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The Parent is a Teacher

Alan Hofmeister

Alan Hofmeister

56TH FACULTY HONOR LECTURE

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
LOGAN, UTAH 84322

FIFTY-SIXTH HONOR LECTURE

DELIVERED AT THE UNIVERSITY

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> to encourage intellectual growth and development of its members by sponsoring and arranging for the publication of two annual faculty research lectures in the fields of (1) the biological and exact sciences, including engineering, called the Annual Faculty Honor Lecture in the Natural Sciences; and (2) the humanities and social sciences, including education and business administration, called the Annual Faculty Honor Lecture in the Humanities.

The administration of the University is sympathetic with these aims and shares, through the Scholarly Publications Committee, the costs of publishing and distributing these lectures.

Lecturers are chosen by a standing committee of the Faculty Association. Among the factors considered by the committee in choosing lecturers are, in the words of the constitution:

> (1) creative activity in the field of the proposed lecture; (2) publication of research through recognized channels in the field of the proposed lecture; (3) outstanding teaching over an extended period of years; (4) personal influence in developing the character of the students.

A. M. Hofmeister was selected by the committee to deliver the Annual Faculty Honor Lecture in the Humanities. On behalf of the members of the Association we are happy to present Professor

acter of the students.

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Hofmeister's paper.

Committee on Faculty Honor Lecture

THE PARENT IS A TEACHER

A. M. HOFMEISTER

56th Faculty Honor Lecture
1977
The Faculty Association

THE PARENT IS A TEACHER

Because we think of education as a process that occurs in schools, we forget that parents are also teachers. While school personnel often debate whether or not parents should be involved, the reality is that they inevitably are.

The following conversation occurred during an in-service training session:

Teacher: "Parents should be kept right out of direct instruction."
In-service trainer: "Do you assign homework?"
Teacher: "Yes."
In-service trainer: "Do you expect parents to help children in difficulty with homework assignments?"
Teacher: "Yes."

While the teacher in this interaction expected parents to be involved in instruction, he was not willing to support them. The parent is, of course, more than a supervisor of homework. The most basic education of children takes place in the home where their life values and their perceptions of self and others are primarily formed (Kelly, 1971). Discussion should focus on increasing the quality of parental instruction rather than on the question of whether or not parents should be involved in instruction.

There are numerous interpretations and approaches to parent instruction ranging from high-school classes on parenting to intensive long-term counseling of parents with serious child-management problems. Some programs attempt to prepare the parent to handle the broad range of personal and social decisions associated with parenthood. Another approach is to provide the parent with skills to facilitate the development of appropriate, academic, social and self-care behavior in their children.

This latter approach is my concern in this paper, emphasizing the research conducted during the past six years at the Utah State University Exceptional Child Center. The broad purpose of this

research has been to develop and validate a technology for effectively involving parents in the direct instruction of their children. Variables such as curriculum, cost, methodology, roles, and pupil and parent skill changes have been investigated in a variety of urban and rural settings. Our findings strongly support a need for greater involvement by parents in the direct instruction of their children.

This research has involved rather intensive interactions with more than 600 families. In some of the studies, the children involved were seriously handicapped; in others the children had relatively minor deficiencies in basic academic skills. In attempting to meet the needs of parents in different geographical areas who have different problems, a variety of intervention vehicles and procedures have been explored.

"Who Said They Weren't Interested?"
A Review of Vehicles to Support the Parents' Instructional Efforts

Indifference is one of the reasons often cited for lack of parental involvement in education. An assumption underlying this argument is that parent training programs would be effective if only the parents were appreciative.

Anyone who has had much experience with group parent training sessions might well understand some of the reasons for indifference. Many of these sessions are watered-down lectures in developmental psychology often delivered with large amounts of condescension (e.g., I'll try to keep away from complex terminology so you can follow) and small amounts of sensitivity to individual problems and concerns.

While it is common to blame the indifference of the parents for their failure to get involved, such an approach is unproductive. We often encounter a parallel attitude towards the children of these parents.[1] Explanations such as, "The parents are indifferent," and "The child has a learning problem," while convenient, restrict the discussion of other explanations such as, "The schools are unresponsive," and "The instruction is ineffective."

