
SITE VISIT: China—Parent Schools

By Robert G. Myers. *Toward a Fair Start for Children: Programming for Early Childhood Care and Development in the Developing World*. 1993. Page 90.

A parental education initiative, begun in 1985 in the People's Republic of China, has, by one 1989 estimate, resulted in the organization of 200,000 "Parent Schools" (Chinese Parents 1987). The rapid growth reflects, at least in part, parental concerns about how to deal with children in the one-child family. The purpose of the programme is to assist parents by empowering them with knowledge.

Educational content varies from place to place, based on local needs and resources. Topics treated are determined by the findings of an intersectoral group (health, nutrition, child development, education, others) brought together locally to examine existing research, identify local resources, and define needs of parents and children. This is done at the initiative of the All China Women's Federation (ACWF) which is organized at five levels, including the community level. Specialists or staff from local institutions provide up to eight sessions for parents over a term. In support of, and sometimes in addition to, the local curriculum and materials, general materials related to child development are provided by the Women's Federation.

Most of the parent schools are attached to kindergartens, primary schools, middle schools, or hospitals. In addition, some communities provide programmes for newlyweds or potential parents. In some cases, libraries have been set up in a special room in the base institution where parents can come to read and study in between meetings. Participants are given a parenting education certificate if they have participated in all or most of the meetings.

The costs of mounting this programme are primarily costs of people's time, rather than monetary costs. Time is given by the ACWF members for organization of classes, by local experts for diagnosis and presentations, and by participants who take the courses. All of these time contributions are voluntary. The monetary costs are restricted to developing and distributing materials. In brief, from the standpoint of the government, this is a very low-cost project.

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Early Childhood Counts: Programming Resources for Early Childhood Care and Development.
CD-ROM. The Consultative Group on ECCD. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1999.