

Challenges in Family Life Education:

Defining and Promoting the Profession

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Family Life Education – An Overview

Family life education is a growing and developing field. When this chapter was first written in 2003, the profession of family life education was likened to a pre-teen, or at best, an adolescent. Five years have passed, and family life education has matured into young adulthood. There have been some important advancements resulting in increased recognition and value. While the profession of family life education is far from realizing its full potential, it is well on its way!

There have been numerous advances in the field in the last half-century including advances in the scholarship on family life education, advances in practice, and advances in the preparation of family life educators (Arcus, 1995). Through the efforts of the pioneers of family life education and those currently working in the field, this profession strives to become as recognized, understood, and accepted as marriage and family therapy, counseling, social work and teaching.

The focus of family life education is on the development of individual potential and the prevention of problems through education (National Commission on Family Life Education, 1968). Family life educators provide skills and knowledge to enrich individual and family life. The scope of family life education includes knowledge about how families work; the interrelationship of the family and society; human growth and development throughout the lifespan; both physiological and psychological aspects of human sexuality; interpersonal relationships, the impact of money, time management, goal-setting and decision-making skills on daily life; the importance and value of education for parenting; the effects of policy and legislation on families; ethical considerations in professional conduct; and a solid understanding and knowledge of how to teach and develop curriculum for what are often sensitive and personal issues (NCFR, 2008).

Family life education applies a preventive approach to promote family well-being. Historically, service delivery to families has operated primarily from an “intervention” mode – addressing the needs of families once problems begin. Waiting for pathology to set-in is more expensive to society – and more detrimental to individual families. Family life education attempts to provide individuals and families with the skills and knowledge they need to live successfully within their individual families, which in turn contributes to societal well-being. As CFLE Deborah Cashen of Parenting Partnerships says “Families do better when they know better.”

Family life education is carried out in a variety of settings including health care, community education, public education, faith communities, social services, the military, and increasingly, business. But rarely is it referred to as family life education and rarely are the providers called “family life educators.” Perhaps the biggest struggle faced by family life educators is the lack of awareness and understanding of who they are, what it is they do, and what they have to offer.

What needs to happen in order for family life education to be widely understood and valued? What will it take to make parent education commonplace, for all engaged couples to take marriage education courses, and for marriage and relationship enrichment weekends to be the norm? Imagine the personal and societal problems avoided if all high school graduates completed a course in communication skills and conflict resolution or if more people had the skills and knowledge needed to efficiently manage their time and their finances? This chapter will consider progress made to date, as well as future efforts needed in order for family life education to reach its true potential as a profession.

Current Status

There are numerous published accountings of the history of family life (Arcus, 1993; Powell & Cassidy, 2007). The focus of this chapter will be on the current status and future expectations for family life education as a profession including issues relevant to professional development and academic program development.

The National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) has played an important role in the advancement of family life education. NCFR is a non-profit, nonpartisan, professional membership organization that provides a forum for family researchers, educators and practitioners to share in the development and dissemination of knowledge about families and family relationships. NCFR has established professional standards and works to promote family well-being. NCFR has been in existence since 1938, publishes the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies* and, beginning in 2009, the *Journal of Family Theory & Review*. NCFR holds an annual conference for family professionals from around the world and sponsors the Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) credential. The National Council on Family Relations has been actively involved in promoting the field of family life education since the 1960's.

Definitions

Family Life Education

NCFR defines family life education as follows:

Family life education has as its primary purpose to help individuals and families learn about human growth, development, and behavior in the family setting and throughout the life cycle. Learning experiences are aimed at developing the potential of individuals in their present and future roles as family members. The core concept is relationships, through which personality develops, about which individuals make decisions to which they are committed, and in which they develop self esteem. (National Commission on Family Life Education, 1968, p. 211).

While the NCFR definition is often cited, it is by no means definitive. For example, back in 1964 Kerckhoff identified the lack of consensus on the definition of family life education and the division of labor within the field as one factor that might inhibit advancement of the field (Arcus, 1993). Numerous definitions have followed (see Arcus, 1993, p. 5–6) but there is still no single widely-accepted definition for family life education.

