachers played the leading role in initiating family life education, although provincial departments of education and local boards of education were also involved. Most teachers did not specifically train for teaching family life education. Primary problems reported by teachers were the lack of student interest, the reaction of school authorities, the lack of qualified staff, the lack of teaching aids, and/or curriculum limitations.

Community reaction to family life education was viewed as a problem by only 9% of those respondents who offered family life education. The proportion was higher (19%) for schools which did *not* offer family life education. Some additional schools cited parental reaction as a serious problem but did not equate this reaction with organized community opposition.

The most recent national survey of family life education in the schools was conducted by the Canadian Education Association to discover the extent to which school districts in Canada had adopted family life education (Déiseach, 1977). In this survey, questionnaires were sent to school superintendents, to district family life coordinators, and to family life teachers in all operating school districts in the 10 provinces.

Based upon the returns from district superintendents, it was estimated that approximately 21% of the school districts had a family life education program. Districts which had adopted family life education tended to be larger, served communities in the more populated areas, had a larger number of school trustees, and, to some extent, were separate school systems. Responses indicated that a number of school boards had given serious consideration to family life education, and anticipated its introduction in the near future. Based on the survey's evidence, Déiseach predicted that by 1978, up to one-third of school districts would have family life education programs.

District family life education coordinators indicated that fewer than one-fifth of the teachers had taken courses appropriate to teaching family life, with some difficulties in providing or obtaining inservice training for teachers, particularly in rural areas. It appeared that family life education courses were usually developed within the local school district, borrowing from existing materials, with a great deal of curriculum planning by local personnel. The coordinators reported that family life education was offered on an equal basis both as a separate subject and as part of other courses, that Health/Physical Education courses were most commonly used to provide family life education instruction, and, although family life education was provided at all levels, that more tended to be offered at the secondary school level.

Nearly 78% of the teacher responses came from teachers in Ontario. They indicated that, at the elementary school level, course emphasis was placed on family relationships and on different kinds of families. Little was provided in sex education. In Grades 6 through 8, topics pertaining to the social and personal life of the young adolescent were emphasized: adolescence and peer groups; conception and birth; puberty; psychological maturation; and parent-child relations. All 40 family life education topics listed in the questionnaire were included in courses for Grades 9 through 13, with major emphasis at this level on conception and birth, venereal diseases, and interpersonal communication. These teachers reported that they were comfortable teaching the course, that students appreciated the program, and that parents were generally supportive of the program. Fifty-eight per cent indicated that they had had some preparation for teaching family life education, with 37% indicating that this preparation was in the form of college or university courses. The majority of the teachers were married women. However, although these teacher responses contribute to

some understanding of family life education in the schools, the responses of these Ontario teachers cannot be seen as representative of teacher experience in all provinces.

While national surveys, like these reported here, do help provide a broad, general understanding of family life education in Canadian schools, the information provided by these surveys is somewhat limited. Is family life education handled in different ways by the different departments reported to be involved? How are the different topics handled? What methodology and resources do family life educators use, and how do they evaluate their offerings? What kind of training do family life educators have? Are there provincial differences in family life education organization and presentation? Answers to these and to other similar questions are needed to help clarify and evaluate family life education in the schools.

PURPOSE AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of family life education in secondary schools in British Columbia. Information was sought concerning the incidence and the organization of family life education in the schools; its content, methodology, and evaluation, and the characteristics and qualifications of its teachers. It was expected that the study's results would not only provide insight into the current status of family life education in British Columbia secondary schools, but that these insights would assist educators in deciding about family life education. Although the study was limited to secondary schools, this was not intended to imply that family life education in the schools take place only at this level. Rather, the decision to limit the study reflected such practical considerations as the amount of time, money, and research assistance available.

