Higher Education: Instruction, Research, and Service

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This article addresses those professionals in colleges and universities who are responsible for the teaching, the research, and the community service associated with family life education. It attempts to review each area noting the present status of the field and projecting future directions. While recognizing the difficulties of an interdisciplinary subject, the family life educator is encouraged to bring together teaching resources from many areas, and to sharpen research in two directions: the immediately pertinent and the theoretical. FLE has an optimistic future but must develop enough expertise and flexibility to meet the challenge of solid scholarship and timely application.

It is not surprising that family life education with its uncertain history, its wavering philosophy, and even a disputed definition has failed to command both the attention and the respect that it deserves from institutions of higher education. Almost no one has been asking the right questions, and in cases where the questions have been asked, the answers have not been very clear: Why is the field so difficult to define? Why are its goals so often challenged? Why is there no clear-cut curriculum, no standard certification? Why is it at the bottom of the academic hierarchy? Is there a logical place for the program to be housed? Is it a part of liberal education or professional preparation? Who is responsible for its being alive and well—if it is?

It is easy to create an abstraction in the term "institution of higher learning" that divorces the faculty from the institution in such a way that, as individuals, we are absolved from failure as well as omitted from praise for that which our universities have or have not accomplished. The members of the faculty *are* the university and the college; what is done is determined by them; what is left undone is also of their doing. We cannot appeal to institutions to be sensitive to the needs of a changing society, to be responsive, imaginative, creative, and reasonably aggressive; we can only appeal to the faculty. Thus, this article strives to review the areas of responsibility that can be claimed by the faculty and suggests ways we can stretch to meet the demands of the rapidly accelerating pace of change in the lives of human beings.

Basic to the solutions of the current problems and the establisment of firm objectives for the future is the participation of faculty who are dedicated to making the area meaningful. The task cannot be left to the administration whose messages for the most part have been something like: "Develop strong courses but don't ask for funds for innovative programs." "Hire qualified faculty but keep their salaries somewhat below the institution's median." "Turn out significant research but get your own grants." Heightening this lack of enthusiam is the concern that the financial crunch and dwindling enrollments will necessitate across-the-board cut-backs in course offerings and program development.

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Frills are the first to go, and in some places FLE is a frill.

The administration is responsible to the budget which speaks much louder than the community requesting education for marriage and parenthood. This is especially so if communities and school boards are themselves conflicted and unable to articulate—or even to agree upon—their needs.

Because FLE is interdisciplinary in its nature rather than a basic discipline, its courses and programs are scattered among several departments on the campus. FLE suffers from a lack of unity, and the faculty suffers from a lack of colleagueship. There is no one spokesman who serves as an advocate. By the nature of the way in which higher education is organized, FLE has no firm, visible place among other programs and departments.

Faculty have generally lacked the assertiveness necessary to put themselves or their subject on the "academic map." They are generally spread over a campus and this makes communication and goal-setting difficult. Their energies have been used in the trailblazing necessary to establish and maintain their courses. Their attention has typically been more directed toward their students than toward administrators. The result is practically no visibility and near zero political influence in the general governance of the institution.

In spite of obstacles of these dimensions, FLE has continued to exist in higher education and has come to the place where we can reasonably expect it to become a more significant part of instruction, of research and of services. Faculty involvement is crucial in pointing new directions.

Instruction: A Challenge To Incorporate

In most institutions the most easily identified activity that can be labeled "Family Life Education" is instruction. Courses may be roughly grouped into three categories: (a) applied or functional; (b) institutional (Landis, 1959); and (c) professional. The goals of applied courses are usually personal enrichment; they are courses that seek to stimulate the student to think about her/himself, marital or other life-style expectations, parenting, and the formation of intimate relationships. Such courses are offered both by secular and religiously oriented institutions and are usually found in Departments of Child and Family Relations, Home Economics, Sociology, Psychology, Nutrition, and Consumer Studies. Within the past ten years appropriate family courses have also been established in ethnic centers, gerontology institutes, and women's studies. These include courses such as Black Families in America, Families in the Later Years, Gender and Sex Roles, etc.

The same departments plus Anthropology and History often offer theoretical courses designed more to inform than to apply. The objectives of these are similar to those of liberal education; they seek to broaden the students' knowledge base in history, philosophy and culture. These are the institutional courses which are often considered only peripherally as a family life education, and may not be so identified at all. Examples of these may be Sociology of the Family, Family Law, Sex Role Development Through History, etc.