The search for solutions to learning problems will not be

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[1]Bateman (1972) suggested that: "The term learning disability should be replaced by teaching disability to emphasize the shift in focus from something deviant or pathological in the child to the inadequate arrangement of the environment as a teacher of that child."

facilitated by blaming the parent or child[2] but rather by studying the specific procedures used by the schools. Engelmann, (1969) in discussing reasons for pupil failure, noted that "The line of investigations adopted by educators departs dramatically from that of the engineer. While the engineer looks for clues that lead to the specific causes for failure — testing the variables that come into play — the educator seeks non-specific causes, often ones that cannot be demonstrated to have any immediate bearing on the problem" (p. 3). Englemann thus criticizes the educator who chooses to study rather nebulous parents' attitudes as the cause of the problem and neglects to examine the specific educational procedures that lead to parent reactions.

The following two studies, one involving the parents as home tutors and the other involving the parents as supporters of the schools' instructional efforts, provide evidence that many parents are interested in becoming involved in instructional activities.

Parents as home tutors. In this study (Hofmeister and Reavis, 1974), the parents of 159 elementary children diagnosed as deficient in a basic math skill area were invited to become involved as tutors. Of the 159 families contacted, 153 volunteered to participate and, of these, 149 actually completed the tutoring assignments. Half of the parents were randomly assigned to an experimental group in which they were given specific tutoring requirements (See Letter 1 on page 4). The control group received no instructions until the conclusion of the experimental treatment period. When both groups were posttested, the experimental group demonstrated significant skill gains.[3]

Parents as supporters of school instruction. In this study conducted by Karraker (1972), parent involvement was limited to

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[2]Durrell (1974) made the following observations: "Of the hundreds of nonreaders coming to our clinic during the past 30 years, most could have avoided reading difficulty. In every case there were obvious weaknesses in the subskills of reading sufficiently serious to account for the difficulty. Nearly all responded to effective skills instruction closely adjusted to their learning needs. The only exceptions were children with uncorrected sensory or physical handicaps, and these were very rare. Psychological, psychiatric, neurological, and sociological explanations of reading failure appear to be unimportant and misleading" (p. 71).

[3]On both a criterion test and a standardized test of computation (California Achievement Test) the difference in scores was statistically significant beyond the .05 level.

supporting the school's instructional efforts. The extent of their involvement is described in the letter sent to parents (see Letter 2, page 5). Strong support was received from parents, and the participating pupils showed marked gains in numerical skills.

In the two studies just mentioned, the following common elements may have contributed to the strong parental support:

(1) The school staff looked first to the individual child and identified a specific need.[4]

(2) The parents' role was well planned and very specific and practical suggestions were made.

(3) The school did not make unrealistic or extravagant demands of the parents' time and resources.

LETTER 1

Dear Parent:

Do you have ten minutes a night for one month to help your child become more successful in his school math program. Parents are being offered the chance to participate in a home teaching program to improve the skills of their child in math. The package (supplied free of charge) is simple and has all that you need to teach your child the basic facts in one of four skill areas of addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division. If you can spend twenty-eight 10 minute sessions helping your child become a better student, return the attached letter marked "yes." If you agree to participate, two things are required:

1. You will need to teach one ten-minute lesson a day for 4 weeks (28 days).
2. At the end of the 28 days you should return the package and a short questionnaire on your reactions to the program.

We feel this program could be of great benefit to your child and improve his school work. If you will return the attached form, we will contact you about starting dates (February 25, or March 31). Please make sure your child brings the signed form back tomorrow if interested. Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

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[4]Lack of specific data on the skill deficiencies of individual children is a serious problem. Many teachers do not have this data and cannot effectively plan and conduct their own instruction, let alone effectively involve others in the instruction.

