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ABSTRACT

While parent education has become popular among educators and reformers, the long-term implications of the emphasis on parent education deserve careful and dispassionate examination. Are exclusively center-based developmental programs for preschool children to be discredited? Should federally-sponsored intervention programs insist on parent participation? If so, what specific form should parent participation assume? To answer these and similar questions about parent education, a group of academicians and educators at the University of North Carolina -- all with extensive backgrounds in varibus aspects of parent education -- proposed to sponsor a conference of leading scholars and practitioners with expertise in the areas of parent education, preschool intervention, and social policy decision-making. The purpose of this report is to summarize the 1980 conference on "Parent Education and Public Policy." The report is divided into six sections: (1) background of the conference; (2) conference proceedings; (3) policy recommendations from conference work groups; (4) themes emerging from the conference; (5) outline of a book that will result from the conference; and (6) reflections on planning and conducting conferences addressed to issues of public policy. The conference program and an example of guidelines for preparing conference reports are appended. (Author/RH)

Parent Education and Public Policy:

A Conference Report

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NIE-G-79-0149

August 4, 1981

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Parent Education and Public Policy: A Conference Report

Ron Haskins

The purpose of this report is to summarize the conference on "Parent Education and Public Policy" which was held at the Quail Roost Conference Center near Durham, North Carolina in March, 1980. This report is divided into six sections: 1) background of the conference; 2) conference proceedings; 3) policy recommendations from conference work groups; 4) themes emerging from the conference; 5) outline of a book that will result from the conference; and 6) reflections on planning and conducting conferences addressed to issues of public policy.

Background of the Conference

The last decade has seen a growing interest in parent education programs. Two widely cited publications can be mentioned to indicate the type of scholarly thinking that has contributed to this interest.

The first, a review of preschool programs by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1975), was (and still is) one of the most thorough examinations of preschool intervention programs with low-income families and children. Careful comparison of programs that involved parents in the curriculum with programs that delivered their curriculum without involving parents led Bronfenbrenner to the conclusion that the former produced effects that were more substantial and enduring than the latter. This conclusion, wrote Bronfenbrenner, implied the need for a "major reorientation in the design of intervention programs and in the training of personnel to work in this area" (1975, p. 597). Although Bronfenbrenner's vision was focused on a number of sweeping changes, among these was an emphasis on using the child's parents "as the primary

agents of socialization" (p. 598). In short, Bronfenbrenner's judgment was that intervention programs for children from low-income families should relinquish their focus on children in center-based programs, and set their sights on working directly with parents.

At the other extreme, Steven Schlossman, in an article in the Teachers College Record (1978) that caused substantial controversy, argued that parent education was being used by "academics and child development 'experts' in Washington" to shift the responsibility for the failure of intervention programs from program designers and administrators to parents. As Schlossman subtly stated the case:

> How well or poorly mothers stimulate their children's minds daily at home becomes the key variable in explaining the children's later success or failure in school and work. Parent education programs thereby shift the burden of accountability for failure from the government-sponsored professional educator to the poverty parent. In William Ryan's terms, they sharply increase the likelihood of "blaming the victim" in rationalizing the inability of federal programs to equalize educational opportunity. (p. 790)

The reviews by Bronfenbrenner and Schlossman are but two of the better and more controversial pieces in a literature that has been growing rapidly in recent years. Underlying this literature are a number of forces that, taken together, have contributed to the widespread interest in parent education. Of these, perhaps four are of special note:

1. Many educators, parents, and popular writers believe that the preschool years are critical to subsequent development; i.e., that

missed opportunities for development because of inadequate stimulation during these years can never be recovered;

2. Particularly after the Westinghouse evaluation of Head Start (Cicirelli, 1969)--in which it was concluded that intellectual gains produced by Head Start participation faded rapidly after entry into the public school--many educators and academicians reasoned that the influence of families was pervasive. What could be expected from center-based intervention, this reasoning went, when children spend far more time in the very environment, i.e., their home, which seems to be the source of their problem in the first place?;

3. A belief has developed among advocates of parent programs that adequately designed intervention programs can significantly change the attitudes, values, and child rearing practices of parents;

4. Since beliefs grounded in philosophical assumptions often carry as much weight as data, parent education seemed important because parents have both a right and a responsibility to participate in their child's development. Thus, data on effects of parent programs are in some sense orthogonal to the view that parent programs are a right.