Criticism has been leveled at both these kinds of courses. The functional are often considered as the "soft and fuzzies" of the college campus. Credits and grades may be easily won, and a personal relationship established with an instructor who is a warm, caring human being. Institutional courses tend to be large, impersonal, exam-oriented and information-based. There are instructors who seem to manage somewhat successfully to combine the best of both approaches, but alas they, too, are criticized for being ambiguously both soft and hard. There is a place within the university for both kinds of courses. They should complement each other rather than compete and should be carefully monitored to avoid overlap. It is embarrassing for faculty to discover another course is using the same text or films, and it is boring repetition for the student.

There are two ways of dealing with the problems of functional versus theoretical courses when they are brought into a single program. They can be pulled together into single courses, probably best taught by teams that represent the investment of the original departments, or they can be made more separate with the differences between the two

sharpened and labeled. What is most important is that the family life educator recognize the value of *both* functional and institutional courses and claim them as belonging to FLE.

It is highly unlikely that any one department offers (or should offer) enough courses to provide the breadth necessary for a family life major. Just as the richness of the field depends upon bringing together many disciplines, so does an undergraduate major depend on materials from a variety of departments taught by professors from various backgrounds and philosophical positions, and presenting substantially different points of view. However, the *administration* of a family life major or minor should be either within a single department or under a designated interdisciplinary committee. Programs that draw courses from a variety of sources tend to be more flexible and can be designed to meet a wider spectrum of student needs. As we enter the 1980s, there will be more demands for tailored programs to meet the increasing number of life-style choices. Such programs require that faculty offer more guidance—a counseling responsibility that provides for a student-instructor relationship but one that also devours time.

Developing an interdisciplinary program that cuts across department lines requires that we acquaint ourselves with many courses and faculty across the campus. Too often in the past we have not expanded our efforts and built the bridges necessary to create broad, imaginative programs. We tend to erect barriers and jealously guard however much or little we have. We should make a comprehensive review searching out all the courses that contribute meaningfully to the study of the family and build programs that are inclusive rather than exclusive.

Professional Programs: Teacher, Counselor, Social Worker and Nurse

Professional programs that have a recognizable component of family life education are generally unified, easily identified and lead to careers in teaching, counseling, social service and nursing.

The curriculum of most interest to family life educators is, of course, the one that prepares more educators, particularly for schools. A few states have defined requirements for teacher certification and in this way have provided impetus for well defined programs under a variety of titles: Family Life, Family Relations, Family and Society, Child and Family Development, Human Development, etc. These are found in Departments or Schools of Education, of Home Economics, or Health. The courses are upper level (junior and senior) and graduate, and the programs are designed for secondary school teachers; however, some universities and colleges with an eye to future trends are modifying or creating curricula for the elementary teacher as well.

Educators close to the programs are most aware of the inadequacies. In Home Economics the need to prepare teachers who can teach in several other areas leaves too little time for thorough preparation in FLE. The Health Education program also has its drawbacks because the physical factors tend to be emphasized at the expense of the social and emotional, and too often only hygiene, sex, and disease are included. The most serious weakness in teacher preparation programs in Education is that so few even exist for FLE, and when they do, they often fail to offer enough courses and supervised experience to build a sense of self-confidence in the young teacher. Teachers shy from areas in which they feel incompetent, and with the little, often erratic preparation they receive as a part of their teacher training, they are not eager to tackle the sensitive material that is a part of courses in marriage and parenting.

Competent preparation means exposure to many areas: sociology, psychology, philosophy, communication, finance, management, and nutrition. Wherever meaningful courses exist they should be incorporated into the teacher's preparation. Family life educators must be imaginative and courageous in initiating new courses that blend a variety of subjects to meet their specific objectives. This may call for team-taught courses, summer workshops, and in-service training programs. Such programs must be of high quality, enthusiastically taught, and richly rewarding to those who take them.

Current educational trends that favor incorporating family life content into most subjects

rather than isolating it and compressing it into one, has brought about a recent innovation in teacher preparation. All teachers regardless of their subject matter areas are being required to develop an awareness of human relationship skills. Essentially *all* good teachers are teachers of family living: they build self-esteem; they communicate; they inspire trust; they are concerned for the welfare of their students; they are role models of responsible interaction between human beings.