Definition of a profession

First, let us consider the question; is family life education a profession? How do we know? East (1980) defined eight criteria that should be in place in order for a field or occupation to be considered a profession. They include:

1. the activity becomes a full-time paid occupation;
2. training schools and curricula are established;
3. those who are trained establish a professional association;
4. a name, standards of admission, a core body of knowledge, and competencies for practice are developed;
5. internal conflict within the group and external conflict from other professions with similar concerns lead to a unique role definition;
6. the public served expresses some acceptance of the expertise of those practicing the occupation;
7. certification and licensure are the legal signs that a group is sanctioned for a particular service to society and that it is self-regulated; and
8. a code of ethics is developed to eliminate unethical practice and to protect the public.

The scope of this chapter does not allow a thorough discussion of each of these criteria. However, Table 1 provides an overview of East's criteria and family life education's current status within each of these criteria. While not all criteria have been met, it is clear that considerable progress has been made.

Table 1 - Family Life Education: Defining the Profession

East's Criteria (East, 1980)	Progress Made	Room to Grow	Criterion 1= no progress 5 = Criterion has been fully met
1. The activity becomes a full-time occupation	Though rarely called family life education, many professionals practice family life education on a full-time basis under such descriptions as parent education, sex education, marriage enrichment, etc.	Family life education is often only part of a family life educator's job responsibilities or employment specifically in family life education may only be available on a part-time basis	4
2. Training schools and curricula are established.	Family-related degrees have been offered since 1960's. NCFR began recognizing academic programs that meet the criteria needed for the CFLE designation, beginning in 1996. To-date there are 101 NCFR approved programs.	Few degrees are called <i>family life education</i> but rather Child and Family Studies, Human Development and Family Studies, Human Services, Family Studies, etc.	4
3. Those who are trained establish a professional association	Numerous family-related associations have been in existence since the early 1900's. NCFR established itself as the premier family life education association in 1985 with the establishment of the CFLE program.	There are numerous other family-related associations and organizations which can cause a fragmented identity.	4
4. A name, standards of admission, a core body of knowledge, and competencies for practice are developed.	NCFR developed the <i>University and College Curriculum Guidelines and Standards and Criteria for the Certification of Family Life Educators</i> in 1984. In 2007 NCFR conducted a practice analysis and created the CFLE Exam.	The results of the CFLE Practice Analysis Survey confirmed the validity of the ten family life content areas as representing the knowledge base needed for family life education	5

5. Internal conflict within the group and external conflict from other professions with similar concerns leads to a unique role definition.	Numerous organizations and credentials exist with some overlapping content. Development of <i>University and College Curriculum Guidelines</i> and the <i>Standards and Criteria for the Certification of Family Life Educators</i> defined the family life education content areas.	Employers and the public are still unclear on what family life education is and how family life educators differ from social workers, therapists, counselors, etc.	3
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6. The public served expresses some acceptance of the expertise of those practicing the occupation.	The increased popularity of parent education and marriage education programs throughout the country reflects the public's increased acceptance of education related to family issues	Participation in family life education programs including parenting education, sex education, marriage and relationship education, financial literacy programs, etc. is still not the norm.	4
7. Certification and licensure are the legal signs that a group is sanctioned for a particular service to society and that it is self-regulated	The CFLE designation was developed to regulate qualifications of family life education providers. CFLEs must meet continuing education requirements in order to maintain their designation. The CFLE credential is becoming recognized as a valid credential for those working in parenting coordination.		5
8. A code of ethics is developed to eliminate unethical practice and to protect the public	The Family Science Section of NCFR established <i>Ethical Principles and Guidelines</i> in 1995. In 1997 the Minnesota Council on Family Relations finalized their work on <i>Ethical Thinking and Practice for Parent and Family Educators</i> , which was adopted by NCFR for use with the CFLE program in 1997. In 2008 NCFR began the process of developing a formal code of ethics for the CFLE credential.		5

Standards and Criteria for Family Life Education

Establishment of Curriculum Guidelines

Perhaps the largest obstacle to getting family life education recognized as a profession comes from the multidisciplinary nature of the field. Initially, and still in many cases today, those carrying out the practice of family life education have come to their vocation through a variety of disciplines (Arcus, 1995). Until fairly recently, few

people were trained specifically in family life education. Rather, professionals practicing family life education held degrees in child or human development, family relations, education, psychology, social work, sociology, etc. They responded to a need for preventative education and attempted to strengthen their knowledge in family life education through in-service trainings, workshops, conferences, etc. (Czaplewski & Jorgenson, 1993).