For these and other reasons, then, parent education has come to enjoy widespread popularity among educators and reformers. The long-term implications of this emphasis on parent education deserve careful and dispassionate examination. Are exclusively center-based programs to be discredited? Should federally-sponsored intervention programs insist on parent participation? If so, what specific form should this parent participation assume?

To answer these and similar questions about parent education, a group of academicians and educators at the University of North Carolina--all with extensive backgrounds in various aspects of parent education--proposed to sponsor a conference of leading scholars and practitioners of parent education, preschool intervention, and social policy decision making. The National Institute of Education provided ~~the~~ necessary funding, and the conference was conducted in March of 1980.

Of the scholars asked to participate in the conference, more than 90% accepted. All conference participants were sent an explanation of the purpose of the conference (see below), a list of participants, and a list of policy questions that would be addressed during the conference (see Appendix A). Of those who agreed to attend the conference, only one person subsequently withdrew (see Appendix A for a list of conference participants). This rather high level of participation and effort may be taken as evidence that interest in parent education as an area of research and potential policy initiatives is quite high indeed.

Conference Proceedings

Overview of Conference Organization

The general plan of the conference was to contract with a number of participants to prepare background papers, and then to use these papers as an organizational framework for the conference proceedings. The format of the first part of the conference, then, included brief summaries of the papers by each author, followed by about 15 minutes of discussion.

In the second part of the conference, participants were assigned to one of four discussion groups. Leaders for each group were contacted by phone and by letter before the conference and advised of the primary questions that their group should address.

The conference concluded with a large-group meeting in which each group summarized its discussions and conclusions. Following these summaries, conference participants attempted to identify any major policy initiatives that might be appropriate. (Appendix A contains a copy of the conference program.)

Paper Presentations and Summaries

A major objective of the conference was to summarize knowledge in each of various areas that comprise parent education. These topics were selected by the UNC planning group after lengthy discussions with authorities in the academic community and with officials at NIE (primarily Oliver Moles, Cynthia Wallet, and Lois-ellin Datta). The topic areas selected, the titles of specific papers under each topic area, and the authors of each paper are summarized in Appendix A.

Of 18 people contacted by phone and asked to write papers, all 18 accepted, and 16 of these in fact produced written papers. After the authors had agreed to prepare a background paper for the conference, they were sent a follow-up letter that explained the assigned topics in greater detail, provided a set of guidelines for preparing the papers, and asked to send their papers to Chapel Hill one month before the conference (see Appendix B for a sample letter and guidelines for preparing the papers). After the papers had been received, authors were sent another letter with instructions for preparing and delivering their paper summaries during the conference.

Of the 18 authors who agreed to prepare background papers, 14 completed their papers at least one month before the conference and sent the first draft to Chapel Hill. These were then printed in multiple copies, assembled

into booklets, and sent to all conference participants 3 weeks before the conference began.

During the conference, each author was given 10 minutes to summarize their main line of reasoning, and time was kept in a rather strict fashion. Following each paper presentation, about 10-15 minutes were taken for discussion.

Based on the questions and comments made during the conference, it was apparent that many participants had read the papers and that they were able to ask specific questions or make well-thought-out comments on the various issues raised in the papers. In short, the papers seemed to serve exactly the function for which they were intended; i.e., to provide common background material and raise specific issues for discussion.

Small Group Meetings

Members of the Chapel Hill planning group talked with a number of authorities on parent education and public policy--both in the academic community and in the federal government--in order to identify the most important policy issues concerning parent education. After discussion with these authorities, and even more elaborate discussions among members of the planning group, we settled on the four work-group topics described below.

Professional and institutional roles and responsibilities. The important issue here is what roles various institutions and professions should play in promoting parent education. In particular, what is the role of teachers, social workers, psychologists, and doctors or nurses in involving parents in the services delivered to children by the institutions represented by these professionals (i.e., schools, social services departments, mental health and similar programs, and hospitals or pediatric clinics)?

Does each of these professions have an obligation to involve parents in their service delivery, and if so, what specific activities should parents be exposed to and what responsibilities should professionals encourage parents to assume?