LETTER 2

Dear Mr. and Mrs. .....,

Your son has been selected to participate in a program to help him do better in mathematics. He will be bringing home a report card each day beginning January 6. This report card has a smiling face and a frowning face on it. Under the faces there are spaces for a checkmark. Each day I will check one of these spaces. If I check the space under the smiling face, it indicates ..... has done well. If I check the frowning face, ... has not done well. There is also a line for my signature.

I would like for you to do something nice for ..... if he brings home a checkmark under the smiling face. Either you select something ..... would like to have or be willing to work for, or ask him what you would do that he would like. This could be a treat to eat, a special favor, money, etc. Really, most anything he could enjoy each day after he comes home from school would be fine. It could be something he could do later on in the evening rather than when he first gets home, but tell him he gets to do it as soon as you see the smiling face checkmark. Also, tell him you are proud of him for doing so well in school.

If ..... brings home a frowning face checkmark, please say nothing, do not scold him, or act disappointed. Just look at the card and walk away. If he does not bring home a card, ask him if he has it, and if he does not, again just walk away and say nothing. Of course, if he does not have the card, he does not get the special favor or treat.

It is important that both of you carry out these instructions if my project is going to work. I hope you will see I am trying to help ....., so please be very consistent about giving the favors only if he has earned them.

Sincerely,

A service delivery. While the previously mentioned studies concerned pupils with relatively mild skill deficits, for the past three years, the Outreach and Development Division of Utah State University's Exceptional Child Center has directed efforts at meeting the needs of the severely handicapped. The focus has been on the development and validation of a service delivery model for severely and multiply handicapped, homebound, children in remote

Getting Ready

MATERIALS:
1. One penny
2. Two dimes
3. One quarter
4. Instructor's Chart
5. Learner's Chart
6. Pencil and crayons for marking charts
7. Reward badge

NOTE: Until the learner can correctly name and identify the dime *without help,* teach Lesson 2 *each day.*

DIRECTIONS: Place a quarter and a penny on the table in front of the learner. Follow the seating plan outlined on p. 6.

STEP A Review

I: (Point to the penny.)

What is this?

L: Penny.

I: Good. Penny.
(Point to the quarter.)

What is this?

L: Quarter.

I: Yes. Point to the penny.

L: (Points to the penny.)

I: Nice pointing!

Point to the quarter.

L: (Points to the quarter.)

I: Good remembering!

STEP B

I: (Hold a dime in front of the learner.)

This is a dime.
(Pause for a few seconds.)

I: What is this?

L: Dime.

TO CORRECT: If the learner fails to respond, say

I: This is a dime. Say it with me. This is a . . .

I&L: Dime.
(Say it together.)

I: Now you say it. What is this?

L: Dime.

I: Good saying "dime"!

I: Yes, a dime. What is this?

L: Dime.

I: Good saying "dime"!

rural areas. In the past, the family has often been the only instructional resource available to these children.

A service delivery model (known as Project TELEPAC) has been developed and is now operational. Project TELEPAC stresses the training and support of the parents as the child's teachers. Typically the child receiving TELEPAC services has been referred by the local school district and is assessed in the home by TELEPAC staff. If the assessment of the child and family and community resources indicated that TELEPAC services are appropriate, the services are initiated.

The major TELEPAC services include:

(1) *Parent Involvement Packages.* Forty Parent Involvement Packages have been produced and field-tested. The packages deal with academic, as well as self-help skills, and are written in a dialogue form to demonstrate specific practical teaching and assessment procedures to parents. Each package is self-contained, in that all instructions and supporting materials are included. (Page 6 shows a page from an academic package on Coin Recognition.)

(2) *The Parent Resource Library.* TELEPAC manages a collection of books and pamphlets selected because of their practical information about caring for exceptional children at home. A catalog of library holdings indexed by common problems and questions is supplied to parents to facilitate ordering by telephone or mail.

(3) *A Toll-Free WATS Line Between Parents and the TELEPAC Staff.* Whenever problems or questions arise parents can call a resource teacher. A WATS line provides direct communication between parents and resource teachers at the TELEPAC office. The line is also a convenient method for parents to order materials from the Parent Resource Library. In addition, every parent working with a package is called approximately once a week by a TELEPAC resource teacher to discuss problems and give advice and encouragement.