This variety of disciplines led to recognition of the need for standards of practice: a comprehensive and cohesive body of knowledge deemed necessary for effective practice. In 1984, the National Council on Family Relations developed *University and College Curriculum Guidelines* (NCFR, 1984), which are used as a guideline for coursework by academic programs and in the development and implementation of family life education curriculum (Bredehoft, 1997, 2001). In 1998 faculty at Weber State University modified the NCFR University and College Curriculum Guidelines, identifying knowledge, skills and abilities needed for practice. NCFR incorporated the Competencies for Family Life Educators into a publication called “Tools for Ethical Thinking and Practice for Family Life Educators.” (NCFR, 1999).

Establishment of Certification for Family Life Educators

In 1984 NCFR also introduced Standards and Criteria for certification of family life educators. Rather than focusing on curriculum content, the Standards and Criteria represented the knowledge base needed for effective practice as well as guidance and directions for completing the CFLE certification application process. The development of a certification credential for family life educators helped to define the practice of family life education and the skills needed. The first Certified Family Life Educators (CFLE) were approved in 1985. There are currently approximately 1,425 active Certified Family Life Educators practicing throughout the world.

There are two levels of CFLE certification, Provisional and Full. **Provisional** Certification is available to CFLE applicants who have demonstrated content knowledge in each of the ten family life content areas, but who have not yet earned sufficient work experience hours in family life education to qualify for Full status. **Full** Certification is available to CFLE applicants who have demonstrated *both* content knowledge and sufficient work experience in providing family life education. The number of hours of work experience needed varies depending upon the relevancy and level of the degree.

The criteria needed for the CFLE designation parallel the University and College Curriculum Guidelines (NCFR, 1984/2007)

and include ten family life content areas. These areas include:

1. Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts (previously titled: Families in Society)
2. Internal Dynamics of Families
3. Human Growth and Development Across the Lifespan
4. Human Sexuality
5. Interpersonal Relationships
6. Family Resource Management
7. Parent Education and Guidance
8. Family Law and Public Policy
9. Professional Ethics and Practice (previously titled: Ethics)
10. Family Life Education Methodology

The broad range of these content areas reflects the multidisciplinary nature of family life education. Without conscious effort it is difficult for someone not trained specifically in family life education to be knowledgeable in these ten family life content areas.

There are a number of other family-related credentials available. Professionals can be certified in Family and Consumer Sciences (CFCS) or Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) through the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences. Those working specifically with families with children facing health issues might pursue certification as a Child Life Specialist through the Child Life Council. Certifications also exist for employee assistance personnel through the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA), for counselors through the National Board for Certified Counselors, for sex educators through the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists, for marriage and family therapists through the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy; and for social workers through the National Association of Social Workers. These professions all encompass various aspects of family life education.

Until 2007, the CFLE credential was awarded through a portfolio review process which required the applicant to document their background in each of the ten family life content areas through academic preparation, professional development, and work experience.

In 2007, the National Council on Family Relations replaced the CFLE portfolio process with a standardized exam. The decision to move to an exam reflected another level of advancement for the profession of family life education. An examination process is often the most effective and cost-efficient method for awarding professional credentials. The development and administration of the exam provides a valid, reliable, objective and legally defensible process for evaluating adherence to the criteria needed for the CFLE credential which will increase the likelihood of having the CFLE designation recognized by official and government agencies.

In looking back on East's criteria for defining a profession cited earlier in this chapter, (see Table 1) establishment of the Certified Family Life Educator designation could be considered one of the first steps in the professionalization of the field as it helped to identify a core body of knowledge and standards for practice (criteria # 4) and solidified the National Council on Family Relation's role as a key professional association for those in the field (criteria # 3).

Increased Opportunities for Family Degrees

Pursuing formal training in family has become easier over the past decade because of the increase in the number of family-related degree programs. Touliatos and Lindholm (1991) identified 104 colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada that included specific graduate-level coursework in the family. Though not a comprehensive list of all programs, it did include the majority. In 2002, *Graduate and Undergraduate Study in Marriage and Family: A Guide to Bachelors', Masters', and Doctoral Programs in the United States and Canada* (Hans, 2005) included 235 family programs (121 undergraduate, 190 masters level, and 71 doctoral programs). While these programs are not all focused specifically on family life education, they do represent a more cohesive and focused approach to the preparation of family professionals. A great number of these programs focus their coursework specifically on concepts and issues deemed core to family life education. They have been approved by the National Council on Family Relations for including coursework needed for the Certified Family Life Educator designation through the NCFR Academic Program Review.