Priorities among parent programs. The question of priorities among types of parent programs reduces to at least three more specific questions. First, what type of parents and children should be the primary targets of parent programs--low-income parents, minority parents, parents of handicapped children? Second, should programs focus on parents of preschool children, school-age children, or both? Third, what are the specific types of program activities that should receive priority? In particular, should programs attempt to provide parents with information about child development, teach desirable child rearing techniques, help parents learn how to conduct particular curriculum activities with their children, or provide counsel and support to parents addressed to their own problems--such as employment, finances, and mental health.

Integration of parent programs with other social programs. The federal government, and to a lesser degree state governments, now support a broad range of human service programs--welfare, education, child care, food supplements, job training, and so forth. To what extent are parent education and parent participation a part of these programs? Can these and similar programs integrate parent education and parent participation?

Federal, state, and local responsibilities for parent programs. The primary question posed here is: What is the appropriate division of responsibility and funding among federal, state, and local governments in support of parent programs? More specifically, is it possible to identify

functions that are best performed by particular levels of government; e.g., the federal government establishing general goals, funding research, and distributing resources; state governments designing, implementing, and evaluating parent programs; and local governments maintaining operational control of programs.

In order to effectively pursue these topics, the Chapel Hill planning group decided to select discussion group leaders who were familiar with the topic and who were forceful enough to keep a discussion group on task while promoting at least moderate consensus in answering the questions posed by each topic. After discussion, we selected Ellen Hoffman of the Children's Defense Fund, David Weikart of High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, Edith Grotberg of the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, and John Niblock of the North Carolina Governor's Advocacy Council on Children and Youth to serve as the respective leaders of the four groups described above.

We then contacted these potential group leaders by phone, explained why they had been selected, reviewed what their responsibilities would be, and discussed the particular questions with which their group would be asked to deal. All four accepted and subsequently served as group leaders. Each leader was sent a detailed letter reviewing what we wanted and outlining in more detail the particular topic their group was to discuss.

Policy Recommendations from Conference Work Groups

Each work group met for approximately 3 hours to discuss their topic and to reach specific answers to the questions posed for their group. The group discussions were recorded on audio tape, and each group leader was asked to submit a written report within one month following the conference. The work-

group summaries presented below are based on the recorded discussions and the individual reports.

Priorities Among Parent Programs[1]

Because priorities among parent programs must be based on such a diverse set of considerations such as age of children, health status of children, financial condition of the family, and type of setting in which the program is offered, the Priorities work group elected to identify the major goals of all parent programs and then to specify the programs' elements that are essential, desirable, and optimal.

The group identified three general goals of all parent programs:

1. to optimize the development of parenting skills;
2. to optimize adult development as parents;
3. to strengthen families in ways that promote achieving the first two goals.

To achieve these goals, the Priorities work group agreed that the following eight program elements were essential, desirable, or optional:

Essential program elements

1. Child development information. There was no illusion among group members that providing information alters parent behavior or attitudes, but information is essential as a precursor to attitude change. As a result of research and experience, professionals have moved away from the old assumption that if one just gives parents information, their behavior will change. Nonetheless, child

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[1]This section is based on a written report of this group's discussion prepared by Hazel Leler.

development information is a necessary ingredient of parent programs.

2. Skill development. This program element consists of helping parents develop the skills they need to deal with their children. These skills include stimulation of infants and children, use of appropriate behavior control methods, and techniques of participating in and influencing community groups and agencies.

3. Program activities. Necessary activities of quality parent programs include holding parent meetings, observing children, conducting home visits, volunteering in classrooms, working in paid or unpaid paraprofessional roles, and conducting family workshops.

4. Governance. Parents benefit most from programs when they are involved in program operations and control. The deficit view that parents need education to reduce their shortcomings has been widely supplanted by the view that parent involvement should be a partnership in which parents benefit from exercising their rights and maximizing control over their lives. Further, their involvement serves as a form of quality control of the program itself.

Desirable program elements

1. Group support. Parents and program workers can come together to help each other achieve common goals and to share ideas. Support groups are highly valuable because they reduce the parents' isolation and help them form a community devoted to achieving common goals.

