

# CHAPTER 1

## HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

**F**amily life education (FLE) that takes place in communities is a unique type of education. The business of outreach FLE involves taking family science principles and practices to the general public—individuals, couples, parents, whole families—in varied educational settings outside the traditional classroom. Some outreach family life educators are employed as field agents or as university campus-based specialists within the Cooperative Extension System. Others may work in social work or other human service agency contexts or as media representatives. Those with an entrepreneurial spirit may develop their own FLE business and market their programs nationally. Still others may hold traditional university positions that include some outreach expectations.

To succeed in educating the public about family life requires a somewhat different skill set than teaching students in traditional classroom settings. With these skills, family life educators become more effective ambassadors of family science scholarship to citizens of the world.

This text endeavors to provide a comprehensive response to the following need: There is knowledge and skills that family life educators need to be most helpful and effective in work with their clientele. To arrive at the response, we first generated a content outline that represented our

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collective experiences totaling nearly three decades as family life Extension Service specialists at several universities. We sent the content outline to other specialists and colleagues and incorporated their ideas. Since this first edition was published in 2005, many FLE scholars, practitioners, and students have used the book in their work and studies and have provided us with ideas to improve upon what we first developed. We have incorporated their ideas into this second edition. The result is what we hope is a practical, how-to reference volume on effective outreach FLE that you will use for years to come.

This first chapter provides a foundational and philosophical discussion of FLE in outreach settings. We begin with a brief discussion of the definition and history of outreach FLE, as well as the role universities and communities have played in the movement. We next turn to a discussion of contemporary developments also making FLE history, including evolution in how knowledge about families is disseminated and the various roles family life educators can play in communities. Finally, we discuss elements pertinent to the development of a working philosophy of outreach FLE. At the end of the chapter, you'll have the opportunity to create a personal philosophy of FLE in outreach settings, integrating the various perspectives presented in the chapter.

#### ● DEFINING FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION

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Much effort has been expended to define FLE, with definitions dating back over 40 years (Arcus, Schvaneveldt, & Moss, 1993b). Overall there has been little consensus reached on a specific definition and greater consensus reached on aims or principles underlying FLE (Arcus et al., 1993b). Moreover, no attempt has been made to distinguish FLE taking place in high school and college settings from FLE taking place outside these environments.

We define *outreach* FLE as any educational activity occurring outside a traditional school classroom setting, usually involving adults, that is designed to strengthen relationships in the home and foster positive individual, couple, and family development. Such education comprises many topics—from marriage education to parenting skills, from stress and anger management to strategies for adapting following divorce—and occurs in many venues. For example, an outreach FLE might hold a 6-week marriage education program in the town's community center for interested couples and place important follow-up readings on the program's website. This kind of FLE is any form of education that has as its goal to “strengthen and enrich individual and family well-being” (Arcus et al., 1993b, p. 21) and falls

within any of the 10 content areas of FLE set forth by the National Council on Family Relations (Bredehoft & Cassidy, 1995), save that it assumes a lay audience that may not turn to a traditional classroom for FLE. Such education follows the operational principles set forth by Arcus et al. (1993b, pp. 15–20), which we have adopted and adapted for community settings. Specifically, these principles state that FLE (a) is to be relevant to individuals, couples, and families across the life span; (b) is based on the felt needs of individuals, couples, families, and communities; (c) draws on material from many fields and is multiprofessional in its practice; (d) is offered in many venues, including community workshops, video and print media, publications, the Internet, and many other settings; (e) is educational rather than therapeutic; (f) is respectful of diverse values; and (g) requires qualified family life educators to realize its goals.

By now it should be clear that this is a book about how to do FLE in outreach versus traditional classroom settings. The guiding principles for each are identical, but the practices vary widely. However, we don't want to continue repeating "outreach FLE" or "FLE in outreach settings" every time we speak of FLE. Therefore, anytime we use the term *family life education* (or FLE) from here on out, we are speaking specifically about *outreach* FLE as we have defined it above.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF OUTREACH FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION •

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Many disciplines have contributed to the history of FLE: traditional home economics, family sociology, social work, marriage and family therapy, social psychology, education, and parenting education (Lewis-Rowley, Brasher, Moss, Duncan, & Stiles, 1993), which in turn draws upon child development and medicine. Truly, FLE is multidisciplinary in focus and multiprofessional in practice.

### Early Roots

The earliest FLE efforts in the United States can be traced to a collaboration between church and state to ensure that children were raised according to biblical standards. Self-help books emerged around 1800, how-to books became visible in the 1850s, and child and mother study groups developed, a precursor of what has come to be known as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in the public school system (Lewis-Rowley et al., 1993).

Informal discussions among support groups were perhaps among the first community venues of FLE. For example, as early as 1815, groups of parents met in Portland, Maine, to discuss child-rearing practices (Bridgeman, 1930, cited in Lewis-Rowley et al., 1993). Also, mother study groups, termed *material associations*, were organized in the 1820s to discuss child-rearing approaches (Sunley, 1955, cited in Lewis-Rowley et al., 1993) followed by mother periodicals titled *Mothers Assistant* and *The Mother* magazine believed to be the first known parenting periodicals.