(4) *Home visits.* Approximately once every two weeks (and sometimes more often if funds permit) the home is visited by a TELEPAC resource teacher. During this visit the teacher (1) responds to parents' questions and concerns, (2) observes the parent instructing the child

and offers advice, (3) demonstrates instructional techniques for the parents, and (4) evaluates the child's progress with a view to modifying treatment prescriptions, if necessary.

On an evaluation of the TELEPAC model (Hofmeister and Atkinson, 1976), randomly selected control and experimental groups comprising 120 families were used to compare the gains made by handicapped children receiving TELEPAC services against a similar population not receiving TELEPAC services. Parents were asked about their reaction to the overall project and the different parts of the service delivery model. At the time of the experiment, the services did not include the home visits because of a lack of funds. The evaluation mainly assessed the impact of the packages.

The experimental treatment period lasted 17 weeks, and at the end of that time, services were provided to those families who had agreed to serve as controls, and services were continued to those families who participated in the experimental treatment group. The experimental families were divided into two groups: one receiving academic packages and the other receiving self-help to sample curriculum breadth and levels.

Statistically significant differences[5] in favor of the experimental group were observed. The gains made by this group must be recognized as being substantial when one realizes that a commonly listed educational characteristic of this population is their unresponsiveness to anything but the most precise and intense educational methods (Harling, Hayden and Beck, 1976). Many of the children had IQ's below 50 and a few years ago would have been classified as "untrainable" and denied public school services.

A Glance at Parent Priorities

One of the previously mentioned TELEPAC services is the Parent Resource Library.[6] This service is made available free of

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[5]An analysis of covariance conducted on the test data from the control group and the experimental group using the academic packages yielded statistical significance at better than the .05 level in favor of the experimental group. A similar statistical test conducted on the self-help packages yielded satistical significance at better than the .01 level in favor of the experimental group.

[6]Kellogg funds through the U.S.U. Quality of Life Program were of considerable assistance in the development of the Parent Resource Library and are gratefully acknowledged.

charge to all parents of handicapped children in Utah, not just those receiving other TELEPAC services. One of the ongoing research projects associated with the library service is the monitoring of parent requests. Detailed computerized records of all library transactions for the past four years have provided extensive data on parent interests.

The most requested group of books are on child management followed by those that describe specific handicapping conditions, particularly learning disabilities and Down's Syndrome. The most popular book is *Living With Children* (Patterson and Gullion, 1968), a small highly programmed paperback that spells out specific practical procedures for managing children.

The WATS lines have also provided the staff with a wealth of information on parental interests. Again, child management has been an important area, and Center staff have prepared a book, *When a Child Misbehaves* (Hofmeister, Atkinson, and Henderson, 1977), responding to the most frequent queries. The book has two parts. The first section lists specific techniques for increasing appropriate behavior, such as paying attention, playing with other children, sharing, and taking care of things; the second section discusses methods for reducing such inappropriate behavior as hitting, sulking, teasing, and throwing tantrums.

Observations on the Role of the School

In the process of working with hundreds of families and a host of school districts, the Exceptional Child Center staff have observed a range of reactions to parent involvement. The teachers who welcome the involvement of parents tend to be confident and competent, with a good grasp of each child's problems. They are only too happy to identify specific meaningful activities in which parents can participate. These teachers see parents as an important source of instructional assistance and agreed with Annette Breiling (1976) who recently summed up the value of parents' involvement as follows:

> It is our contention that investing a regular portion of time for involving parents as teaching partners in reading can reap benefits far greater and more long-lasting than those benefits gained by trying to work solely with children. It is physically impossible for a school to provide 10 minutes of individual work daily with each child. For a teacher of 30 children this could consume five hours a day with no time for work in any other topic (p. 192).

In contrast to the above-mentioned teachers, we have encountered teachers extremely suspicious of any parent involvement in the instructional process. In some cases this resistance seems to have been caused by past experiences with parents. In other cases, we gained the impression that the teachers were not technically competent to involve and manage others in the treatment of individual children. There are teachers who are reluctant to involve parents, student teachers, and aides on the grounds that they are "more trouble than they are worth."