NCFR introduced the Academic Program Review in 1996 in order to recognize university and college degree programs that offer a combination of coursework that covers the ten family life content areas needed for certification through NCFR. As of February, 2008, the National Council on Family Relations has approved 83 schools, representing 101 undergraduate and graduate programs. This increase in NCFR-approved programs has resulted in an increase in the number of CFLE applicants with specific training in family. Graduates of these approved programs are able to apply for Provisional Certification through an abbreviated application process. Since the first school was approved in 1996, approximately 900 applicants have received Provisional Certification through the Abbreviated Application process. Provisional certification provides recognition to designees with a solid academic foundation in family in order to increase their job opportunities, which in turn, provides them with the family life education work experience needed to upgrade from Provisional to Full Certification. An increased number of professionals who formally identify themselves as family life educators through certification will help to increase the visibility of the profession.

Family Life Education Practice Analysis Survey

In 2007 the National Council on Family Relations set about the task of developing a standardized examination to replace the portfolio application process as the means for awarding the Certified Family Life Educator designation. As a first step, NCFR contracted with Schroeder Measurement Technologies (SMT) to conduct a Practice Analysis Study. The goal of this study was to develop an instrument that appropriately assessed the skills and knowledge required for competent entry-level family life education practice. The survey results, which we'll review below, provided a helpful insight into the experience, practice settings and demographics of those currently practicing family life education. In addition, it confirmed the validity of the family life content and sub-content areas.

The study intended to describe the practice of family life education and determine if there was a core set of competencies required for entry-level practice. While NCFR had identified the content areas determined to be necessary for practice when they developed the CFLE Standards and Criteria back in 1984, this determination had been based on a more theoretical approach. NCFR did not conduct any kind of practice survey when first developing the CFLE program. According to professional standards, a Practice Analysis should address those competencies that are needed by the professionals to practice safely and effectively in order to protect the public. At the same time, the Practice Analysis should address the importance and frequency with which elements are used or performed (SMT, 2007).

The *Competencies for Family Life Educators*, developed by faculty at Weber State University, served as the foundation for the CFLE Practice Analysis. A committee of Subject Matter Experts (SME) assisted in the research, organization, and review of the competencies resulting in a comprehensive list of skills and knowledge elements required for competent practice. A rating scale was adopted to provide a means for measuring how often a skill was performed and how important the skill was for practice.

The Subject Matter Experts converted the comprehensive listing into a survey instrument in order to analyze the skill and knowledge elements required for competent entry-level CFLE practice. Included in the survey was a demographic questionnaire designed to gather confidential data describing the survey respondents. This survey was sent to current CFLEs as well as family life educators who were not certified.

The survey received a total of 522 responses from CFLEs in 47 states, as well as responses from Canada, Switzerland, Jamaica, Japan, and Turkey. The email-based survey achieved a response rate of 47.2% of the CFLE population.

NCFR requested the development of a mirror survey so they could request participation from non-certified practitioners who were practicing in the field of family life education. The sampling plan targeted non-certified practitioner participation through community websites and Listservs. The final analysis included 369 practitioners in the field of family life education who were not NCFR- Certified. Respondent demographic information and element ratings from the mirror survey were used by NCFR to compare to the finding from the certified sample.

Level of Certification

Of the 522 current CFLEs, 79% held Full Certification (demonstrated knowledge and experience) with 21% indicating Provisional Certification (demonstrated knowledge but not meeting the minimum work experience requirements needed for Full certification).

Years of Experience

Respondents were asked "How many years have you been a family life educator?" Of the 522 respondents, four did not answer. About 22% had two years of experience or less, about 17% had between three and five years' experience, about 33% indicated six to ten years and approximately 28% indicated over ten years' experience as a family life educator. The mean was 9.16 and the median was seven years.

Organizational Structure

Respondents were asked about the structure of their organization. Of the 522 respondents, twelve did not answer this question. From the three options listed, approximately 53% reported non-profit organizations while 30% indicated Government and 17% indicated for-profit organizational structures.

Primary Funding Source

Respondents were asked to identify their organization's primary funding source. Of the 522 respondents, ten did not answer this question. The largest group of respondents (about 32%) reported State funds and about 12% reported Federal funds as their primary source, while about 21% indicated fee-for-services and about 16% indicated "other" sources, most indicating a combination of sources.

Primary Focus

Respondents were asked to identify their organization's primary focus. Of the 522 survey respondents, 12 did not answer this question. About 65% reported Education and about 14% reported Intervention as their primary focus while about 11% indicated Prevention and about 10% indicated "Other."