As family life education is relatively new in British Columbia, it was decided to survey all of the province's 74 school districts to provide a complete overview of the situation. Letters were sent to all district superintendents explaining the study and requesting permission to contact selected secondary school teachers in the district. Schools were considered to be secondary schools if they included any or all of Grades 8, 9, 10, 11, or 12. In British Columbia, these schools are generally identified as secondary (Grades 8-12), senior secondary (Grades 10-12 or 11-12) or junior secondary schools (Grades 8-10). However, elementary-junior secondary schools were also surveyed if they included Grades 8 or above. Departments selected for this study were health/physical education, guidance/counseling, home economics, and social studies.

If the superintendents agreed to participate in the study, questionnaires were then sent to appropriate department heads in each secondary school in the district.

FINDINGS

Survey results

Replies were received from 47 district superintendents representing 57 school districts (77%) in the province, with superintendents in 53 districts agreeing to participate in the survey. However, reply cards from two districts were misdirected and were received too late for questionnaires to be mailed to teachers in those districts. Thus, the number of districts surveyed was 51 (69%). One district which declined to participate in the study reported current involvement in district-wide family life education program planning at the time, and their feeling was that participation in the study was premature. Reminder cards were intended for districts not replying to the initial request; however, a postal strike during a critical time in the survey delayed the survey and made such plans unfeasible.

Questionnaires were sent to 896 departments in the 224 schools in the participating districts. Questionnaires were returned by 179 departments in 116 schools, with one additional questionnaire returned by a curriculum department which provided family life education for all 14 schools in that district. The rate of response to the survey is thus 58% for schools and 26% for departments. While this rate of questionnaire returns seems somewhat low, the plans to send reminder cards were abandoned because of timing delays due to the postal strike. As it was, some of the last departments surveyed indicated involvement in family life education and interest in the survey but an inability to complete the questionnaire due to end-of-term pressures.

Family life education organization and enrollment

Family life education was offered in 96 (47%) of the schools responding to the survey. These schools were located in 34 districts (68%) throughout the province, although nearly two-thirds of the schools were in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island areas. These included 30 secondary schools, 23 senior secondary schools, 38 junior secondary schools, and two elementary-junior secondary schools. Most respondents did not report total school enrollments.

(It should be noted that an additional 15 schools indicated plans to initiate family life education in the coming year. While these schools were not included in the survey findings, this information may indicate a growth trend in family life education in B.C. schools.)

Many respondents did not know or did not indicate when family life education had been initiated in their departments. For those who did respond, it was clear that these offerings were a development of the 1970s, especially in the guidance/counseling and social studies departments. Only two de-

partments, both home economics departments, reported family life education prior to 1960.

The teachers indicated that they themselves were primarily responsible for initiating family life education, although students were also involved in one-third of the cases. Local boards of education and the provincial Department of Education contributed to the development of this area of education, primarily through resource allocation and course approval. Nearly one-half of the respondents had encountered no problems in offering family life education in their schools. The most frequently mentioned problems were lack of qualified staff and lack of teaching aids. Less than 10% reported either community reaction or the reaction of school authorities as a problem.

As earlier noted, 14 schools offered family life education through the District Curriculum Department. In the remaining 82 schools, family life education was offered by 45 home economics departments, 38 guidance/counseling departments, seven social studies departments, and four health/physical education departments. As three of the health/physical education offerings carried guidance titles and one carried a social studies title, further information concerning these will be included with these departments rather than with health/physical education.

Only 12 schools reported that family life education was offered by more than one department. The length of time devoted to family life education in these offerings varied greatly, from four hours to 180 hours. In this article, offerings will be identified as a *course* if 70 hours or more were devoted to family life education, and as a *unit* if 40 hours or less were spent on this area.

Thirty-four family life education courses were reported by the respondents. Of these, 31 were offered by home economics departments, two by social studies departments, and one by a guidance department. The majority (23) were offered at the Grade 11/12 level, with 11, all in home economics, offered to Grades 8, 9 and 10. All were elective. Students were predominantly female, although males were enrolled in the three guidance and social studies courses and in eight of the Grade 11/12 home economics courses. Home economics respondents indicated that most of their courses were open to male students whether or not male students were currently enrolled.