Teacher training institutions must accept considerable blame for the lack of paraprofessional management skills in teachers. The ability to pinpoint specific skill deficiencies in individual children, identify appropriate intervention procedures, and manage paraprofessionals (including parents) providing the individual intervention, is an important and often neglected set of teaching skills.

In fairness to teachers who choose not to involve parents, it should be noted that some writers have questioned the involvement of parents in the child's instructional program (Brown, 1969, Meadow and Meadow 1971). The majority of the recent literature, both data and non-data based, is, however, strongly supportive of parental involvement in the child's instructional program (MacDonald, 1971; Voelker, 1967; Breiling, 1976; Feldman, Bugalich, Roredale, 1975; Criscuolo, 1974; Bellamy, Dickson, Chamberlain, Steinback, 1975; Koven, LeBow, 1973; Jelinek, 1975; Kelly 1973).

School Administrators and Parent Involvement

The reactions of school administrators to parental involvement have been as varied as teacher reaction. In some school districts we were welcomed by administrators earnestly searching for effective ways to involve parents, particularly the parents of children in need of remedial help. Not all administrators, however, appeared interested in demonstrations of parent effectiveness. In one study where we thought everything went well (i.e., the parents were enthusiastic, the pupils made good gains, and intervention was carried out at an extremely small cost), the school administrators refused to allow publication of the results in the local press. The reason given was that it might make the schools look bad if the parents were shown to be effective instructors of their children. This reaction by the school administration was inexplicable, in view of the fact that evaluation of the experience by each family indi-

cated that they felt nothing but gratitude to the schools for being invited to participate.

The following parent's comment was similar to many of the comments received:

"For the first time in rearing children, I have been given something concrete to help my child."

The futility of working when schools are involved but not supportive was demonstrated in a sequence of two experiments we conducted. In the first study, principals and teachers were bypassed. We screened the children, identified problem areas, contacted parents, supplied the parents with programs to conduct at home, and retested the pupils to assess skill gains. The experiment was quite successful. For the second study we gave volunteer principals and teachers the training and materials to repeat what we had done in the first experiment. The result was, to say the least, disappointing. In the first study 95 percent of the parents completed the tutorial programs, and their children showed substantial gains over control children. In the second study less than 15 percent of the parents completed the programs, and the children showed no evidence of gains over controls. Despite the fact that participating teachers were volunteers in the last experiment, we were not able to train them to represent competently and enthusiastically the program to parents. We supplied personnel to do most of the "behind the scenes" tasks, such as screening the pupils, assembling materials and preparing parent mailings. Despite this help, some teachers never sent the materials to the parents. Others sent materials but never made the recommended follow-up telephone call for each of the 3-5 families that were involved in each class. Several teachers made no secret of the fact that they considered other things (e.g., bicentennial projects) considerably more important that the parental involvement programs.

When bond issues fail the schools often accuse the community of callous disregard for the needs of children. With many educators placing other priorities above that of entering into instructional partnerships with parents, it should not be surprising that the communty may not react supportively to an increase in taxes for education.

Kelly (1971) has noted that "The taxpayers revolt in education does not stem exclusively from economic sources. . . . We are also faced in many places with an intense public alienation from

the schools — because meaningful involvement has so long been discouraged" (p. 375).

Our observations indicate that teachers lack confidence in parents. Teachers are often unsure of: (a) the reactions of parents and (b) the effectiveness of parents. There have been a number of studies conducted, including studies in schools in low income areas, where considerable parent participation was involved. Willmon (1969) noted that: "Many parents of culturally disadvantaged (children) will attend and participate . . . if invited and encouraged (p. 410).

Wille (1970), reporting on a preschool program that was quite successful in involving parents, stated that:

> The first step toward parental involvement would be to convince parents of the overwhelming importance of their enthusiasm and support (p. 28).

