

RESEARCH REPORT

FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS IN RHODESIA

THE CONCEPT OF family life education is not new. It was an essential part of the upbringing of youth in traditional African society, undertaken by a number of adults in the wider kinship group. In the nuclear family which is the typical family unit for Rhodesians of European ancestry, family life education was tacitly conceded to be the responsibility of parents. What is recent, however, is the increasing pressure on schools to become involved in family life education. This concept is confused by the variety of terms used, often interchangeably. Thus one hears of population education, sex education, responsible parenthood education, education for better family living, education for personal development and so on. People are not always clear about what the goals of the educational programmes are.

The decision as to which term is used is probably not important, provided that it does reflect, as accurately as possible, the objectives of the programme, which in turn should reflect the specific needs of young people in the community whom the programme is designed to serve.

Although the family is one of the most pervasive institutions of man, the processes of modernization and urbanization and the changing status of women are bringing about such radical changes in family roles and the functions of the family unit, that each society needs to discover how best to carry out family life education in the midst of change.

Disorganizing trends which threaten family life in Rhodesia, and which could be counteracted, at least in part, by educational programmes, in both the formal and non-formal systems, are:

1. In African society the gradual disintegration of the wider kinship system in urban environment is accompanied by change in the customs and norms regarding family life; the breakdown of the sexual behaviour code; and loss of control over the younger generation. Parents are experiencing difficulties in being solely responsible for the discipline of their children without the support of the wider kinship group. Even in rural areas there is considerable evidence that the traditional methods are not preparing young people to face the demands made on them by modern society.
2. The persistence of the cultural value of large families which was functional in a rural agricultural economy, but puts a heavy economic burden on the individual family in the urban environment. Frequently the result is malnourished and under-educated children.
3. In European society an exceptionally high divorce rate is accompanied by an increase in pre-marital pregnancies. There is considerable evidence that young people are not receiving guidance in the home to prepare them for marriage and parenthood.
4. In both societies early marriage, teenage pregnancy and abortions,

venereal diseases, alcoholism and drug abuse, illegitimate children and one-parent families are on the increase.

5. The retention of legislation which discriminates against women retards the process of their emancipation. This tends to reinforce perpetuation of the pattern of male dominance in decision-making within the household.

The trends listed above are not unique to Rhodesia, nor is the debate as to who should be responsible for providing an educational input, the broad aim of which is to prepare youth to fulfil their social roles as responsible adults in the family unit, and in the community. At the international level the role and responsibility of educationists in the emerging field of population and family life education is expressed in the following recommendation contained in the World Plan of Action approved by all of the 136 member states who attended the United Nations World Population Conference in Bucharest in 1974:

It is recommended that Governments consider making provision, in both their formal and non-formal education programmes, for informing their people of the consequences of existing or alternative fertility behaviour for the well-being of the family, for educational and psychological development of children and for the general welfare of society so that an informed and responsible attitude to marriage and reproduction will be promoted (U.N., 1974, p.18).

The World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession accepted this recommendation and stressed its importance and urgency (W.C.O.T.P., 1974).

A consistent pattern that emerges is that both teachers and parents have a responsibility to develop in young people rational and responsible attitudes and behaviour towards the national development needs in their country, and to the family as the basic unit in society.

Perpetuation of international concern for the welfare of the family unit is now expressed in the designation by the United Nations of 1979 as the International Year of the Child. The official document states that there are 350 million children in the world who do not receive the minimum basic services in health and education. Children are the essence of family life education.

It is clear that the educational task is not only complex but also urgent, and the target population are the youth who are approaching adulthood and will become the parents of tomorrow.

DEVELOPMENTS IN RHODESIA

The process in Rhodesia has followed a pattern which is typical of twentieth-century democratic societies. Concerned citizens who perceive a social ill get together and a voluntary association is formed. Thus the Marriage Guidance Society was established in 1955 and the Family Planning Association in 1957.

Initially the activities of voluntary associations tend to be remedial, in attempts to rectify a situation, or to bridge a gap. However, in the past decade there has been a swing away from remedial work towards preventive work, resulting in an increasing development of educational programmes. Thus in the European Division of the Ministry of Education, and to a lesser extent in the African Division, the Marriage Guidance Society and Family Planning Association have been giving sessions in schools on topics related

to the aims of their respective associations. However, the pattern has been very haphazard, and frequently a once-only lecture with questions and discussion. For such training to become effective, it needs to become part of a synthesized whole which incorporates the full range of family relationships which are relevant to youth at different stages in their development.

Awareness of the need for a more integrated approach led the National Council of Women in 1974 to pass a resolution urging the Ministry of Education to consider the introduction of a four-year course on 'Education for Living' in Teachers' Colleges and Secondary Schools, one section to be devoted to personal relations, including relationships in the family unit.

