PARENT EDUCATION

A Survey of the Minnesota Program

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1939

THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA PRESS

MINNEAPOLIS

FOREWORD

With the growing emphasis that has been placed of late years on the need for sound programs of parental education, we welcome all contributions to this field that are based on scientific study and that provide material of practical value. The present book meets both these requirements. Dr. Davis, in Part I, makes a thoroughgoing analysis of the amount and type of information on child psychology that was acquired by mothers attending a number of widely varied classes in child training, and in Part II Dr. McGinnis analyzes the nature and make-up of the groups and presents a view of the program as a whole. From seven years' study group records, and aided by their own long experience in parental education, both authors work out conclusions and suggestions that will undoubtedly be of value to persons organizing or carrying on similar programs.

On the methodological side, this study presents a modification of the technique for measuring attitudes that was developed by Wickman, and demonstrates a successful attempt to apply the method to the measurement of the knowledge acquired by parents in child study groups.

Although, as one of the authors points out, "action may lag far behind knowledge," and parents may not put into practice all or nearly all the knowledge they acquire in child study classes, yet it is useful to know what they learn, under what circumstances they learn best, and how such learning may be measured. This study is presented, then, not as giving a picture of an ideal program of parent education, but as showing what was accomplished under a specific program and as offering numerous points of departure for further research and practice.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although the authors are responsible for the final form of both these papers, the actual conduct of the studies and the statistical analysis of the data involved the cooperation of many persons on the staff of the Institute of Child Welfare. Among those who made substantial contributions Edward A. Rundquist, Belle O. Fish, Marion L. Faegre, Blanche Anderson, Florence L. Goodenough, and John E. Anderson should be mentioned. Others who assisted in the collection of the data were Louise Beth Wilson, Pearl T. Cummings, Adelaide Lackey, and Rebecca Nelson. Sincere thanks are expressed to the many parents whose cooperation made this study possible. It should also be added that, in the preparation of the book, each of the authors made important contributions to the work of the other.

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Part I

THE EFFECT OF ATTENDING CHILD STUDY GROUPS UPON PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARD CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR

I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Statement of the Problem

Sooner or later in this quantitative age every instructor pauses and looks about him for an instrument with which to measure the results of his efforts. If he has been teaching factual subjects he need not look far, since we have fairly satisfactory techniques for measuring the acquisition of knowledge and skills. In subjects dealing with matters of opinion, however, the problem is much more complicated, because in such subjects few, if any, basic facts can be labeled *right* and taken as the standard of perfection. It is possible, of course, to assemble the opinions of experts in a specific field and to use these opinions as a standard of reference, with the assumption that they are based on all the evidence available to date. But there is always the probability that new knowledge will change expert opinion, so that this standard is at best a fluctuating one.

This problem of a standard complicates every attempt to evaluate most adult education and all parent education. The primary purpose of such education is to influence the attitudes, behavior, and practices of adults in the direction believed most desirable by the best contemporary opinion. Yet, since the subject matter presented deals with matters of opinion, and the effects of teaching are intangible, one may well ask if attempts to measure the success of a parent education program can possibly be worth the effort. It is true, of course, that certain known facts concerning child development and behavior can be presented to child study classes. We know, for instance, that boys weigh more at birth than girls, that in many respects girls develop faster than boys, that young children in a group situation tend to subdivide on the basis of age and sex, and that children of 5 use longer sentences than children of 3. The retention of such facts can be measured by examinations, if mothers are willing to cooperate. But parent education goes much deeper than this, and we cannot call the program a success unless actual practices in the home are influenced for the better through the interchange of ideas and experi-

ences in the child study class and through the reading done by the mothers.

