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ABSTRACT

This study was concerned with assessing the relative importance of prior teaching experience as a criterion in the selection of family life teachers. Comparisons between experienced and non-experienced teachers were made in three areas: sex knowledge, counseling adequacy, and competency in handling family-life issues. Scores derived from each area suggest that there is essentially no measurable difference between experienced and non-experienced teachers. This finding reinforces the belief that specialized training of family life teachers is important for the future of family life education. (A six-item bibliography is included.)
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Prior Teaching Experience as a Criterion
in the Selection of Family Life Teachers

An Asset or a Liability?

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This study was concerned with assessing the relative importance of prior teaching experience, as a criterion, in the selection of family life teachers. Comparisons between "experienced" and "non-experienced" teachers were made in three areas: sex knowledge, counselling adequacy, and competency in handling family life issues. Scores derived from each area suggest that there is essentially no measurable differences between "experienced" and "non-experienced" teachers. This finding reinforces the belief that specialized training of family life teachers is important for the future of family life education.

Prior Teaching Experience as a Criterion in the Selection of Family Life Teachers - An Asset or a Liability?

More than twenty years ago Kirkendall and Handwerk(1) wrote an article stressing the urgent need for teacher preparation for those who would teach family life courses. The demand for such qualified teachers still exceeds the supply as it did then. For example, from a recent regional survey, Elizabeth Force (2) makes the following observation:

Quality teacher training opportunities in the field are meager. Teacher training is not oriented toward helping teachers become aware of family life education as a vital component in their preparation to work with children and families. There is a scarcity of "teachers of teachers" equipped to help with this kind of preparation.

In recognition of this great need the National Council on Family Relations has, through various committees, developed guidelines for both family life programs (3) and criteria for preparation of family life teachers at the junior and senior high school level (4). What effects these efforts will have on resolving this shortage-problem remains to be seen. However, until such time that teacher education institutions begin in earnest to produce qualified family life and sex education teachers, the problem of selecting family life teachers to teach such courses will continue.

Thus, every conscientious school administrator is faced with the dilemma of choosing the "right" person for teaching family life courses. In such a selection, a consideration of some of the following factors would probably be involved: a) teacher's marital status; b) amount of teaching experience; c) mutual respect between teacher and students; and d) teacher's field of specialization. Given these several factors, the administrator would very likely select a married woman trained in home economics with some prior teaching experience (5, 6).

The decision, then, to select one teacher over another is probably heavily weighted in favor of those who have had some successful teaching experience, generally. There have been, most certainly, exceptions to this conclusion. For example, a school with only one home economics teacher, and one who has had no prior teaching experience, might be asked to teach despite that fact. Or, others might refuse to teach, although having had prior teaching experience, and a new teacher would get the "job" by default. Finally, an inexperienced teacher may volunteer to teach because she believes she would enjoy it!

This article, then, is addressed both to those school administrators who must select family life teachers, and to those who will be asked to do the teaching. The following study was carried out to shed some light on selection criteria and, hopefully, it will prove helpful to those who need such information.

Study of Experienced vs. Non-Experienced Teachers

A study was carried out by the writer to learn if the responses of "experienced" teachers would differ significantly from those of "non-experienced" teachers in three areas pertinent to family life education. These areas are: Sex Knowledge; Counselling Adequacy; and Issues in Family Life.

The selection of the three criteria is taken from the 15 criteria of basic areas* as set forth by the Committee on Educational Standards and Certification for Family Life Education, 1968-1969 (7).

Sample

This was a non-random, self-selected sample comprised of all women who enrolled in a three credit course in Family Life Education at Central Washington State College, Ellensburg, Washington, during the 1970 summer session.