2. Advocacy. Programs can help parents develop advocacy skills to secure their rights.

3. Program evaluation. Parents can become systematically and rigorously involved in evaluating programs and monitoring their effectiveness. Researchers have found that parents can, through training, become valuable paraprofessionals skillful in securing useful data.

Optional program element. Finally, the work group identified one optional program element; namely, counseling. Counseling may be valuable in helping parents solve their own problems, but research has not demonstrated its value in changing behavior and attitudes as much as more structured educational programs.

The eight program elements listed above were formulated by the Priorities work group to provide a basic framework for designing or improving parent education programs. If professionals continue to carefully evaluate existing programs such as Exploring Early Childhood, Head Start, Home Start, Follow Through, and Parent-Child Centers, it will be possible to determine whether these elements exist in ongoing programs and the extent to which they are effective in influencing parental behavior. Information of this type will, in the long run, help professionals determine which of these eight elements should receive the highest priorities.

Integration of Parent Programs with Other Social Programs[2]

Many current programs at the federal level support, involve, or educate parents. Examples of programs in each category include Aid to Families with

[2]This section is based on a written report of this group's discussion prepared by Edith Grotberg.

Dependent Children (AFDC), Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and Home Start respectively. Thus, there is a broad range of programs that encourage or even require parent participation of some type. In general, three types of parent participation in social programs might be recognized:

1. Parent involvement. As defined by this group, parent involvement refers to programs in which parents help make program decisions and set policy. Parents are not the object of training; rather, they participate on an equal basis with professionals in making decisions.

2. Parent education. Parent education programs are those that attempt to give parents knowledge or skills that relate to their function as parents. The intent of these programs is to have parents develop skills so they can use information and services effectively without the need for institutional support. Above all, the aim of parent education is to make parents independent.

3. Parent support. Parent support involves neither participation in program decisions nor the provision of information or skills; rather, parent support is any service, resource, or organization that provides financial, service, or psychological assistance to parents in fulfilling their child rearing function. By this definition, AFDC is a financial support program; Title XX day care and the day care tax credit are service support programs; and Parents Anonymous is a psychological support program.

The work group agreed that all human service programs should consider all three types of parent participation. Further, an important element of coordination between parent programs is to make all three types of participation available to parents who need it.

In order to achieve this coordination between programs in which parents participate, the group identified three guidelines that should shape federal policy:

1. All programs that affect parents should empower them to participate in the decision making process for developing and carrying out the program.
2. All programs that affect children must have a parent education component so that parents might develop the skills and acquire the information that will enable them to be better parents.
3. Every program intended to serve families must demonstrate the ways program activities will support the entire family, preserve the family's integrity, and respect its uniqueness. Programs emphasizing the prevention of family dissolution must clarify those program elements that are directed toward this end.

Professional and Institutional Roles and Responsibilities[3]

This work group was charged with the task of considering the roles of the various professionals and institutions that are or should be involved in parent education. The group made seven major recommendations:

1. All human service professionals--as well as professionals (such as the police) who have contact with families on a regular basis--should be trained in working with parents. More specifically, they should have training in human growth and development and in understanding the responsibilities of professionals to promote family development and integrity. In addition, professionals should

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[3]This section is based on a written report of this group's discussion prepared by Ellen Hoffman.

be trained to understand and accept their responsibility to help parents deal with the institutions that influence child and family development.

2. Professionals should be responsive and sensitive--but not aggressive--about offering their advice and information to parents. In order to accomplish this goal, professionals should receive both preservice and inservice training which includes the following elements:
   a. how to avoid cultural bias;
   b. how to increase their sensitivity to the needs of parents and their children--including the special needs of nontraditional family types such as single-parent families;
   c. how to enhance parents' understanding of the operation of institutions and how to improve the relationship between institutions, professionals, and parents.
3. In addition to enhancing the roles of professionals in parent education, policy should encourage development of community support systems. Researchers should try to become "family advocates" by identifying actual needs of parents and communities and by trying to identify and delineate what support systems are already available.
4. The media should be used as a vehicle for providing information on subjects of concern to parents; e.g., health, nutrition, education, and so on. Development and distribution of public service announcements and exploration of the potential of cable television should be undertaken.