This study indicates that family life education was more likely to be included as a unit within another course in a department. Seventy-six units were reported, 59 in guidance departments, 11 in home economics departments, and six in social studies departments. Sixty-five per cent of these units were offered to students in grades 8 and 9, with the remainder evenly divided between Grade 10 and Grades 11/12. The majority (80%) devoted 10 hours or less to family life education, with only 10% reporting more than 20 hours. Units in home economics and social studies were usually elective, while approximately 75% of the guidance units were re-

quired. However, some of the guidance respondents indicated that units were required but that students could opt out, while others reported units were voluntary but that all students attended. Both male and female students were enrolled in the guidance and social studies units, while only female students were enrolled in the home economics units.

Family life education content

Sixteen content areas in family life education were listed, and teachers were asked to indicate the approximate amount of time spent on each topic. This is a difficult question, as many topics may be interrelated and any class period may deal with several topics. A number of respondents reported only the topics covered with no indication of relative priority; others did provide the requested information. These responses help provide profiles of family life education courses and units as taught in the three departments surveyed. Two measurements of family life content are reported here: 1/ the "popularity" of a topic, as indicated by the number of courses including it; 2/ the "priority" of a given topic, as indicated by the percentage of class time devoted to it. All survey responses were used to determine topic popularity; topic priority is based on the 76% of the responses providing this information.

The most popular topic in home economics courses at the Grade 11/12 level were male-female roles and preparation for parenting, followed closely by relationships with family, human reproduction, and child development. These topics were included in 90% or more of the courses. The home economics courses appeared to be broad family life education courses, as all 16 topics were included in at least half of the courses. The least popular topic was reported to be family-community interaction. Priority in these home economics courses was given to child development (28%), preparation for parenting (13%), and human growth and development (8%). The least amount of time (less than 5% each) was spent on marriage and divorce laws, premarital sex, and marriage problems.

Most home economics family life education courses carried a child care course title; however, courses reporting a family life education or human development title differed somewhat in content emphasis. Child development still had the highest priority, but only 14% of class time was spent on this topic. This topic was followed by dating, personal development, and human reproduction, each with 10% of class time. Marriage and divorce laws had the lowest priority (4%).

In the Grade 8/9/10 home economics courses, the most popular topics were child development, relationships with siblings, human reproduction, and preparation for parenting, with marriage and divorce laws the least popular topic. Priority topics at this level were child development (15%), preparation for parenting (15%), and human growth and development

(11%). Premarital sex and marriage and divorce laws had the lowest priority in these courses, with less than 5% of class time spent on each topic.

The guidance course reported in this survey was called Human Sexuality and included 11 of the 16 topics listed. Priority was given to preparation for parenting (15%), male-female roles (10%), and marriage/marriage relationships (8%). Human growth and development had the lowest priority (3%). However, as this was the only guidance course reported, no generalizations can be drawn concerning family life education courses offered by guidance departments.

Similarly, no generalizations can be drawn from the two family life education courses reported by social studies departments. The two courses varied in the number of hours and the number of topics included. The two courses were similar in that priority in both courses was given to personal development, male-female roles, and the cultural comparison of families. Neither course included human reproduction in their course content.

Teachers reporting units in family life education generally did not provide information concerning topic priority but did indicate topics included in these units. As reported earlier, most units were taught in guidance departments, with most of them 10 hours or less in length. As these guidance units varied greatly, it is difficult to draw generalizations concerning them. However, the following patterns were noted.