About the same time research at the University, sponsored by the Family Planning Association, resulted in a research report which recommended that a suitable training programme should be designed for schools to educate the youth about the demographic aspects of overpopulation and the related concept of family planning (Geraty, 1973, p.41).

A Working Party on Population Education was set up in the Division of African Education in July 1973, and for the first four years the emphasis in their educational programme for schools tended to be at the macro-level, covering demographic statistics, population growth in the world and Rhodesia, the relationship between man and his environment and the finiteness of resources. A comprehensive Resource File for Teachers on Population Education has been produced.

At the micro-level, which is family life education, the emphasis is on preparing youth to fulfil their social role as responsible parents in the family unit and in the community. More recent research into family values in African Grade 7 classes in Rhodesia (Geraty, 1977) led to the recommendation that family life educational programmes should be developed and introduced into the school curriculum. The findings indicated that there was still considerable support for the large-family value; that a four-child family was considered to be a small family; that the man's primary role was seen to be that of provider, and the woman's as that of wife, mother and home-maker. Although 53 per cent of girls thought women should get the same pay as men for the same job, only 26 per cent of the boys did. However, there was evidence of a growing awareness that children were an economic responsibility and that there are positive benefits in postponing marriage.

It is therefore suggested that both population and family life education are needed in the school system, the emphasis to be adjusted to suit the specific learning needs of the young people at different stages in their development. An advantage of the family life approach is that students are interested in talking together about subjects which already affect their own lives and plans for the future. Controversial subjects such as sexuality, sex roles, marriage and divorce have the potential to stimulate lively discussion.

Attempts to implement the proposals put forward by the National Council for Women have been made by both Divisions of the Ministry of Education. In the European, Asian and Coloured Division, a syllabus has not been imposed. Headmasters have been circulated with suggestions for a Guidance Programme in Secondary Schools. These can be used as a basis for developing programmes. The policy on sex education is that it should be limited to aspects included in the biology syllabus and sociological topics concerned with relationships, of a general nature, with members of the opposite sex. The significance of this arrangement is that the actual development of programmes depends on the enthusiasm of the headmaster and/or a teacher on his staff.

The Division of African Education has retained the 'Education for Living' title, and the 1978 guide for Education Officers, Principals of Teachers' Colleges and Headmasters of Secondary Schools contains suggestions and ideas which have been submitted by headmasters based on their own experience of implementing the topic. A wide range of aspects of family life education have already been included in syllabuses at some schools, such as the family, parenthood and family planning, legal status of women, drugs and drug abuse. Again, the conviction of the headmaster that the topic is important remains crucial.

A major weakness which is particularly relevant for the family life aspect is that three important issues have either not been resolved, or have been left to the discretion of individual headmasters. The first is whether family life education should be concerned with inculcating values or merely with providing information. For example, should sex education merely provide information on the 'facts of life' about human reproduction, or should the teacher, or a trained specialist, be available to help students develop their own sets of values based on an informed understanding of alternatives, and of the consequences of individual decisions and actions in the area of reproductive behaviour.

The second issue is the selection of appropriate teaching methods. As the primary concern of family life education lies in the area of attitudes and behaviour, rather than the provision of knowledge, suitable teaching techniques may need to be evolved.

Finally, there is the question of involving the parents, and how this can be effected so that family life education in the home and the school can be mutually supportive.

THE 'ANALYSIS' OF FAMILY ROLES' APPROACH

A further dilemma for headmasters and teachers is that family roles vary from culture to culture, and in rural and urban environments. However, if the problem-oriented approach suggested below is adopted, the dilemma may well turn out to be the strength of the exercise.

The purpose of the educational process in this approach is to encourage exploration and analysis of family roles in traditional and modern societies, and to examine alternatives in, for example, the division of labour in the home, the status of the sexes, sex roles and so forth.

It is appreciated that the idea of getting students to think seriously about such questions, and to discuss them, may well prove difficult for some teachers. However, for those who are convinced of the value of this type of education, and who feel reasonably competent to handle the subject matter in a professional and objective manner, the following ideas may prove to be useful.

The first step is to identify the prescribed roles for adults in the family unit, bearing in mind that responsibilities associated with each role, and appropriate behaviour patterns, will depend on cultural values and norms. A further complication is that some roles are emerging and others are declining, which results in a measure of uncertainty.

Recent research in America (Nye, 1976) attempted to delineate and measure the expectations and behaviour patterns associated with eight roles identified in the literature as belonging to the positions of spouse or parent. These roles can be divided into normative roles and optional roles. The normative roles are those which are taken for granted, and in which there is a measure of agreement in the community on what should be done and who

should do it. For example, it is seen as the duty of the parents in the family to support the family, to provide a home, and to care for and socialize the children. The optional roles are not seen as being the duty of any one person in the family, yet they make a contribution to the enrichment of family life. For example, a wife does not have to help her husband solve a problem, nor does a husband have to initiate recreational outings for the family, but they often do.