5. The role of schools in providing parent education should be expanded. Such education should include:
   a. information about child and family development in the elementary school;
   b. technical information about family life and the values underlying family responsibility at the junior and senior high levels.
6. Evaluation and reporting requirements should be built into all programs providing for parent education so that the strengths and weaknesses of various models are consciously addressed and documented.
7. The development of new roles and jobs for professionals working with families, as well as the creation of new models of parent involvement in public and private programs, should be undertaken. Such new roles might include, for example, a "parent resource coordinator" in the public schools to assure that parents have access to information they require.

Federal, State, and Local Responsibilities for Parent Programs[4]

The task addressed by this work group was to examine the appropriate division of responsibility and funding for parent programs among federal, state, and local governments. The group made the following recommendations:

1. There should be a federal mandate for parent education and parent participation in all federal legislation and programs dealing with families. This mandate should apply to at least the following

[4]This section is based on a written report of this group's discussion prepared by John Niblock.

programs: Social Security Act Titles IV-A, IV-B, V, X, XIX, and XX; Elementary and Secondary Education Act Titles I, III, and VII; P.L. 94-142; Emergency School Assistance Act; Head Start; Home Start; Follow Through; Runaway Youth Act; Foster Care; Supplemental Security Income; Special Supplemental Food for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); Agricultural Extension Program; Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act; Appalachian Regional Commission day care and infant mortality programs; Comprehensive Employment and Training Act; and Job Corps. This mandate should include the stipulation that a certain percentage of each program's budget should be set aside for parent education.

2. Federal, state, and local programs should all attempt to empower parents by supporting mediating structures such as neighborhood organizations, churches, and voluntary agencies. Whenever possible, programs should allow such mediating structures, rather than local, state, or federal government agencies, to administer and run programs that affect parents or children. Government oversight should be permitted, but the actual conduct of programs should be the responsibility of these mediating structures.
3. State governments should take the initiative in passing legislation and appropriating funds to support parent education through the public schools. These programs would include training of students as future parents and courses for parents and interested citizens in local communities. Such state legislation should leave ample room for local education authorities to adapt their programs to local

needs and to have control of the programs within broad guidelines established by state legislation.

General Conference Themes

Generalizing across the work-group reports just summarized, as well as the various group discussions during the conference, four themes appeared to receive more or less general support. I emphasize the term "more or less"--not all conference participants would agree with all of these themes.

1. There seemed nearly unanimous agreement that the current political and economic situation does not lend itself to major new initiatives in parent education.
2. Given this political and economic climate (which has intensified since the conference; i.e., since March of 1980), it is necessary for advocates of parent programs to do two things: a) perfect the programs that are currently funded in order to establish a solid base of research support for effective parent programs that can be expanded when more money is available; and b) emphasize the role of the private sector in funding research and service programs of parent education.
3. An important initiative in parent education that does not require large sums of money is to amend current federal and state legislation for all programs affecting children and families in such a way that parents would be authorized to have the maximum feasible participation in program decision making and program delivery. At minimum, all human service programs should have parents in positions of power on their advisory boards.

4. Although many conference participants felt there were adequate data to support the claim that parent programs are effective, nearly all participants believed that parent involvement in programs that affect families is a right and does not require research support. The basic justification for this position is that in a democracy, citizens have a right to play a direct and influential role in any institution that affects their lives.

Publication of Conference Papers

A major shortcoming of conferences intended to address policy issues is that they usually can do no more than make recommendations. This, of course, is not a very effective approach to influencing policy decisions. The chances of a conference having any impact on policy--even in the long run--is reduced to almost nothing if conference proceedings and conclusions are not published in as conspicuous a manner as possible. Thus, the Chapel Hill planning group has made arrangements for the background papers and some of the group recommendations to be published by a commercial publisher. Members of the planning group do not labor under the assumption that a publication will necessarily influence policy, but it will at least increase the possibility that conference proceedings will help shape the view of professionals, service practitioners, and policymakers and will be available to groups or individuals who subsequently take up the banner of affecting public policy on behalf of parent education.