Units less than 10 hours long averaged seven topics per unit, while those from 10 to 40 hours averaged 12 topics per unit. One respondent indicated that 10 topics were included in one 5-hour unit. In Grades 11/12, the most popular topics were reported to be male-female roles and dating, courtship, and mate selection. All topics listed in the questionnaire were mentioned in at least one unit at this level. In Grade 10, male-female roles and premarital sex were most popular, with marriage and divorce laws least popular. Personal development, family relationships, and interpersonal relationships were the most popular topics in Grade 9 units. Marriage and divorce laws and marriage problems were not included in any Grade 9 units. Personal development, interpersonal relationships, and human reproduction were most popular at the Grade 8 level. Marriage and divorce laws and preparation for parenting were not included in any Grade 8 guidance units.

Units in home economics were most likely to emphasize personal development and interpersonal relationships, although no topic was included in all of the Home Economics units reported. Child development and preparation for parenthood were *not* included in these units. In social studies, units were most likely to include topics in marriage relationships, marriage problems, marriage and divorce laws, and social problems. Child development was not included in any social studies units. Because of the small number of units reported from these two departments (11 and 6 respectively), this data should be interpreted with caution.

Family life education resources and methodology

An examination of the resources used by the respondents may also indicate the nature of family life education in British Columbia secondary schools. Sixty-five per cent of the home economics courses used required textbooks, with two-thirds of these in child development and/or parenting. None of the three guidance and social studies courses required texts. A number of respondents indicated constraints in using texts, primarily unavailability of appropriate ones or department budgets not allowing purchase of books in adequate numbers. Some home economics teachers who did use texts indicated that while these were often inadequate for course content they were supplemented by other materials. Many respondents, however, indicated that they did not believe texts were necessary for family life education, preferring to keep course content "current," "flexible," and "related to student needs."

None of the respondents reported the use of texts in family life education units. Both courses and units in all departments made use of reference materials, including books, pamphlets, and periodicals. Some respondents provided detailed listings of materials used; others indicated that they used "the usual references"; some did not reply to this item. (It was not clear whether these latter respondents did not use references or simply did not provide the information.) Few patterns can be detected from the information provided. For example, 40 different references were used in the 20 home economics Grades 11/12 courses, with no reference listed more than twice. In the guidance units, nearly 30 references were listed, again with no reference listed more than twice. As expected, the topics of these references tended to parallel the content emphasis reported earlier in this paper. Home economics references were listed on all family life education topics with emphasis on child development and parenting; guidance references were primarily on self-development, sexuality, and parenting; social studies references emphasized self-development, family relations, and marriage.

Guest speakers were used in 92% of the courses and units. Courses averaged 6 speakers per course, while the units averaged 2.6 speakers for units less than 10 hours and 4 speakers for units between 10 and 40 hours. Speakers used most often were nurses (59%), doctors (31%), and representatives from community social service agencies (20%). Films were used in 88% of the family life education courses and units. An average number of 5 films per course and 4 films per unit were reported, covering a wide range of topics in all three departments. The films reported most often by all respondents (regardless of department) were *Jamie*, *Phoebe*, *Four Families*, and the *Human Journey* series. Other resources reported were the use of field trips, videotapes, slides, filmstrips, transparencies, and models. There were no patterns in the use of these resources within or among the three departments.

Respondents were asked whether parents or other members of the com-

munity were involved in the family life education offerings other than as guest speakers or as members of panels. Only 18% indicated such involvement. One-fourth of the home economics respondents reported that parents provided children for the departments play school or for case studies carried out by students. Parents provided transportation for field trips or served as group discussion leaders in 16% of the guidance units. They were not involved in any of the social studies offerings. No one reported involving parents or community members in the planning or the evaluation of family life education.

The majority (90%) of the respondents indicated that the most successful technique was class discussion. Most indicated that discussions were more valuable when based upon a film, guest speaker, readings, or class projects. As one teacher noted, "Usually, preparation for discussion pays." However, approximately 10% of the guidance respondents indicated that "freewheeling discussions" or rap sessions, motivated by student interests, were most successful. Home economics respondents also indicated that participation in play schools or other child observation experiences was also a valuable learning experience.