Several attempts have been made to measure the effect of parental instruction by direct observation in the home or by obtaining the mother's statement as to the benefit she has received and the extent to which she believes it has modified her practices in regard to her children. A more indirect but in some ways more feasible approach to such measurement is to obtain the mother's opinion of certain aspects of child behavior before and after she has received systematic instruction. Although action may lag far behind knowledge, and the halo effect or the Sunday School answer may render many mothers' statements unreliable, the author believes that the opinions of women varying widely in age, experience, and socio-economic and educational backgrounds are valuable in indicating the efficacy of a parent education program.

Attempts to Evaluate Similar Programs

The parent educator may take heart by recalling how very recent are the first attempts to measure successful family life in general (50, 54, 56, 64). This has been done for the most part by comparing reports on their home life obtained from well adjusted and from poorly adjusted persons. Although there seem to be some common elements in the family relationships of the former group, and unsatisfactory home conditions may almost be said to be the rule among children referred to clinic and court, we are as yet far from being able to predict on the basis of home life how any child will turn out.

In a pioneer study of the attitudes and practices of parents, Laws (23) used four separate techniques. Her objectives were to develop means of rating the attitudes and practices of parents, to compare a mother's own idea of her attitudes and practices with the ideas of three other competent observers, and to study the relationship between attitudes and practices of parents and responses of children. Although her conclusions were tentative, she believed that her methods could be used as a means for measuring changes in parental attitudes brought about through organized study. Parents who had taken the tests were inclined to analyze and question procedures and attitudes with which they had previously been well satisfied.

Another early attempt at evaluating parent education was made by Stolz (49) and reported by Witmer (61). After a two-year program Stolz questioned fifty women who had attended ten or more child study meetings. They were asked to choose, from a list of possible objectives in joining a study group, three "which represented their desires for the next three months and to note whether or not they had received help on them through study group attendance." Similarly Cushing (9) and Praegar (37) obtained opinions from group members as to the benefit received from a study program. Jack (18) prepared an interview form with sections on physical habits, aspects of personality, and methods of control. Her tests were given at the beginning and the end of a course to twenty-eight mothers who had had no previous training in parent education. The second test showed improvement, especially in questions concerning play and discipline, and there was a suggestion that the mothers who made the lowest initial scores had improved most. Jack attempted to measure the reliability of her test by comparing answers given on the interview form with those given on a questionnaire composed of similar questions. The correlations indicated that "statements concerning routine habits are fairly reliable," those dealing with personality difficulties less so, while those on methods used to overcome behavior problems have the least reliability.

Schaus (41) tried to discover the advantages of lecture as compared with discussion methods. She organized six classes, three to receive instruction by lecture and three through discussion. Equated groups were selected from both types of classes and compared for mastery of subject material, changes in parent and child behavior, attendance, and use of libraries. Tests given at the beginning and the end of the course indicated that "the study discussion group made slightly more advance in acquisition of subject material than the lecture group." Other differences between the groups were possibly due to chance.

Such objective aspects of behavior as physical care, handling of feeding problems, and the incidence of temper tantrums can be recorded with fair accuracy. Maclay (see Witmer, 61, page 74) reported some improvement in such matters in her home management class of pensioned mothers, as rated by a social worker. In the studies of Kawin and Hoefer (19) and of Giblette

and Macrae (13) instruction given to the mothers was accompanied by nursery school care for the children. Findings of the former study were inconclusive, and although the latter investigators reported eradication of some problems and improvement along all lines, it is impossible to separate the beneficial effects of the nursery school on the children from those of education on the mothers. Witmer (61) describes an investigation by Scoe (42), who compared the incidence of problem behavior as reported by the mothers among "the children of 300 study group and 296 non-study group parents of much the same educational level." The former reported more problems, in this way probably indicating their greater ability to recognize them or their greater frankness in admitting their existence, although it is also possible that parents who have trouble with their children gravitate toward child study classes.