This volume is currently being prepared for publication as part of an ongoing series on social policy analysis. Published by the Ablex Publishing Company of Norwood, New Jersey, the series is being organized by James Gallagher and Ron Haskins of the Bush Institute for Child and Family Policy

at the University of North Carolina. Two volumes in the series (one on models for social policy analysis and one on maternal and child health policy) are now in press; the Parent Education and Public Policy volume will be the third volume in the series. The book is being edited by Ron Haskins, and current plans are that the final papers will be submitted to Ablex on October 1, 1981. Thus, the volume would be available for purchase by April, 1982.

This series of books is currently being advertised in professional journals and newsletters as well as by direct mail brochures to approximately 10,000 professionals, human service providers, and policymakers. About four months before publication of the Parent Education and Public Policy volume, an advertising campaign will be mounted to publicize this particular volume in the series.

Reflections on Planning and Conducting Conferences on Public Policy

Both laypersons and professionals have an interest in ways that public policies can be improved to achieve the purposes for which they were designed. American governments at the federal, state, and local levels have tended to appropriate funds for social programs based primarily on needs of potential participants and the political strength of such participants and those who advocate in their behalf. In times of heightened social conscience and affluence, such as the mid-1960s, need and advocacy led to more or less uncontrolled expansion of these programs.

In many cases, then, social programs in this country have been enacted with little attention to dispassionate analysis of what the programs could actually accomplish and at what cost. Thus, there is now a need to analyze existing and proposed programs to determine what they have achieved or what

they could achieve and how best to organize and implement such programs to achieve their ends.

There are, of course, many ways that such program analysis is being carried out. These methods include governmental commissions, analyses by executive and legislative agencies such as the various planning and evaluation branches of the executive departments and the Congressional Budget Office, work by legislative committee staffs, and various conferences sponsored by federal agencies.

The conference described in this report has been one such effort. Needless to say, no single activity of this type can be expected to provide definitive answers to policy questions such as the role of parent programs in improving the quality of life for American families. Nonetheless, conferences can provide reasoned arguments, based on judgment, data, and expert opinion, that can play at least some role in subsequent policy debates.

In order to play even this limited role, however, a number of steps must be taken to insure that conferences address the policy issues they were designed to consider, and produce specific recommendations that are consistent with expert opinion and social science data. Six of these steps seem especially pertinent, and serve as a basis for planning by subsequent groups planning conferences to address policy issues. First, it is necessary to provide participants with a common basis for dicusssion. This can be done in any of several ways; e.g., by having one person prepare a single overview paper, by supplying a bibliography or copies of extant written materials, or by preparing several background papers that cover selected aspects of the problem under consideration. In most cases, a moderate amount of background material is to be preferred, and participants should have the material well (at least one month) in advance of the conference.

Second, in addition to background material, the specific policy questions to be considered should be selected before the conference, and participants should be informed about the questions. If possible, at least some participants should play a role in selecting questions, and the background material supplied to all participants should be pertinent to the policy questions. At minimum, key conference participants should have an opportunity to review the policy questions and propose new topics or minor changes in the topics selected by the conference staff.

Third, the background material should be briefly and succinctly summarized during the conference itself. People who summarize the material should assume that participants have read the material, and should therefore cover only the major points and do little more than suggest the arguments and data that support major points. In order to fulfill this requirement, it will usually be necessary to exert some control over the summary presentations. This can be accomplished by having conference staff make the summary presentations, or if the presentations are to be made by invited speakers, being certain they understand that only a summary is necessary, that only a specific amount of time--say 10 or 15 minutes--will be devoted to each presentation, and by having someone call time and stop the speakers if necessary. In any case, the rule of thumb should be that no more than about 1/3 of conference time be devoted to presentations, thereby leaving 2/3 of the large-group meeting time for discussions.

Fourth, unless the conference is very small or there are only one or two policy questions to be discussed, it is usually a good idea to break the conference into smaller groups of 10 to 12 people to discuss each issue separately. Since the primary business of the conference is to prepare

specific policy recommendations on each of the preselected issues, at least half of the conference should be devoted to small-group meetings.

Fifth, the conference staff should carefully select a discussion leader and a reporter for each group. Discussion group leaders must be thoroughly familiar with the topic at hand, and must also be well briefed on both the specific question to be addressed by their group and the ground rules by which discussion should proceed toward consensus. Of greatest importance, the leader should understand, and should inform members of the discussion group at the beginning, that the outcome of their meeting is to be a set of specific policy recommendations.