Experienced Teachers

Eighteen women, with a mean age of 34.2 years comprised the "experienced" teacher group. The marital status showed twelve were married, five were single,

*The writer chose these three areas of sex knowledge, counselling, and family life issues because they seemed most easy to measure as compared to the others. Actual content comprising these areas is not provided with the criteria. Each program has to develop its own.

and one was divorced. The group's teaching experience covered the educational range of K-12 including the junior college level. Nine were high school teachers. The number of years of teaching experience ranged from one to 42 years, with a mean of 7.4 years. Ten of these teachers had taught at least one family life course. All but three of the ten had two years or less experience in teaching family life. Fourteen of the 18 women cited home economics as their major field, with the remaining four in elementary education. On the average, each teacher had received instruction in 2.6 family life courses exclusive of the course that they were enrolled in now.

Non-Experienced Teachers

There were 21 non-experienced teachers. Seventeen were either graduating seniors or graduate students, with four juniors included. The mean age of the group was 22.2 years. Marital composition of the group included sixteen single women, four married, and one divorcee. All but two were home economics majors, with one from public health, and the other in early childhood education. All but three of the students expressed a desire to teach family life and sex education courses. The remaining three, who did not endorse this idea, were uncertain about what they wanted to do. On the average, each student had had three family life courses.

Procedure

At the beginning of the course, four questionnaires were utilized to obtain (1) personal background material; (2) sex knowledge; (3) counselling adequacy; and (4) information on professed competency in handling family life issues.

Since the research question was concerned only with how measured responses from experienced teachers would compare with those of non-experienced teachers, there was no attempt to conduct a "before-after" measurement between the two groups. Another study, however, might attempt to learn whether a

particular course is utilized more by one group than the other. A "before-after" measurement in this case would be essential.

Findings

Sex Knowledge

A multiple choice test, based on such items as sex vocabulary, human anatomy, beliefs about sex practices, and contraceptive knowledge, was used to determine which of the two groups was most knowledgeable. Findings indicate that the "experienced" teaching group had a mean score of 62.7 correct responses as compared to 62.2 for the "non-experienced" group. Essentially, then, there was no measured difference in sex knowledge between the two groups.

Counselling Adequacy

Both groups were given a list of four items identifying certain sexual problems of students on which the family life teacher might be expected to offer counsel. They were asked to indicate how adequate they would feel in counselling someone on each sexual problem by marking one of the following responses: (1 = very inadequate; 2 = little adequacy; 3 = fair degree of adequacy; 4 = high degree of adequacy). Since few in either group marked extreme categories of adequacy, all responses were counted as either "adequate" or "inadequate." Table 1. shows the percentage of those who felt "inadequate" should counselling be requested in any of the four sexual problem areas. Three of the categories indicate that the "non-experienced" teacher felt somewhat more adequate than those who have had actual teaching experience. However, no significant differences were found between the two groups.

Both groups felt inadequate to offer counsel should they be confronted with a problem of homosexuality, a problem concerning a sexually molested child, and guilt feelings over one's sexual behavior. Interestingly, both groups show, (at least two-thirds of them), feelings of counselling adequacy should they be confronted with a premarital pregnancy problem.

Issues in Family Life

Both groups also were asked to respond to how competent they would feel in handling various family life issues should these arise in class. Table 2 provides an over-all picture of the percentage of those who felt competent. Most noteworthy are items two, "abortion", and five "religious views on sex". For item two, the "non-experienced" group apparently felt more competent if they had to deal with abortion as an issue, than the "experienced" teacher. On the other hand, it was the "experienced" teachers who felt quite competent on the issue of religion and sex. This latter item was the only one among all the items in any of the tests which was statistically significant at less than the one percent level according to the obtained chi-square value of 7.3 with 1 d.f.

Discussion

Caution should be exercised in making generalizations from these findings. The sample was a non-random, self-selected one. Despite these limitations, the study does attempt to evaluate the importance of teaching experience in light of certain family life and sex education teacher preparation criteria. At a common sense level, one would think that teaching experience per se would, to some degree, differentiate experienced from non-experienced teachers.