Primary Practice Setting

Respondents were asked to describe their primary practice setting. Of the 522 survey respondents, four did not answer this question. Approximately 34% of respondents indicated Education (post-secondary) as their primary practice setting and about 11% indicated Education (e.g. birth through secondary) settings. Practitioners in Community-based Services made up about 20% of the sample. Other settings included Faith-based organizations (8.5%), Government/Military, (5.4%), Health Care and Family Wellness (4.25%), Private Practice (9.65%) and Other (6.56%).

Primary Area of Practice

Respondents were asked to identify their primary area of practice from 43 options provided in a pull-down menu. Of the 522 survey respondents, four did not answer this question. About 19% indicated College/University Education as their primary area of practice, about 12% Parenting Education, while about 9% indicated Counseling and Therapy as their primary area of practice.

Education Level

Respondents were asked to describe their highest level of education. Of the 522 survey respondents, six did not answer this question. About 37% indicated a Doctorate degree and about 42% indicated a Master's degree, while just 21% indicated a Bachelor's degree.

Degree

As a follow-up to the education level question, respondents were asked to identify the field in which their highest degree is in. Of the 522 respondents, a majority (57.47%) indicated their highest degree was in Human Development and Family Studies. About 16% indicated Marriage and Family Therapy/Social Work as the field of their highest degree while about 14% indicated Education.

Age

Respondents were asked to identify their age. Of the 522 survey respondents, two did not answer this question. About 11% reported their age was under 30; about 15% reported their age was 30 to 39; about 20% 40 to 49; and about 40% were 50 to 59 years old. About 2.5 % indicated they were over 70 years old. The mean age was 48.08 years and the median was 51.

Gender

Of the 522 survey respondents, four did not answer the question regarding gender. About 82% of the respondents were female and 18% were male.

Ethnic Background

Respondents were asked to identify their ethnic background. Of the 522 respondents, twelve did not answer this question. The majority, (87.25%) of respondents were Caucasian, while about 7% were African American, and about 2% reported Hispanic ethnicity.

Client Age

Respondents were asked to describe the age range of the clients to whom they provided care. Respondents were asked to select all that applied. Of the 522 respondents, about 66% indicated providing care to Young Adults and 58% indicated providing care to Adults, 33% to Infants/Children, and 15% to Newborns. About 8% of the sample indicated care for the Elderly over the age of 85.

Survey Findings and Decision Criteria

The demographic data gathered from the survey was helpful in providing a picture of those practicing family life education, but the main objective of the practice analysis survey was to identify elements of practice including frequency of performance and importance.

Survey respondents were asked to review a comprehensive list of 77 tasks that may be performed by a family life educator using the following scale: **Not Performed, Of No Importance, Of Little Importance, Moderately Important, Very Important and Extremely Important**. A sampling of the 77 tasks included: “Assess the impact of demographics (e.g. class, race, ethnicity, generation, gender) on contemporary society,” “Evaluate family dynamics in response to crises,” “Identify developmental stages, transitions, tasks and challenges throughout the lifespan,” “Recognize the biological aspects of human sexuality,” “Recognize the developmental stages of relationships,” “Apply goal-setting strategies and evaluate their outcomes” “Promote various parenting models, principles and strategies,” “Identify current laws, public policies, and initiatives that affects families,” “Identify and apply appropriate strategies to deal with conflicting values,” and “Employ techniques to promote application of information in the learner’s environment.”

Summary of the Practice Analysis

The 2007 entry-level CFLE Practice Analysis collected data on the frequency and importance of CFLE element performance. A SME Committee reviewed statistical analysis of the 77 elements and established statistical criteria for frequency and importance rating. Of the 77 elements, four did not meet the criteria for inclusion set by the SME Committee and were removed from the content outline. Two of the four were rewritten and included by SME Committee decision. Two other elements were rewritten and one element was included based on respondent suggestions.

The SME Committee developed several criterions for determining if an element would be included or eliminated. Most notable were the following:

Decision Criteria - Percent Not Performing

The SME Committee’s first decision criterion was based on the percentage of respondents who indicated that they did not use or perform an element. To qualify for inclusion, the element had to have at least 94% of the respondent population indicating that the element was performed. No elements were eliminated based on this decision criterion.

Decision Criterion - Mean Importance Rating

The second decision established that the mean importance rating must be at least 3.65 (0.65 Higher than Moderate Importance on the rating scale) to be included on the final content outline. Three elements were eliminated based on this decision criterion:

Analyze how individuals and families manage resources using various theoretical perspectives

Promote consumer rights, responsibilities, and choices of action/advocacy

Recognize the biological and psychosocial aspects of sexual dysfunction

These elements were determined to be outside the scope of family life education practice and were not included in the final CFLE Exam Content Outline (Appendix X).