Regarding the recorder, it is probably best for members of the conference staff to fill this role. Although in some cases it may prove desirable to tape record the small-group discussions for subsequent use, it is nonetheless necessary to have one person responsible for writing down the group recommendations and for insuring that group members agree with the wording of each recommendation. Under some circumstances, it may also be desirable to have the recorder prepare a written overview of the group discussion that includes the specific policy recommendations. If this is done, the report should be sent to selected members of the group for comment and suggestions.

Sixth, some type of written record of the conference should be produced. Although written materials are not necessarily the best format by which to communicate with policymakers, it seems safe to conclude that without some written record, there is little chance that conference recommendations will have any impact on policy, even in the long run. In preparing the written record of the conference, there are at least two audiences that should be kept in mind.

The first is professionals, who can be effectively reached through journal publication or a book. Although professionals do not often play a direct role in policymaking, it may be possible to promote consensus on policy issues among professionals. In the long run, professional consensus on important issues can have an impact on policy. The second audience is policymakers. Formal publications and books are not the most effective means of communicating with this audience, though their staff members may expose themselves to such means of communication. Perhaps the most effective way to communicate with policymakers is by writing personal letters and including brief overviews of conference recommendations. If the conference has produced specific recommendations that are judged to represent consensus, and if such recommendations are timely and important, it may be worthwhile to present selected policymakers with specific legislative proposals that would follow from conference recommendations.

A note of caution about communicating with policymakers seems in order here. The long-term impact of professionals on policymakers may be enhanced if we are cautious in making policy recommendations. Thus, unless there is widespread agreement among professionals on research results that support a particular policy initiative, and unless there is substantial reason to believe that such initiatives would produce the intended results, it may be best to confine communication to the professional community.

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Parent Education and Public Policy

A National Conference

March 14–16, 1980

Quail Roost Conference Center

Rougemont, North Carolina

Jointly sponsored by the National Institute of Education and the Bush Institute for Child and Family Policy, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Conference Planning Committee

Ron Haskins, Chairman
James Gallagher
Hazel Leler
Patricia Olmsted
Roberta Rubin
Earl Schaefer

Research Assistants

Marie Bristol
Susann Hutaff
Florine Purdie

Parent Education and Public Policy Conference

FRIDAY, March 14

PM

6:00 Dinner

7:00 Session I: Policy Background

Introductions: *Ron Haskins*

Alternatives Confronting the Congress in the Development of Parent Programs: *David Mundel*

To Strengthen All Families: A Human Development and Community Value Framework: *Paul R. Dokecki and Robert M. Moroney*

Survey of Current Federal Activities in Support of Parent Programs: *Stan Kruger*

Discussion

9:30 Cocktails

SATURDAY, March 15

AM

7:30 Breakfast

8:30 Session II: Research Papers: Programs for Parents of Preschool Children

Evaluations of the Home Start Program: *Ray Collins*

An Overview of the Parent Child Development Centers Social Experiment: *Paul R. Dokecki*

Longitudinal Studies in Early Childhood Education: *David P. Weikart*

9:45 Break

10:00 Session III: Research Papers: Programs for Parents of School-Age Children

Parent Involvement: Perspectives from the Follow Through Experience: *Patricia P. Olmsted and Roberta I. Rubin*

Parent Education and Involvement in Relation to the Schools and to Parents of School-Age Children: *Hazel Leler*

Parents and Federal Education Programs: Some Preliminary Findings from the Study of Parental Involvement: *J. Ward Keesling*

11:15 Break

11:30 Session IV: Research Papers: Programs for Parents with Special Needs

Programs for Teenage Mothers: *Janet Forbush*

Programs for Parents of Handicapped Children: *Merle B. Karnes*

Four Perspectives on Parent Involvement in Preschool Programs for Handicapped Children: *Ronald Wiegerink and Ann Hocutt*

PM

12:45 Lunch

2:00 Session V: Summary of Research and General Discussion: *K. Alison Clarke-Stewart and Urie Bronfenbrenner*

3:00 Break

3:15 Session VI: Issues of Service Delivery

Parent Education, Cultural Pluralism, and Public Policy: The Uncertain Connection: *Luis M. Laosa*