From this study, the findings seem to contradict common sense. Teaching experience, even where such experience includes teaching family life courses apparently does not serve to separate experienced teachers from the non-experienced ones. This finding occurred, although the criteria used to evaluate such experience would seemingly have favored the experienced teaching group, e.g. counselling students.

Both groups achieved the same mean score for sex knowledge. Since the non-experienced group had, on the whole, more family life courses than the experienced group, then this finding would suggest that the experienced group must have acquired additional knowledge on its own. Yet, additional learning here only brings them up to the non-experienced group level.

Where both groups were asked how adequate they would feel in counselling someone if they were presented with personal sexual problems, they both admit to feeling inadequate in this area. One would expect at least the non-experienced group to respond this way, but not necessarily the experienced group. It would seem that no teacher could escape some counselling, no matter how superficial the problem, sooner or later.

Whatever one does as a teacher on a day-to-day basis then, it apparently does not add up to feelings of counselling adequacy. This finding seems to suggest that although there are numerous student-teacher contacts, that fact alone cannot provide a sufficiently significant experience for developing a sense of adequacy in counselling with sexual problems.

Finally, the questionnaire concerned with family life issues shows both groups as feeling highly competent should they be confronted with such issues. Two exceptions, however,

were noted. A higher percentage of the "non-experienced" group felt more competent on the abortion issue than did the "experienced" group. This was not statistically significant, however. The other item, "religious view on sex" was responded to significantly higher for the "experienced" teachers than the "non-experienced". An interpretation of this result suggests that experienced teachers are possibly more traditional in their orientation toward sex and religion. Since the questionnaire asked only how competent they felt they would be in discussing family life issues, there is no way of knowing how they would really perform in an actual situation. If the issues involved only cognitive responses, then the findings probably would reflect fairly accurately their own assessment of "knowledge" of the issues. However, family life issues often become emotionally laden and require more than an intellectual grasp of the issue. Perhaps the experienced teacher would perform more competently than the non-experienced, but it is not known if that is true.

Of the three criteria under discussion, the area of counselling seems to offer the major finding of concern for school administrators and potential family life teachers. It was in this area that both groups felt highly inadequate. This suggests that, qualitatively, counselling experience is perceived by these teachers as something quite different from teaching experience. Why teachers responded this way might be related to the fact that counselling requires one to deal with the client's feelings and his own as well. This writer suspects that when teachers claim that they are poorly prepared to teach family life courses, what they are probably really concerned with is the "affective domain" of their

training as opposed to the "cognitive". This finding seems to suggest that experiences utilizing either group and/or individual counselling would be helpful for the potential family life teacher. Comparisons between teacher groups who have had such additional training by counselling techniques and those who have not would be revealing.

Summary

By comparing "experienced" with "non-experienced" teachers, it was found that no advantage accrued to the experienced teacher in three measured areas. Prior teaching experience seems, therefore, to be neither an asset or a liability as a factor in the selection of family life teachers. However, if there are to be more adequately trained teachers, opportunities for learning some counselling procedures, as well as perhaps personal counselling, when indicated, appear as an important first step in the preparation of family life teachers.

Table 1. Percentage of Those Who Felt Inadequate if They Had to Counsel on the Following Sexual Problems.

Problem	N=18		N=21	
	Experienced Teachers		Nor-Experienced Teachers	
	#	%	#	%
1. Homosexuality	14	78	14	67
2. Sexually Molested Child (Counsel With Family)	15	83	17	81
3. Guilt Feelings Over Sexual Behavior	9	50	13	62
4. Premarital Pregnancy	7	39	8	38

Table 2. Percentage of Those Who Felt Competent Should They Be Confronted With Various Issues Common to the Family Life Field

Issues	N=18 Experienced Teachers		N=21 Non-Experienced Teachers	
	#	%	#	%
1. Contraception	13	72	18	86
2. Abortion	8	44	15	71
3. Sex Education	13	72	17	81
4. Moral Standards	15	83	17	81
5. Religious Views on Sex*	14	78	7	33

*Chi-square 6.63 significant at 1 percent; d.f. = 1

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