Family life education evaluation

Respondents were asked to indicate the methods used to evaluate both the courses/units and the students enrolled in them. Less than 15% indicated that they evaluated their family life education offerings. Those who did sought student opinion through class discussions, check lists, or unsigned written statements. One reported using attitude change, but did not indicate how it was measured.

One-third of the guidance respondents did not give marks in family life education and thus did not use any kind of student evaluation. An additional 17% gave marks but did not indicate the basis for these marks. For the remainder, the methods used most often for student evaluation were class participation and student self-evaluation. Half of the social studies respondents indicated evaluation of students based on examinations, projects, or written assignments, while the other half either did not evaluate students or did not reply to the question. Ninety per cent of the home economics respondents evaluated students, primarily through the use of examinations, projects, and other assignments. A number of respondents indicated that evaluation was one of the most difficult aspects of family life education, as benefits were often intangible. They noted the importance of not appearing to mark "how likeable you are."

Characteristics and qualifications of family life education teachers

Information was sought concerning the personal characteristics and professional qualifications of the 116 teachers/counselors involved in the above

family life education offerings. These family life educators were predominantly female (62%), predominantly married (70%), relatively young (70% under 40), and thus relatively inexperienced (50% with 10 years or less of teaching experience). All 33 home economics teachers were female, all 10 social studies teachers were male, and the 73 guidance teachers included nearly equal numbers of males and females (34 and 39 respectively). In general, home economics teachers were older, with half of these teachers over 40. Nearly all of the single teachers were in guidance departments, representing 25% of the guidance teachers. The social studies teachers were the least experienced, with 70% having less than 10 years of teaching experience, in contrast to 57% of the guidance teachers and 55% of the home economics teachers.

Information on undergraduate training was received from two-thirds of the teachers. They reported undergraduate degrees in 13 different subject matter areas, 66% of them from B.C. universities. Appropriately 10% had received their undergraduate training outside Canada. Nearly 90% of the home economics teachers had majors in home economics, 16% of them from outside Canada. A wide range of majors were reported by guidance teachers, with 28% in physical education and 17% in guidance predominating. Half of the social studies teachers had degrees in history.

Respondents were asked to indicate their training in the 15 subject areas considered important in training family life educators (Committee on Educational Standards and Certification for Family Life Educators, 1970). Of the 95 responding, 45% had training in biological sciences and 33% in family sociology. Few reported practice teaching or field experiences relevant to teaching family life education and few had studied family-community interaction, family laws, or research on the family.

Some differences were noted between departments. Home economics teachers reported training in management (81%), family sociology (65%), human development (61%), biological sciences (77%), and family interaction (50%). For social studies teachers, 71% had had training in group processes and 43% in family sociology. Greater variation in training was apparent among the guidance teachers. Of the 57 responding, 30% had had training in biological sciences, 26% in family sociology, and 23% in group processes. Fourteen teachers, all in guidance departments, reported postgraduate degrees. Training in these degrees emphasized group processes and counseling strategies.

Some respondents noted participation in various forms of inservice education or informal education. These experiences covered a wide variety of subject areas, ranging from single special lectures to weekend workshops and noncredit short courses. Few patterns were noted in this information, except to indicate that many teachers have continued to study family life education beyond their formal degree programs.

Respondents were asked to indicate where they felt the greatest personal

need for further training. Four indicated no need for further training, while one-third reported that "any" further training would be helpful. For the remaining, subject areas mentioned most often were methods in family life education, group processes, and family law. Half of the teachers reported teaching family life education because they were assigned to the area, while one-third were involved due to their own interest. The remainder reported a combination of these factors.

Only one-third of the respondents replied to questions concerning school and community reactions to family life education. Of these, generally favourable responses were reported from students (90%), school administrators (85%), parents (77%), and community members (54%). While two respondents indicated somewhat unfavourable responses, the remainder either believed reactions were neutral or they had no idea how others reacted.