Ojemann (35) has made a valuable contribution by attempting to estimate the validity of child development principles in general as well as that of parent education programs. The value of such programs may be estimated by measuring the practices of parents and also by using child behavior as an index of parental learning. Ojemann's scale for measuring attitudes toward the specific trait of self-reliance (33) was used by Hedrick (15), who obtained very definite results in measuring the effectiveness of a program directed toward changing parental attitudes toward the trait.

Ford's (12) evaluation of a program of parent education offered to women receiving Mothers' Aid is of special interest, because the members came from the very lowest socio-economic classifications. The personal interview, which was the only possible technique in this case, was made objective by using a questionnaire as a basis and interviewing the mother in the office when she called for her monthly check. Ford concludes that these mothers feel a real need for help in dealing with their children, and that the program offered is meeting this need, although she could not decide why 244 of the 318 mothers did not avail themselves of the opportunity offered.

Use of the Attitude Technique

A study by Wickman (59) has profoundly modified the instruction in mental hygiene given during the past decade to

students preparing to teach (4, 16, 39) and has made teachers more aware of personality differences in children. In a preliminary inquiry in 1924 he found that Minneapolis teachers showed a strong reaction to some types of problem behavior but were little concerned about other types. An amplification of the same procedure in Cleveland during 1925 and 1926 indicated the presence of a constant factor in teachers' attitudes. The types of behavior that teachers considered serious were compared with those for which parents referred children to clinics, as shown in clinical records.

Parents appeared to be much more concerned than teachers with the neurotic habits of children and with problems of social adjustment. Teachers seemed to be more aware of problems relating to the school situation. Individual teachers were frequently preoccupied with a particular type of behavior. One teacher, for instance, was most concerned with problems of obedience, another with offenses against her standard of morality.

As a check on the attitudes of teachers, thirty clinicians who had had experience in the study and treatment of behavior disorders in children were asked to rate the same fifty problems used in the rating scales given to the teachers. The findings indicated that teachers stress the importance of problems relating to sex, dishonesty, disobedience, disorderliness, and failure to learn, while mental hygienists are most concerned about withdrawing, that is, unsocial forms of behavior. There was a high degree of consistency among groups of teachers in their attitudes toward specific problems, rank-order correlations ranging from .67 to .90. The relationship between teachers and clinicians, on the other hand, was slightly negative. The correlation for the 28 teachers in the Cleveland experimental group was —.22 and for the 511 teachers in the second control group it was —.08.

Examination of the instructions given to the teachers and to the clinicians reveals the significant fact that they were not looking at the items of behavior in the same way. Teachers were asked "How undesirable is this behavior in the school child?" In the absence of more specific instructions they were, of course, very likely to consider the undesirability from their own point of view as teachers. The clinicians were asked a much more detailed question:

What is your professional opinion of the seriousness or importance of this behavior when occurring in any school child with regard to its future effect in limiting his or her happiness, success, and general welfare after leaving school and on entering adult social and industrial life? In other words, how much will the possession of this behavior trait by a child generally handicap him in his future adjustments as an adult? (59, page 210).

Wickman states that his purpose in making this distinction was to obtain from the clinicians their "purely intellectual and professional opinions freed as far as possible from their native, emotional responses to the problems." From teachers, on the other hand, the intention was "to elicit the everyday responses to the problems freed as far as possible from whatever rationalizations the teachers might make when subjected to a test." In other words, "the purpose on the one hand was to study typical attitudes toward behavior that actually prevailed on the part of teachers, and on the other hand to establish the ideal, as it were, of what the attitudes should be for the healthy correction of behavior disorders and for the ultimate welfare of the individual child." It was, therefore, an attempt to contrast "the intellectual with the more spontaneous reactions to behavior problems."

This procedure, Wickman admits, presented the teachers in an unfair light, but he apparently feels that they should not object to this, since our ultimate knowledge of the problems under consideration was to benefit. In all the discussions and later investigations stimulated by Wickman's study, the consensus of opinion seems to be that the variation in instructions to teachers and clinicians was unjustifiable. It is most unfortunate that findings so widely quoted were obtained by so questionable a technique. The best procedure seems to be that used by Bowles (6), who asked her subjects to take into consideration both the present and the future seriousness of children's behavior problems.