A school staff that does not believe strongly in the importance of parental involvement will have difficulty offering believable invitations to parents to become involved with their children's education.

One of the most convincing demonstrations of parent effectiveness has been the correspondence programs conducted for children in the Australian Outback. For these children, the state departments of education offer basic education services through correspondence lessons administered by the parents. Thousands of children have received all their elementary education from their parents aided by the highly structured correspondence program. When these children moved to boarding schools for secondary education, they had little difficulty competing with their teacher-taught peers.

Have You Ever Tried That Yourself? Thoughts on Designing Parent Programs

In our early program development efforts, we placed an emphasis on the group instruction of parents. In the first major study (Hofmeister and Latham, 1972), we held four group sessions with parents of preschool, severely handicapped children.

While the evaluation data[7] suggested moderate success, only

[7]This data was collected from 28 families randomly divided into a control and an experimental group. The changes in self-care skills of the children were the basic source of evaluation data. Skill gains strongly favored the experimental group. The experimental treatment was provided by a local public health nurse.

50 percent of the parents attended all four meetings. A major reason given by the parents for their loss of interest was that the instructional examples we stressed did not relate directly to the skill deficits of their children.

Other problems were also encountered such as the difficulty parents faced in leaving their families to attend evening sessions. After that first study we stressed individual parent training programs and began parent programs with an evaluation of the child's skills.

Based on the evaluation of each child, we prepared specific intervention programs for each parent to conduct. When we did not have specific intervention programs, we delayed initiation of the program until prototype materials were prepared. One of the reasons for the development of the Parent Library mentioned earlier was to have an informational resource for parents where still more direct support was unavailable.

In planning parent programs an emphasis has been placed on generalization. Although we often focus on training the parent to teach children specific skills, we attempt to help parents develop general skills applicable to other instructional tasks not specifically treated by the partciular parent training program. In order to do this, we have depended heavily on the concept development theories of Susan Markle (Markle and Tiemann, 1972).

Markle believes that concepts are best developed by the systematic presentation of examples and non-examples of a concept, not by explanations that emphasize verbal definitions of the concepts. Unfortunately, much college text material on educational practice and child development falls in the latter category, and those well-meaning individuals who try to translate this text material into simpler terms for parent consumption may achieve about the same results as the original text did with university students.

In an effort to be able to present a range of specific examples to parents, much of our time is spent preparing and field-testing small highly specific instructional programs. A listing of programs that have been developed to date is given on page 14.

The Research and Development Process

Most of the individual packages have been developed to date by a rather lengthy R&D (Research and Development) procedure in which the prototype materials are exposed to four types of evaluations:

(1) An evaluation of the expressed and observed needs of the children and their families.

(2) Criticism by internal and external evaluators of such areas as instructional methodology, curriculum sequencing, and the clarity and attractiveness of the printed materials.

(3) Intensive direct observation of individuals using the materials with children; and,

(4) Comparative experimentation in which randomly selected control and experimental groups are used.

It is not unusual for a program to be revised 10 or 11 times, and in some cases, a 30-page program has taken three years of field-testing and revisions and has cost as much as $5,000 to develop.

By far the most important source of data for improving programs has been the intensive observation of individuals using the materials. Much of this data is collected by observing paraprofessionals through a one-way glass as they use the materials with children.

Although the materials have been validated through use with parents and other paraprofessionals, most of the packages are purchased by teachers for use in the classroom. In some cases we have encountered problems in field-testing because teachers resented having to pass materials on to parents and would rather have used them in the classroom. It has been obvious that many teachers feel a real need for very specific instructional sequences. It may be that teacher training programs have not placed a sufficient emphasis on the specific technical skills involved in intensive one-to-one instructions. It is not unusual for a teacher to reach certification and not be trained as a tutor.