All respondents were invited to provide additional comments relevant to family life education. While many did not respond to this opportunity, others wrote detailed, thoughtful statements. Some teachers suggested family life education would be taken more seriously if taught as a regular course; others favoured deemphasizing content and organization in order to deal with topics as they arose during class discussions.

These statements indicate that not all decisions concerning family life education were made by the teachers. Some reported they were required to teach family life education as a part of a department's offerings, while others were required *not* to teach it, or not to teach certain "touchy" subjects such as "sex," "working mothers," and "death." Many teaching units in family life education indicated that they felt their instruction was limited due to course overload, and they could only devote a few hours to family life education. A few evaluated their own offerings as "half-hearted," as they used mostly films and guest speakers. While respondents believed that family life education was important for all, teaching such subject matter was considered easier and more effective with a willing audience.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from this study that the incidence of family life education in British Columbia secondary schools was significantly higher than that reported for B.C. in the national surveys, and that, in fact, the incidence was to some extent greater than reported in these findings. It is estimated that as many as half of B.C. secondary schools were offering family life education as part of the curriculum. While these findings make it impossible to determine reasons for these discrepancies among studies, two guesses might be hazarded: (1) information for this study was obtained from classroom teachers rather than from administrators or supervisors; (2) there may be fluctuations in the offering of family life education. If the latter is the case,

additional studies are needed to monitor the incidence of family life education and to identify factors promoting or inhibiting it.

The fact remains, however, that family life education was offered in approximately half of B.C. secondary schools. But this should not be interpreted to mean that half of B.C. secondary school students received such instruction. Much family life education was elective or, if required, was relatively short. Thus, while students were able to take family life education, many did not elect to do so. Is this because students did not see family life education as interesting or important, or because administrative arrangements or program requirements limited student enrollments? An examination of district and/or school policies and practices regarding family life education as well as studies of student interests and motivations are needed to further explain family life education's ability or failure to develop.

While family life education in B.C. was more likely found in larger schools and communities, it was widely scattered geographically. As many programs were initiated by individual teachers at approximately the same time, this suggests the idea's rapid dissemination throughout the province. The data in this study do not suggest reasons for why such dissemination occurred, but they do show clearly that family life education in the 1970s was an idea whose time had come.

It is important to note, however, that this dissemination appeared to be of the *idea* and not of any particular approach for implementation. Many differences were noted within and among the departments in the content and the organization of family life education. More similarities were noted among the courses in home economics than any of the other offerings. This may reflect some network which occurred among home economics teachers of family life education, or it may suggest that, given sufficient time to devote to family life education, a particular body of knowledge "emerges" as appropriate for family life education. Evidence from the few guidance and social studies courses in this study suggest that the latter is unlikely, as different content was noted; however, these may have been unique rather than representative guidance and social studies courses.

When family life education is taught as a unit, it is obvious that choices must be made due to limited available time. The data in this study indicate that, although there are broad patterns within each department, such units vary widely with respect to the content focus, the length of time devoted to the subject, and the activities and resources used.

Such variation may be appropriate, as it allows for flexibility in meeting the needs of youth in a particular community. However, it may also represent the lack of an overall philosophical framework concerning the nature and aims of family life education. Numerous important questions are raised. Why is some content chosen, other content is ignored? Who makes these decisions? On what basis? Do the different approaches affect students

differently? This latter question would appear particularly relevant to the short units which attempt to cover several different topics. The differences which appear in the departmental offerings do suggest merit in implementing a team approach to family life education in most schools. Such an approach would capitalize on the strengths appearing in different departments and would likely strengthen the total family life program.

It is obvious from the above that it is difficult to make generalizations about family life education in B.C. secondary schools, and inappropriate to make *global* statements of support or condemnation concerning these offerings. Much more must be known – both descriptive and evaluative – before sound judgments can be made.

Two objectives appeared to guide both the courses and the units: (1) to learn what is known about individual and family development topics; (2) to become aware of one's own feelings and attitudes. Both objectives were included in many of the offerings, but there was some indication that self-awareness was the *only* objective in some family life education. While this is an important objective, it may not qualify as education, in that such courses may become little more than "rap sessions." While rap sessions may be enjoyable, they may add little to students' understanding of themselves or others.