A major contribution to FLE that educators could make is in the development of materials —the writing of texts and teacher guides, the making of films and film strips. If faculty themselves lack the expertise, they can serve as consultants to the media. There is a desperate need for a body of educational media.

Unfair as it may seem, FLE as a defined subject in the public schools must justify its value in a way that English and Algebra do not; teachers of family courses are subjected to a barrage of criticism and comment. Faculty in teacher-training institutions should not only equip their student teachers with the very best preparation possible but should provide on-going back-up services that provide a support system after they leave the university. These include in-service consultation, workshops, library and film privileges. Beyond demonstrated excellence in the classroom, evaluative studies on content and method need to be made and published. Too often we develop programs on our best hunches rather than on objective research—partially, at least, because we've not done the research.

The preparation of *counselors* concerned with marital and family problems is no stronger than that of FLE teachers. The majority of counseling programs exist in Departments of Educational Psychology or Clinical Psychology, and except for the few programs that are accredited by AAMFT, family relationships are only a minor part of the training. The assumption is that if a counselor can help an individual, helping couples and family groups is only an extension. Counseling programs are notoriously short on theory and research and long on experiential learning. Counselor training provides opportunities to practice and develop the techniques of a particular theory of counseling but little opportunity to explore a variety of techniques or to develop insight into the use of the counselors themselves in therapy.

With all its shortcomings, however, in a short period of time family therapy has made the greatest gains in academic respectability of any of the family related areas. Marriage and family therapy has its own journals and considerable space in other journals both scholarly and popular. Therapy has gained more visibility because the general public has become more aware of the need to "heal" or "mend" the disturbed or claim the same visibility by interpreting to the public the need for *education* that may *prevent* the need for therapy.

Graduate Schools of *Social Work* often offer work in several family areas such as dynamics, intervention techniques, conflict resolution, and human development. These are usually integrated neatly into required courses with titles and descriptions which often do not reveal the extent of their family relations component. Although the quality of courses may vary, most graduates from programs of Social Work enter their careers with an understanding of family structure and function as well as with some skills in individual and group counseling. Although in many universities courses offered through Social Work are available only to majors in that program, family life educators should not be reticent about making proposals for cooperative efforts. Sharing is a concept familiar to social workers and family life educators alike.

For the past several years training programs in *Nursing* have included limited courses in child development and family relations. Nurses have been alert to the importance of understanding the families of their patients and have been aggressive in the area of maternal and child health and in developing the nurse-practitioner program. Like courses in Social Work, courses in Nursing are often open only to those in the nursing program, however, the family life educator should not overlook any opportunity to participate. Sometimes the mutual use of special facilities, such as a preschool laboratory, provide cooperative opportunities and mutual benefits.

Research: Quality and Social Value

A higher priority than either liberal education or professional preparation in most institutions of higher education is the generation of new knowledge and its dissemination. This is as true of the social and behavioral sciences as of the hard sciences, yet investigations into family relationships and into FLE remain elementary.

Research in our field is not easy. Great truths about human development and behavior have been hard to discover both because man is *not* an experimental animal and he *is* a very private one. There are few simple and direct cause-and-effect associations and many complex ones. Most of all human behavior is highly individual and good research very expensive.

A double burden is laid on the family researcher: the demand for applicability (which is highly individual and concrete) and the demand for hypotheses which contribute to much-needed theory building. In attempting to meet these demands, researchers have often been accused of over-generalization and over-abstraction. Even so, in the next decade there will be a continuing body of research that will aid in the development of theories that will eventually lead to in-depth understanding of family function, as well as a proliferation of studies that will shed light on practical, immediate family problems. The pragmatists of the world will continue to want individual, personal answers; the idealists will demand theory.

Compounding the problems of research within the college or university is the publish-or-perish dictum, which has resulted in too many independent bits and pieces of "manageable research" that fail to replicate, supplement, or contradict previous investigations. However, increased competition for publication is resulting in an improved quality of investigation and a greater clarity in presentation and interpretation. Shoddy research is being screened out by editors who are confronted with many more manuscripts than space will accommodate. The excellence of research has been forced by the scrutiny of funding agencies that must make choices among competing proposals. With government support dwindling, some gaps are being filled by institutional funds, but scholars should be prepared to invest financially in their own research. In addition, they must insist that their academic positions are interpreted as part-time teaching and part-time research. They must jealously guard their research time from the demands of both students and institutions.

