



Education for Parenthood

Report of a seminar on Wednesday, 2nd April 2014, at Portcullis House

Chair: Nick Peacey Speaker: Suzanne Hargreaves, Education Scotland

Response: Frank Field, MP

1. Background

- Parenting and family environment play the most significant role in influencing future life chances.
- The period between conception and the age of two is the most cost-effective time to ensure that all elements are in place for the child's future success.
- The Foundation Years Action Group (FYAG) wants everyone to be educated about the importance of early affection, care and healthy attachment
- It proposes three points in life ('dykes') at which education for parenthood should take place: in schools and educational institutions, during pre-natal classes and as part of neo-natal support.

2. Nick Peacey: introduction to the seminar

The English national curriculum gives parenthood education scant attention and a recent FYAG research review showed: evidence on such education in schools is dated and patchy; parenthood education is mainly taught in secondary schools, aimed largely at girls and often limited to the biological aspects of reproduction and 'problem-solving', such as reduction in rates of teenage pregnancy

The 2013 Ofsted review of Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) the curriculum area in which much parenthood education might reasonably be placed, found that PSHE is a weakness in 40% of schools, often taught by untrained teachers and poorly assessed.

PSHE lessons are non-statutory in England and therefore the subject has no programme of study. There is statutory guidance only for sex and relationship education in secondary schools and this dates from 2000.

4. Introducing education for parenthood into the national curriculum core might be one way to secure a route to universal learning about the area. Teaching on attachment and neuroscience could be included in the KS3 biology curriculum. Seminar attendees heard that Frank Field, the Chair of FYAG, has already written to the Secretary of State making this suggestion. The Secretary of State responded to say that these aspects might be included in the national curriculum but to date, it has not happened. The importance of parenting and strong relationships could be included within the statutory sex and relationships section of the curriculum.

5. Elsewhere, education for parenthood is learned as part of the national curriculum. The seminar heard about two aspects of this in Scotland. Roots of Empathy is a mature and well-researched Canadian programme being rolled out for 5-8 year olds in Scottish schools. A local infant and parent visit the classroom every three weeks over the course of a school year. A trained instructor coaches pupils to observe the baby's development. Evaluations indicate significant reductions in aggression and increases in pro-social behaviour. Most

Scottish local authorities are introducing Roots of Empathy, to reinforce social, emotional and behavioural learning.

6. Suzanne Hargreaves from Education Scotland gave a presentation on the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). The CfE teaches children about parenting with the key aims of raising attainment, 'closing the gap' and preparing children for their futures. It gives sustained emphasis to health and wellbeing, alongside literacy and numeracy, the other two core curriculum priorities. Within this, relationships, sexual health and parenthood play a vital part.

Scotland has had a Parental Involvement Act since 2006. In 2012, its National Parenting Strategy outlined the range of resources available to support parents. The detail of the health and wellbeing curriculum recognises the value of parenting. At each phase, Scottish children learn about the relationships between parents and infants, the skills, commitment and qualities that parenthood requires and the importance and the enduring and complex responsibility of being a parent/carer. The curriculum is not mandatory but schools are supported in planning teaching and learning, appropriate to their setting, to meet its recommendations.

7. Seminar attendees divided into groups to answer the following three questions:

- What measures should an incoming government adopt to ensure more consistent provision across the country?
- What outcomes should we measure to assure ourselves that education for parenthood has taken place successfully in a primary/secondary school?
- Identify 'quick wins' that could be adopted at little or no cost to enhance education for parenthood?

8. In general:

- There was support for education for parenthood to be introduced into schools via a) the national curriculum and b) the implementation of pilot studies of those existing 'baby watching' programmes that are well-evaluated.
- Attendees proposed the re-introduction of the Every Child Matters principles so that the rights and voices of children are central to all education initiatives and their monitoring and evaluation.
- There was support for measuring outcomes through better understanding of children's voices and what they tell us
- Attendees suggested that the ethos of schools could be measured, asking questions such as: does the school operate on a strengths based model rather than a deficit model, what approach is taken when there is an incident and how does the school prepare its pupils for transition?

'Quick wins' could include:

- ensuring that all teachers receive supervision (in similar ways to parts of the health sector) and ensuring that teachers undergo sessions of reflective practice as part of registration requirements.
- transferring the training already provided to the health sector to education so that the most recent research and evidence on attachment and neuroscience is part of professional development at every level
- providing visual demonstrations to senior leadership teams on the importance of early attachment
- consulting and including parents and carers in curriculum developments and

inter-generational work on parenthood

9. Frank Field responded to the feedback. He talked about the work being carried out by the Foundation Years Trust on indicators to measure life chances and the Early Intervention Foundation's work on the most effective intervention programmes. He said that both organisations should be able to assist FYAG with some of the issues raised by the groups. Discussion centred on the necessary environments and help needed for teachers to ensure that education for parenthood can take place properly. It was acknowledged that though the ideological base and policy drivers in Scotland differed from those of the rest of the British Isles, important lessons could be learned.

References

<http://www.rootsofempathy.org/en/where-we-are/united-kingdom/scotland.html>

<http://base-babywatching.org.uk/>

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningteachingandassessment/curriculumareas/healthandwellbeing/index.asp>

<http://thefoundationyearstrust.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.fyir.org.uk>