A related issue raised by the respondents is whether course planning facilitates or limits family life education. This study indicates that respondents differed on whether family life education should be structured or unstructured, but no attempt was made to consider how educational growth might best be promoted without loss of flexibility. Such a concern could well be the focus of additional research studies.

Some disquieting thoughts are raised by the reported use of family life education resources. While many different resources were listed, very few were used in more than one or two schools. The respondents had indicated that they tended to use "what's available." Are the differences in the reported resources the result of a selection procedure, or of an unawareness of available resources? How *do* family life educators learn about resources in the field? What criteria do they use to select resources once discovered? And, perhaps more importantly, to what extent does the apparent availability of resources dictate course content? Concerns might also be expressed for the prevalence of popular press items among family life education resources. While creative teachers may be able to use such items to advantage, reliance upon such resources has some potential for superficiality and for focus on currently "popular" issues and topics.

Two points must be made, however. This study did not attempt to learn about resources teachers might develop for their own use, or to determine *how* teachers use resources available to them. Information on these two points would help provide a more accurate picture of resource use in family life education and might be somewhat more reassuring.

Family life education offerings are undoubtedly richer than a listing of topics or of resources would indicate. An understanding of family life education would likely be facilitated by in-depth case studies of specific offerings.

Numerous other questions for further study are suggested by this study. For example, descriptions of family life education offerings help in understanding the field of study, but such descriptions do not indicate the resulting effect on students. The evaluation of family life education is important for further study.

Further study might also focus on organizational and political problems in family life education. For example, how do departments compete for students and how does this affect family life education enrollment? When a department curriculum is over-crowded, what factors determine inclusion of family life education? What differences exist between communities accepting or rejecting family life education in the schools?

Some final comments should be made concerning the family life educators themselves. These respondents varied widely with respect to both personal characteristics and professional training. Although personal characteristics are not necessarily important to successful family life education, such characteristics (or the lack of them) may be of interest to some. In this study, personal characteristics did not appear to be important in the kinds of family life education offered.

However, while all respondents had had some training in some subject matter areas of family life education, few had had specific training in family life education philosophy, organization, and methodology. This lack of training in family life education may help to explain the wide variety of family life education offerings in British Columbia. It cannot be assumed the similarity of all offerings if teachers had this training, but it is likely that some more distinct patterns, based on a clearer understanding of the field, might emerge. Such training might not only strengthen existing offerings but encourage development of additional ones.

It should be recognized that although these respondents did not have specific family life education training, they appeared committed to family life education. It was evident that much time and thought had been given to family life education planning, with many program shortcomings resulting from circumstances beyond teacher control.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this survey study has been to examine the nature of family life education in secondary schools in British Columbia. It has been found that family life education is offered in approximately half of these schools which are widely scattered throughout the province. Family life education is most likely to be offered as a unit within another course, primarily

through home economics and guidance departments. Wide variations are found in the content and the organization of this subject matter, both within departments and among departments. The most similarities are found within home economics family life education. Many different resources and techniques were reported, with guest speakers and films the most heavily used resource, and class discussions the most successful technique.

Family life education teachers were predominantly married females, under 40, with 10 years or less of teaching experience. Most were trained in B.C. institutions, with training in family life education content areas, but few had had specific training in family life education philosophy and methodology. Teachers differed in the objectives they believed appropriate for family life education and in whether they believed planning facilitated or limited family life education.

Because of the wide variations in programs studied, it is difficult to generalize about family life education in B.C. secondary schools, and therefore difficult to make global evaluation statements concerning these programs. While this study contributes to a clearer understanding of family life education in B.C., many questions remain unanswered.

NOTES

- ¹ Although the terms family life education and sex education are not necessarily interchangeable, this sex education study dealt with a number of family life education topics.

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