Parent-Professional Interaction: *Earl Schaefer*

Parent Involvement in the Public Schools: An Administrative Perspective: *Richard C. Hunter*

4:15 Break

4:30 Session VII: Large Group Discussion of Policy Issues

6:00 Dinner

7:00 Small Group Session I: Policy Issues

8:30 Cocktails

SUNDAY, March 16

AM

7:30 Breakfast

8:15 Small Group Session II: Policy Issues

10:00 Break

10:15 Session VIII: Small Group Reports

12:30 Lunch and Departure

Policy Questions for Small Group Discussions

Professional and Institutional Roles and Responsibilities
Discussion Leader–Ellen Hoffman

What are the responsibilities and roles of various professionals and institutions in parent education? More specifically, what are the roles of teachers, psychologists, social workers, doctors, and nurses? Should the public schools assume a primary role in parent education and involvement?

Priorities Among Parent Programs
Discussion Leader–David Weikart

What specific types of parent programs, focused on which particular types of parents with children of what particular ages, should receive federal support? What are the priorities among these various types of parent programs? On the basis of what criteria–effectiveness, cost or efficiency, equity, stigma, and so on–should these priorities be assigned?

Integration of Parent Programs with other Social Programs
Discussion Leader–Edith Grotberg

The federal government now supports a broad array of human service programs (e.g., AFDC, Title I, child care, food stamps, housing, job training, and so forth). Can parent education be integrated with these programs, and if so, how? Or should parent education programs remain separate from other service programs?

Federal, State, and Local Responsibilities for Parent Programs
Discussion Leader–Richard Hunter

What is the appropriate division of responsibility and funding among federal, state, and local government in support of parent programs? For example, some would argue that the federal government should establish general goals and missions, set priorities, conduct research and development, and distribute resources; that state governments should design, implement, and evaluate specific programs; and that local governments should have operational control of programs. In any case, if there is to be a federal initiative in parent education, or even a reorganization of existing parent programs, it would seem wise to spell out in detail the responsibilities of federal, state, and local governments.

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BUSH INSTITUTE FOR CHILD AND FAMILY POLICY

January 10, 1980

Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner
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Dear Dr. Bronfenbrenner:

First, as I am sure you know, we are very pleased that you have agreed to attend the conference on Parent Education and Public Policy and to prepare a summary paper of the research reports. In this letter, I would like to briefly explain the nature and timing of this latter task.

You will recall from our phone conversation that the conference itself will be a rather small, working conference limited to about 35 participants plus a few observers. The research reports (see enclosure) will be prepared and distributed before the conference, and each author will therefore need only 10 minutes or so to summarize their paper. Each summary will then be followed by discussion.

After all the research reports have been summarized, you and Alison Clarke-Stewart will have 15 or 20 minutes to present your summaries of the research papers. These remarks, of course, can be prepared beforehand, but I suspect you may also want to agree or disagree, minimize or emphasize, some of the points made during the discussions that follow the various papers.

After the conference, you may take 12 to 16 weeks to put your summary in written form. Although we would like you to emphasize the papers presented at the conference, you should certainly feel free to include material from other research reports available in the literature if that seems appropriate. The primary objective is to provide a survey of evidence documenting the effects of various types of parent programs on both parent behavior and child development or school performance. Hopefully, this survey may lead to some statements about the types of parent programs, or the particular characteristics of various parent programs, that seem to be especially capable of producing effects.

Finally, both you and Dr. Clarke-Stewart should feel free to draw conclusions from your review about the types of programs that should be supported by federal policy. This particular task, however, is not a requirement of your review because other papers will be specifically addressed to this question. Nonetheless, we would encourage you to draw policy implications if you feel comfortable doing so.

The research papers and the research summaries will be presented on Saturday morning and, if necessary, Saturday afternoon. Thus, if you cannot attend the entire conference, Saturday would be the most important day for you to attend. You will notice that the enclosed card lists possible flights for attending the entire conference and for attending the Saturday session only. If you will check the flights you prefer and return the card to me, I will send you the tickets.

If you have any questions about your paper or about the conference, please do not hesitate to call me. In the meantime, I certainly hope your recovery from surgery is progressing smoothly.

Cordially,

Ron Haskins
Conference Organizer

RH:asp

Enclosures