The elements included in the final content for the NCFR CFLE met the statistical criteria of importance and frequency of performance established by the SME Committee of Subject Matter Experts.

Use of the results of the Practice Analysis survey as the base for the Certified Family Life Educator Exam ensured that the exam accurately represents the knowledge, skills and abilities needed for effective practice. The results of the survey completed by non-certified family life educators proved to be very consistent with the results of the survey completed by CFLEs, further reinforcing the validity and reliability of the content elements.

Current Challenges

Lack of Identity as a Discipline

As demonstrated, substantial progress has been made in establishing consensus on the content of family life education and the standards needed for effective practice. However, there is less agreement on what an academic degree meeting these standards is called. Very few degree programs are specifically titled “family life education.” Rather, family-related degree programs carry a myriad of titles including family science; family studies; individual and family studies; family and consumer sciences; family and child development; human ecology; family, youth and community sciences; family and child sciences; child, adolescent, and family studies; family relations, and more. The overall field of family studies has struggled with the issue of identity for many years with no clear consensus. For example, the *Graduate and Undergraduate Study in Marriage and Family: A Guide to Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral Programs in the United States and Canada* (Hans, 2002), includes within the 235 programs listed, over 100 different titles for their departments and/or degrees awarded. The establishment of a core body of knowledge and the advancement of the profession through standards of practice will help with the promotion of family life education as a profession within itself but as a field of study within the broader family field, family life education would benefit from a clearer identity.

Diversity of Settings in Which Family Life Education Takes Place

There are probably numerous instances of family life education occurring in your community on any given day. There are family life educators working in health care settings - doing workshops and classes at hospitals, in community education, faith communities, junior and senior high schools, colleges and universities, social service agencies, corporate settings, government agencies, corrections, retirement communities, and in the military (see Appendix XX for examples of employment settings for those trained in the family field).

The multidisciplinary nature of family life education and the variety of settings in which it takes place can be seen as both a plus and a minus. The positive side is that there are numerous opportunities for those with the broad training normally included in a family degree. The negative side is that this variety of settings can make it difficult to target efforts when job seeking. Do you apply with hospitals or through community education programs? Which job titles do you look for in the classifieds or when searching the Internet? The Department of Labor’s 2008-09 Occupational Outlook Handbook www.bls.gov/oco does not include family life education as an occupation (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008-2009). In fact, the only occupations listed with family in the title include Family and General Practitioners, Family Services Social Workers, and Family Therapists. The occupation of Family Services Social

Worker only includes information on social work with no reference to any other family-related positions. As those involved in family life education know, the social work field has done an excellent job of branding itself and incorporating social work training (and in many cases social work licensure) into many state and federal jobs dealing with families. While this works well for jobs focusing on intervention and case management, it excludes a great many well-qualified family professionals who possess the skills and knowledge needed to help families through a preventative approach. A new licensure requirement for non-social work family professionals is not likely. Generally, most legislators are not interested in creating new licensure requirements in any fields that do not involve significant health or welfare risks to the public.

An NCFR marketing consultant once recounted a story about the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) designation, which is possibly the most widely recognized certification in the United States. A representative of the American Association of Certified Public Accountants was asked, “What did it take to get the CPA designation so widely recognized?” His response: about 100 years.

Strategies for Growth

Ideally it will not take 100 years for family life education to become a widely-recognized profession. There are a number of strategies that can be implemented to increase the visibility and value of educational and preventative efforts focused on the family, including the promotion and support of standards of practice, education of employers and the general public, incorporation of family life education into intervention settings, inclusion of family life educators as recognized service providers in legislation dealing with families, increased funding for programs focused on prevention and with that increased attention to the importance of evaluation, and the development of a niche or specialty area for CFLEs.