PARENT PACKAGES DEVELOPED BY UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

Language Arts Packages

Spoken Name, Address, and Phone Number
Written Name, Address, and Phone Number
Letter Naming
Survival Words
Sound Symbol Relationships
Blending Sounds
Programmed Spelling

Word Recognition
Vocabulary Building

Math Packages

Number Skills
Counting Objects
Number Symbols
Addition Combinations
Subtraction Combinations
Multiplication Combinations
Division Combinations
Carrying and Borrowing
Basic Math Concepts

Self-Help Packages

Buttoning
Shoes and Socks
Zipping
Easy Basic Sewing (left and right hand)
Seam Stitching (left and right hand)
Sewing on Buttons (left and right hand)
Emergency Telephone Skills
Following Spoken Directions
Naming Coins
Time Telling
When A Child Misbehaves
Recreation I
Recreation II
Independent Dressing Skills

Infant and Preschool Related

Improving Speaking Skills
Matching Sizes, Shapes, and Colors
Play Skills
Toilet Training (Short Term and Long Term)
Balanced Nutrition and Exercise
Eating and Drinking
Motor Development I (Preskills for sitting and moving about)
Motor Development II (Sitting and moving about)

What Should the Parent Teach?

In identifying areas for parent involvement, many educators would not want the parent to introduce new concepts because there is more than enough work to do in the practice and overlearning of skills already introduced by the teacher. The overlapping or

consolidation of skills is a major and time-consuming instructional task. Too often, the teacher's painstaking efforts to introduce a new concept or skill amount to naught because the instruction is not followed by the consolidation activities needed to ensure that the concept or skill is retained by the child. The parent can be invaluable in providing tutoring aimed at the consolidation of learning.

Determining which skill areas to stress represents a problem to some teachers. While preassessment of the child will be the best guide in each individual case, there is research to indicate which skill deficits most commonly occur. A knowledge of such deficits will help the teacher to plan ahead and prepare and select appropriate instructional materials for use by parents.

In studying research related to error patterns, one notes that rather than being faced with a wide and confusing array of different skill deficits, the failing child's problems can often be traced to a relatively narrow range of skill deficits. In short, while the deficits themselves may be severe, there are relatively few skills that make up the major learning blocks for most of the children. For example, Morris (1967) noted that in reading, an imperfect knowledge of letter sounds could be regarded as one of the main causes of unsatisfactory progress for nearly half of the poor readers. Roberts (1968), in a study of typical arithmetic errors, noted that approximately 80% of the errors made by third grade children were of three basic types: (1) selection of the wrong number operation; (2) incorrect recall of basic number facts; and (3) defective use of algorithms.

Some writers (Bijou and Sloane, 1966) have questioned intensive involvement of parents in the treatment of severely emotionally disturbed children because of the complexity of the treatment. For the mildly handicapped child, instructional intensity rather than instructional complexity appears to be the issue. Rosenshine (1976) reported, after reviewing numerous studies, that instructional time in a curriculum area was consistently the most important determinant of success. The image of the education profession is not well served by the educator who flits from one expensive and often invalidated "innovation" to another, while proven approaches involving an increase in time and effort go unused.[8]

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[8]A casual observer might conclude that some educators who put method changes before method mastery are more interested in relieving their own personal boredom than they are in increasing the competency of their pupils.

Conclusion

In closing, I would like to point out that the technology to involve parents more effectively in the instruction of their children does exist and has been proven with demonstrated benefits to children, parents, and schools. Although changes are evident, the schools have been slow, and to say the least, cautious in embracing extensive parental involvement in instruction.

As a teacher and observer of those handicapped children who, with an increased instructional commitment could have achieved more, I feel that same frustration and concern that was expressed by Allen Stokes in a previous honor lecture:

> . . . It is incongruous in this era of training for highly specialized careers that we have neglected training in the most difficult and specialized job — that of rearing our children. We pay far more attention to the physical nurture of our children than their behavioral nurture. . . . It is an indictment of our intelligence when any serious dog-lover, preparing to train his first puppy, naturally turns for advice to experienced persons, but then blithely enters upon child-rearing without training (p. 14).

It is difficult to understand why the schools and the institutions who train school personnel should have neglected the involvement parents in instruction. The usual response of schools that they have too much to do already is not valid. Taking the parent into partnership to educate a child is not an extra, it is the essence.

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