The growing emphasis on social applicability has made it acceptable to ask the "So what?" question. The economy itself dictates parsimony and relevance. Family research must be interpreted to have social meaning, and the topics that qualify are numerous: infant sensitivity and response, parent interaction, premarital relationships, decision-making, reconstituted families, incest, aging, work, value formation, ethnic family patterns and relationships, housing, nutrition, government policy, day care, the hospice, death and dying. Obviously, there is hardly an end to what we don't know.

There has been an increase in the public consumption of research and an increasing awareness of the numerous places in which significant research is being generated: Schools of Medicine, Business, Home Economics; Departments of Sociology, Psychology, Psychiatry, Child Development, Family. The dissemination of findings is also no longer confined to juried journals written in a particular jargonese, but is extended to popular articles read by a literate, non-specialized audience. Public education is an important facet of family life education and scholars should be increasingly involved in popular presentations. They need not make apologies to their institutions or their colleagues. If journalistic writing comes hard, the scholar can team up with the journalist, an advantageous combination that results in many good articles and books.

Researchers have a special responsibility to FLE in terms of evaluating content, methods of presentation, materials, and sponsorship. Undoubtedly, certain materials and methods are more effective with some groups than with others; some programs must be more effective than others, but we don't know which, and we don't know why. Teachers need the researcher's help in assessing the consequences of their efforts.

It is unfortunate that many educators fear doing research studies or feel that they are incompetent. They rarely lack the interest, but somewhere in the process of graduate education, the flame of exciting discovery has been quenched by lengthy statistical formulae. Research requires careful design, patience, and persistence, but beyond that it need not be all that difficult. The hours that once were required for data analysis have been almost eliminated by the accessibility of computers on our campuses. We need but familiarize ourselves with new skills. And as educators, we should take special precautions to see that fear and discouragement are not perpetuated from generation to generation.

From current trends in family research, we can anticipate that the next decade will see a continuing increase in both quantity and quality, that fewer areas will be taboo, that more will have social significance. Theories will be more clearly defined and pursued. Optimism is justified because professionals and lay public alike are realizing how important basic research is to the solutions of family problems and because the age of computer science has made the research possible.

Community Service: Private Enterprise and Effort

Except for federally supported programs of the Cooperative Extension Service in land-grant institutions and of Divisions of Continuing Education, most college and university administrations take little responsibility for FLE extended into the community. Individuals, however, do. Few areas of interest contribute as many participants to community activities as Family Living. Faculty serve as consultants, as committee members, as program planners, lecturers, advisors, and counselors. Faculty work with many groups: clergy, teachers, doctors, lawyers, social agencies, parent groups. For the most part services of this kind are poorly paid, if paid at all, but are freely given. Faculty can rarely be faulted for lack of community service, but the fact that that service receives so little recognition is partly because those who give it are modest and partly because service activities are not valued at tenure reviews. A substantial contribution to the community requires as much skill, effort, and time as a research project. We should be less reluctant to acknowledge the value of our contribution and more firm in seeing that it is properly credited by our institutions. What can our communities look to for leadership if not to higher education?

Quality, Applicability, and Visibility

The scene changes slowly and the action over the past 40 years has not been spectacular as far as FLE in institutions of higher learning is concerned. But what has been done has been positive. Whether it is appreciated or not depends a great deal on how it is interpreted to the administration and how it is represented to other faculty. And it depends on the quality and value of the work itself. In areas of teaching, faculty must be willing to consolidate programs, to work across departmental lines, and to slash away duplication and inconsequential content. Teacher training programs must be rigorous, must provide enough experience and support for new teachers to feel competent. Counselor training, like teacher preparation, needs to include theory as well as practice and needs to recognize those special techniques that are effective with family relationships.

In the area of research, the university and college has a greater opportunity than any other institution to contribute meaningfully to knowledge and to the solution of social problems. As the quality of research increases, its publication is urgent. Learning to speak a common language becomes imperative, and the family life educator must be equipped and willing to pull together material from many disciplines and apply it to the area of family life.

Faculty in the field of FLE have a unique role in that they not only make original contributions but also consolidate and interpret material from other areas. Our own inventiveness, our own acuity and intellectual excellence are the qualities we must bring to our tasks. Unless we as individuals provide the leadership, our institutions cannot. This means an individual professional commitment of self to something we believe in—something we care about enough to work for and to be responsible for. There is no way for higher education to have a role unless *we* assume it.