Promote and support standards of practice

While the Certified Family Life Educator program does not entirely represent the field of family life education, it does provide the most focused effort at increasing the awareness and value of family life education as a profession. Since licensure for family life educators may not be feasible, at least in the near future, other efforts will be needed. Family professionals can support the field of family life education by recognizing the need for established standards of practice. This might involve pursuing certification themselves and/or recognizing and rewarding those who carry the CFLE designation. Increasing the number of people who identify themselves as family life educators, and actively promoting this identification through the use of CFLE initials after their name, in their promotional materials, on their resumes and vitae as well as in their job titles, will help to increase awareness of family life education as a profession. Likewise, increasing the number of qualified Certified Family Life Educators is an important strategy to increasing the recognition and value of family life education as a profession. The CFLE initials after a designee’s name brings attention to family life education as a practice with identified standards and requirements. Likewise, credentials like Certified Family and Consumer Scientist (CFCS) and Human Development Family Studies (CFCS-HDFS) help to bring awareness to professions that bring a preventive and educational approach to family issues.

Educate employers and the public

Family life educators will find that they need to do a fair amount of educating about family life education and its value. They may need to be creative in finding employment settings and be willing and able to market themselves to potential employers. Often employers will not really understand what a family degree or certification represents. They need to be educated on the fact that these credentials represent a solid understanding of families, a lifespan perspective, and the skills and knowledge needed to develop and present educational workshops. Most family life educators trained specifically in family will work from a systems perspective, i.e., individual system, couple system, family system, and social service, business and government systems. Graduates of family degree programs need to see themselves working as a family life educator at *any* system level in *any* organization (C. Campbell, personal communication, May, 9, 2002). They need to be encouraged to see themselves very broadly in terms of training and skills and to encourage employers to do the same. Employers that experience the benefit of hiring an employee with such skills and knowledge will be more likely to hire similar candidates in the future.

Incorporate family life education into intervention settings

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Family life educators working in settings that focus primarily on intervention or counseling might be able to identify opportunities for offering family life education within that same setting. For example, an agency that works primarily with families struggling with financial issues might want to offer money-management workshops to the community. Those offering home visits to parents identified as at-risk might also sponsor “family fun nights” that provide opportunities for all families to gather together to share information and friendship. There is usually no shortage of families needing the assistance of a social worker or counselor, so there is little risk that inclusion of preventative measures by the same agency will result in a shortage of clients.

Inclusion of family life educators as providers in legislation

The growing field of marriage education may provide opportunities to get family life educators legally recognized as well. A number of states have passed or are considering legislation that mandates or provides incentives for people completing marriage education or parent education classes. Typically this legislation includes a listing of recommended providers of these services. Unfortunately, legislators tend to favor bills that include a limited list of qualified providers. These providers are usually people who possess credentials such as licensure that are already sanctioned and recognized by state or federal bodies. It simplifies the passage of the bill but unfortunately may not provide the best measure of who is qualified to provide these services.

Important progress has been made within the field of parenting coordination. Parent Coordinators work within the court systems with divorcing parents. They focus their efforts on minimizing the effects of divorce on children by working with the parents. In addition to educating parents about the effects of divorce, they work with them to establish procedures and policies to increase the likelihood that ongoing relationships will be positive. Until recently mandated parent education programs, required in some states for divorcing couples with children, often identify licensed social workers, therapists, and clergy as the only approved providers. While many of these providers may very well be qualified to provide educational classes dealing with parenting, being licensed as a social worker, therapist, or clergy does not guarantee any specific knowledge in parenting or the ability to develop and implement educational workshops. Someone trained specifically in family life education is at least as qualified, and most likely more qualified, to provide parenting education workshops than a social worker, therapist or pastor who are identified as providers simply by virtue of their licensure in that particular state. Through the efforts of family life educators in the state of Texas, Certified Family Life Educators are now specifically included in legislation identifying qualified providers for parenting coordination. This is an important advancement for family life education because it recognizes professionals who use a preventive and educational approach.

Those interested in promoting family life education can monitor relevant legislation and take the opportunity to educate those who initiate the bills to include family life educators among the list of approved or recommended providers. Inclusion of family life educators as approved providers in legislation will open the door for similar provisions throughout the country.

Increased funding for programs focused on prevention – Evaluation

Prevention can be difficult to prove. Granting agencies usually require thorough documentation of program outcomes to support funding efforts. “The potential benefits of family life education must be more clearly linked to predefined program goals (e.g., the reduction of teenage sexual activity or pregnancy, more effective parenting behavior, or stronger, more fulfilling interpersonal relationships) in a way that shows such education to be good for society by fostering the development of individuals and families (Czaplewski & Jorgensen, 1993). If a clear and direct linkage through family life education could be made to a reduction in at least the financial costs (let alone the emotional costs) associated with divorce, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, child abuse, violence, bankruptcy, and many other individual and societal problems, funding of preventative and educational programs would no longer be an issue (for an excellent discussion on program evaluation see Treichel, 2009 in this publication).