The normative roles therefore are the provider role, the housekeeper role, the child-care role and the socialization role. A brief examination of each will serve to suggest discussion topics or exercises.

The husband or father is normally expected to be the main provider of the means to support the family. However, many wives nowadays work for pay outside of the home, so the role is often shared. Topics which could be discussed are:

Should the wife work outside the home?

Who should manage the income?

What should a woman who has children, but no husband do?

The housekeeper role (not to be confused with the housewife role) includes all tasks related to food processing, cooking and serving, cleaning, laundering, repair of clothing and household equipment, shopping and keeping financial records.

Most societies prescribe that the wife/mother should accept responsibility for the majority of the housekeeper roles. However, many men now agree that the role should be shared. Each of the tasks in the housekeeper role can be analysed into greater detail, with concomitant discussion on the allocation of duties.

There is an overlap between the child-care and socialization roles. However, the focus of child care is the provision of the physical and psychic needs of the child, with the object of rearing a healthy child. The World Health Organisation has recognized the important role of the family in promoting and protecting the health of its members (W.H.O., 1975). Traditionally the mother has been primarily responsible for the child-care role, but even in this role the idea of sharing responsibility is emerging.

A wide range of topics can be explored when examining this role, combining factual information sessions with informal discussion on modern/traditional values. Family diet, family diseases, pre-natal and post-natal care, nutrition, home accidents, environmental sanitation, the concept of family planning, sexually transmitted diseases and early childhood development are all relevant to the child care role.

The socialization role refers to the activities within the family which contribute to the development of the child into a competent, social and moral person. It involves teaching children what is right and wrong, developing a sense of responsibility, competence in eating and dressing properly, doing school work and generally interacting with others.

As in the case of the child-care role, the major responsibility for socializing the child has in the past been allocated to the mother. However, there are cultural variations, with fathers or other relatives being expected to take more responsibility for the teaching in specified areas.

Stimulating discussion on the normative family roles is an indirect method of creating awareness of some of the responsibilities of parenthood, and the needs of children.

The optional roles incorporate some of the more controversial and less clearly-defined aspects of family life. The optional roles are the sexual role, the kinship role, the therapeutic and the recreational role.

The sexual role is still a 'hot potato' in educational circles. Traditional education in the family tended to be limited to the moral aspects of sexual behaviour. Controversy still exists about the ethics of including moral education in the school curriculum, although the inclusion of human reproduction in the biology syllabus is rarely disputed. The divergence of opinion lies in the field of moral education, and how it should be handled. Experts tend to see the aim as being to bring about a more mature understanding of moral problems, whereas laymen identify moral education as the direct inculcation of socially acceptable habits. The consensus of opinion tends to be that this topic is best handled by carefully selected and trained people.

The kinship role offers the opportunity to explore different cultures and changing patterns of behaviour. Although there is wide support for the view that kinship structures are less important than they used to be, certain kinship obligations do affect marriage and family relationships, and in some cultures are more important than in others. Suitable topics for discussion in the school curriculum include marriage practices and customs, such as the payment of *lobola*, financial assistance to relatives, and maintaining communication with relatives.

The therapeutic role refers primarily to the emotional support the family gives to its members — the opportunity to discuss problems and worries, the giving of reassurance and affection and the offer of help in solving problems. Students could be encouraged to discuss whether this really is an optional role in the family, or an obligation.

Recreational activities can either be viewed as an individual activity, or as group activities. The functions of leisure activities can be classed as relaxation, entertainment or personal development. Areas to be explored include the value of the recreational role, and the importance of having family recreation together.

CONCLUSION

It is suggested that this approach to family life education can be used as a guide to assist in the development of programmes suitable for including in the school curriculum. Both the child-care and the socialization role open the door for guided discussion on parenthood, and give the teacher the opportunity to discuss the causes and consequences of behaviour leading to parenthood, bearing in mind that:

Becoming a parent is not always a voluntary act. It is often the unintended consequence of a spontaneous sexual act.

Parental status is relatively irrevocable. One can change spouses, and change jobs, but parents are generally stuck with the responsibility of having to bring up their own children.

There are few roles in society nowadays for which people are so poorly prepared as those associated with parenthood.

A primary objective of family life education would thus be to expose options that are available in marriage relationships, and the responsibilities that are involved in parenthood. That there is an educational need to make young people aware of these responsibilities, and the consequences of irresponsible behaviour — for the individual, for the family, for the community,

and for the nation — has been established. The responsibility of the school to provide an educational input in this area is also being accepted, albeit with reluctance. A consoling thought is that if the youth of today can be made aware of the need for concerted action in order to preserve a stable society and viable environment for the next generation, they may well become the educators of tomorrow in their own homes, and this is probably the ideal to strive for in family life education.

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