A partial explanation of the different viewpoints of the two professions as found by Wickman may be that whereas the teacher sees large numbers of normal children all day long and day after day, the clinician sees only maladjusted ones for occasional interviews in somewhat artificial situations. It is also possible that the sex of the raters affected their viewpoint. Teachers are for the most part women. Wickman does not state

the sex of his mental hygienists, but one gets the impression that they were men.

Of course the great majority of our records in this study were provided by women, but among the unused records were five schedules filled out by fathers. Nothing is known about these men except that they had not previously attended a study class and had not read the correspondence course sent out by the Institute of Child Welfare: Their opinions therefore were apparently based on their general knowledge. They filled out Form B1, in which the first twenty-five questions deal with girls of 9 and the last twenty-five with boys of 9. The analysis of these five records given in Table 1 indicates replies sufficiently different from the mothers' to suggest the desirability of obtaining similar opinions from a large sampling of men.

TABLE 1.—MEAN PERCENTAGES OF MEN AND OF WOMEN WHO RATED TRAITS* AS SERIOUS OR VERY SERIOUS IN A CHILD OF 9 YEARS

Traits	Five Men	Women in Main Study
First twenty-five	56.0	76.0
Second twenty-five	65.6	77.4
Delinquent	72.3	86.1
Neurotic	71.1	72.4
Personal-social	43.1	71.0
All	60.8	76.6

* A description of the traits that were rated will be found in Chapter IV.

The striking facts in this analysis are the apparent awareness of these five men of the importance of the neurotic traits and the extremely slight importance that they attribute to the personal-social traits. It would be very interesting to ascertain whether this is a characteristically masculine viewpoint. Further investigation of this matter should be carried on with men who are attending parent education classes.

With all its imperfections, Wickman's study may be said to constitute a milestone in education and in mental hygiene. It was followed by several others that attempted to modify its technique in various important points. Ellis and Miller (11) gave teachers the instructions that Wickman gave only to the

mental hygienists. The result was a correlation coefficient (Spearman rank-differences method) of .45 with the clinicians and .65 with Wickman's teachers. Ellis and Miller believe, therefore, that the difference in instructions was largely responsible for the lack of agreement between Wickman's teachers and his experts. Bain (4) found that classes given Wickman's scale before and after taking courses in child psychology, parent education, or teacher training tended after training to agree with the clinicians in attributing more seriousness "to problems of the unsocial, introverted, and recessive types" than they did before training. Laycock (24), Yourman (65), and Snyder (43) obtained from teachers ratings which indicated that they agreed very closely with Wickman's teachers. In the two latter studies, however, the teachers were first asked to list children who showed outstanding behavior problems and to describe the problem behavior. Yourman suggests that the criteria by which teachers pick problem pupils "may be developing children with problems."

MacClenathon's (27) teachers devoted their regular meetings throughout a school year to a project based on Wickman's technique. They listed the kinds of misbehavior encountered in their experience, the traits being eventually condensed into fifty items. Teachers were asked to mark these to show the frequency of their occurrence among their pupils and their effect on a child's social adjustment. Finally each teacher was given a list of the pupils in her room and asked to class each child's total behavior as being extremely well adjusted, showing minor difficulties, showing behavior difficulties of some importance, or showing extremely serious behavior problems. The children in the last two groups were studied further. Almost 20 per cent (123 out of 624 children in the school) were thus selected as showing serious behavior difficulties. These findings were compared with similar ratings by mothers who belonged to a child study class and by another group of mothers who were not in the class. It was found that each group tended to rank as most serious those behavior patterns that interfered most with the smooth functioning of the group's affairs, although "teachers tend to call types of conduct by harsher names than parents use."