Carve a niche

As noted, family life education takes place in a myriad of settings. Its multidisciplinary nature means that family life educators might find themselves competing for jobs with, or working along side, those trained in social work, psychology, child development, sexuality, or therapy. One approach to increasing the visibility of family life education is to establish or identify a setting where family life educators are uniquely qualified to provide services.

Health care providers are increasingly offering workshops on parenting and stress management. Community education catalogs list numerous classes related to family life. Youth programs and church and faith communities are some of the most common settings for family life education.

The area of work/life holds tremendous potential for family life educators. Corporations and businesses are beginning to understand the interconnectedness of work and family life. They recognize that the personal life of an employee can have a detrimental effect on their work life, especially if that personal life is riddled with substance abuse, domestic violence or serious financial difficulties. However, less-serious or problematic issues related to normative family stresses, such as couple relationships, parenting, elder care and more can affect work life as well. Investment in brown bag lunch workshops on “communicating with your adolescent” or “time management” can pay back in increased productivity or decreased employee absence. Family life educators are uniquely qualified to provide these types of workshops.

Conclusion

Few can argue with the merits of providing individuals and families with the knowledge and skills needed to lead satisfying and productive lives. But general acceptance of, or the lack of argument against such efforts, is not enough to ensure the advancement of the field of family life education. The challenge before advocates of family life education lies in converting this rather soft support of preventative efforts into acceptance and promotion of something that can be seen, felt and truly understood. We need people to readily recognize what is meant by parent education, marriage enrichment, and life skills and to actively participate in such activities on a regular basis. We need professionals in related fields to acknowledge and value the knowledge and skills possessed by those who identify themselves as family life educators and to recognize the place that family life education can hold in a variety of settings and situations. Family life education is not in competition with other fields such as social work, therapy, counseling, or ministry. Rather it should be seen as a complement and part of a collaborative collection of resources and services available to help families function as effectively as possible.

Like all worthy goals, the elevation of family life education to a recognized and valued profession cannot be accomplished quickly or through the efforts of just a few individuals. It requires a grass-roots effort of multiple players: individuals, agencies, organizations, businesses, schools and government. Perhaps someday, in place of the response “What do you mean – take a class on parenting -- everyone knows how to parent,” we instead hear “Which parent education class will you be taking?” If each player can do his or her part, family life education may someday be a household word and an activity in which we all willingly take part.

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Related Websites

American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences: www.aafcs.org

American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy: www.aamft.org

American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists: www.aasect.org

Child Life Council: www.childlife.org

Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education (CMFCE) www.smartmarriages.com

Employee Assistance Professionals Association: www.eap-association.com

National Association of Social Workers: www.naswdc.org

National Board for Certified Counselors: www.nbcc.org

National Council on Family Relations www.ncfr.org

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Appendix A

Family Life Education Career Opportunities – Employment Settings¹

4-H Development	Health Promotion Organizations
Adoption and Foster Care	Hospices
Adult Education Centers	Hospitals
Child Protective Services	International Agencies
Civic Groups	Latch Key Programs
Colleges and Universities	Mental Institutions
Community Action Programs	Military Family Support
Community Education/Extension	Neighborhood Youth Corporations
Community Health Centers	Nursing Homes
Consumer Credit and Protection	Parenting Centers
Correctional Facilities	Peace Corp.
Criminal Justice	Planned Parenthood
Crises Centers	Pre-School/Day Care
Crisis or Hotline Services	Project Head Start
Day Care Centers	Recreation Programs
Disability Services	Religious Organizations
Divorce Mediation	Research
Domestic Violence Prevention	School Dormitories
Drug/Alcohol Rehab Centers	Schools - Public & Private
Early Childhood Family Education	Schools for Deaf/Blind
Economic Opportunity	Senior Citizen Programs
Employee Assistance Programs	Social Security
Extension	Social Welfare Offices
Faith Communities	Sororities/Fraternities
Family Life	Student Services
Family & Individual Therapy	Vocational Guidance
Fathering Programs	Women's Centers
Funeral and Mortuary Services	YMCA/YWCA
Girl Scouts/Boy/Scouts/Campfire Girls	Youth Organizations
Halfway Houses	
Health Care	

¹ For an extended discussion on careers and family life education see Eiklenborg, Bayley, Cassidy, Davis, Hamon, Florence-Houk, et al. (2004). *Family Science: Professional Development and Career Opportunities*.