Boynton and McGaw (7), McClure (28), and Dickson (10) agree that behavior that troubles teachers most is quite natural to the normal child, if the mental hygienists and psychologists

are right. Preston and Shepler (38), on the other hand, compared a normal group with seventeen grade school children who were considered by clinics to need psychiatric treatment, and found no distinguishing behavior. Daydreaming occurred in 36 per cent of control cases and in 23 per cent of clinic cases; temper tantrums occurred in 31 per cent of both groups.

Further doubt as to the predictive value of children's behavior arises from the few studies in the literature describing the early characteristics of children who later became psychotic. Witmer's (62) students investigated the childhood personality and parent-child relationships of manic-depressive and dementia praecox patients. In this careful, well controlled study there was no evidence of a difference in the childhood personalities of those who developed the two types of psychoses. Veo (55) found among patients at the Boston Psychopathic Hospital six who had been studied between the ages of twelve and sixteen years by the Judge Baker Foundation as needing vocational guidance or presenting some type of conduct disorder, and "in no case was mental disease suspected by persons referring them." Among the files of the foundation, moreover, only one additional case was discovered who three to ten years after study was diagnosed as psychotic by the Boston Psychopathic Hospital. This case was not included because his mental deficiency overshadowed his psychotic tendency. Furthermore, Childers (8), studying schizoid children, while he adopts the traditional attitude toward withdrawal as highly characteristic behavior in such cases, nevertheless points out that the child's first reaction is usually attack and rebellion. Retreat is employed only after he finds himself thwarted. Withdrawal is serious because "so long as a child is fighting, there is a fair possibility that his energies may be directed into socially useful channels."

Pullias (39) varied the usual study based on Wickman's list by asking the twenty-seven students in his class in the mental health of school children to indicate the treatment they used for each type of behavior. He then selected papers representing three types of treatment that might be called, respectively, modern, transitional, and ancient.

Stogdill (44, 45, 46, 47, 48) has made extensive comparisons between the attitudes of parents, students, and psychologists toward children's behavior. A scale compiled from clinical records, the traits suggested by practitioners, and books on child

care and guidance was scored by forty graduate students in psychology, and revised on the basis of results. The final scale, somewhat like Wickman's Schedule D, contained seventy items of child behavior to be rated 1 to 10 according to the seriousness or undesirability of the behavior. When one hundred and ten parents and fifty mental hygienists rated the seventy items (48) the findings were very similar to those of Wickman for teachers and clinicians, although a number of the items used were very different from Wickman's. Parents considered the most undesirable behavior to consist of aggressive acts in "conflict with the conventional code, opposition to parental control, and acts believed by parents to be of physical hazard." To the mental hygienists the most serious items seemed to be those associated with introverted, unsocial behavior. Parents tended to take most problems more seriously than did the experts. (Wickman's teachers also regarded most problems as more serious than the experts did.)

These ratings were supplemented by those of forty-five graduate students in psychology (44), to find out whether college students are "more liberal in their attitudes toward children than their elders are." Only five items (playing with fire, swearing, smoking, bashfulness, and spending most of time reading) distinguished significantly between parents and students. The rank-order correlation between rankings of experts and parents was .45; between experts and students, .58; between students and parents, .94.

Similar findings were obtained from scales (47) designed to measure the attitudes of parents, students, and psychologists toward parental control and the social adjustment of children. Psychologists favor the greatest degree of freedom for children, and parents the least. Finally, Stogdill (45) asked parents and psychologists to rate the effect on children of sixty items of parental behavior. Parents and experts agreed fairly well on about two-thirds of these items. They considered the most undesirable forms of parental behavior to be "those which tend to discourage the child and undermine his feeling of security and self-confidence." There were twelve items, however, that distinguish significantly between the two groups.

Watson (57) was the first to publish a criticism of the methods used in both the Wickman and Stogdill studies. It is true, of course, that a term such as *restlessness* or *stubbornness* or *dis-*