Around the turn of the 20th century, FLE as a field of endeavor emerged in response to what was perceived as the negative impacts of social conditions such as industrialization, urbanization, and changing roles of women. Changing conditions in society were seen as problems or creating problems with the decrease in socialized behavior taught to children. This was theorized to be the cause of the increasing rate of juvenile delinquency, a greater divorce rate, and other current societal ills during that time period. FLE programs were created on the theory that they could help families deal with these new changes in a “complex and changing society,” hopefully decreasing or making family-related social problems disappear (Arcus, 1995, p. 336).

### The American Land Grant University System

A more formal FLE movement was also taking place in universities and colleges throughout the United States and some of its territories. The land grant university system was created by the Morrill Act, signed into federal law by President Abraham Lincoln on July 2, 1862. This act provided 1.7 million acres of land to the states so that each might have at least one college that promoted “the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life.” Some of the “practical education” was to be taken out among the people where they lived and worked. The signing of the Morrill Act became the catalyst for the establishment of academic programs in home economics throughout the United States. Within this context, home economics/human ecology emerged as a dominant theoretical paradigm at the turn of the 20th century (Lerner, 1995). From a human ecological perspective, put forth first by Ellen Swallow Richards, the family was seen as affecting the well-being of the larger society. Thus, as the home environment could be enhanced, so too could the community at large. Leaders in the home and family movement during this time saw scientific knowledge about the family, disseminated to the masses, as an important way of correcting or preventing social ills so pronounced in the family (Lewis-Rowley et al., 1993). The “home oekology”

(Buboltz & Sontag, 1993) perspective brought many disciplines to bear on the problems pronounced in families.

### Cooperative Extension

The Morrill Act also set the stage for an educational delivery system that would transmit knowledge about families to the masses, which came to be known as the Cooperative Extension System. This system, created by Congress through the passage of the Smith-Lever Act in 1914, provided a major federal thrust in the furtherance of FLE in community settings. So enthused was President Woodrow Wilson about the new system that he called it “one of the most significant and far-reaching measures for the education of adults ever adopted by the government.” Its purpose was “to aid in diffusing among the people of the U.S. useful and practical information on subjects related to agriculture and home economics, and to encourage the application of the same.” Extension work was to consist of “giving practical demonstrations in . . . home economics to persons not attending or resident in said colleges in the several communities, and imparting to such persons information on said subjects through field demonstrations, publications and otherwise.” The underlying philosophy was to “help people help themselves” by “taking the university to the people” (Rasmussen, 1989, p. vii).

Thus, land grant institutions became known as universities *for* the people of the state: The teaching, research, and outreach done there was primarily to benefit the masses in the state (Lerner, 1995). The land grant idea was committed to applying the best science possible to the practical problems of families. Extension home economics agents, later known as family and consumer science agents, were hired to be the conduits through which information about family life could be communicated to the local communities, through the carrying out of community-based FLE programs. Some states hired family living agents, in addition to family and consumer science agents, whose specific charge was to carry out FLE programs. Today there is a county agent in most of the over 3,000 counties of the United States who have at least a partial charge to promote strong family living through extension programs. These agents often carry out their responsibilities in this area in collaboration with other like-minded professionals. FLE programming is carried out through a specific curriculum designed for target audiences, fact sheets, bulletins, pamphlets, videos, newspaper series, online learning modules, and other various means. During the late 1980s, Cooperative Extension in the family area was zero funded by the Reagan administration, later to be restored due to a public outcry of support.

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Areas of family life emphasis within Cooperative Extension have evolved over the years to meet the needs of the constituency. Beginning in the 1980s, programs became more focused on interdisciplinary national initiatives than disciplinary programs (Rasmussen, 1989). For example, families underwent radical changes over two decades that culminated in the 1980s, which brought about increased stresses and risks for family disruption and dislocation. Complex issues such as these demanded a comprehensive, interdisciplinary response. During this time, family and economic well-being received increased emphasis among local family life educators affiliated with Extension.

Concern for limited-resource families, defined as families at risk for not meeting basic needs, received increased programmatic emphasis in the early 1990s and continues today. This increased emphasis has led to adopting teaching strategies and practices that are best suited to meet the complex needs of limited-resource families, such as peer support, professional/paraprofessional teaching efforts, one-on-one home visits, and working in small groups (Cooperative Extension System, 1991).

Other recent emphases in the Extension System have included a focus on children, youth, and families who possess greater risks for not meeting basic life needs. The Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR) initiative has received federal funding since 1991. Since that time, CYFAR has supported programs in more than 600 communities in all states and territories. Other major family life efforts have been made in the area of parenting education. In 1994, the National Extension Parent Education Model (Smith, Cudaback, Goddard, & Myers-Walls, 1994) was developed. This model made an important contribution to guiding the development of community-based parenting education programs. Web-based FLE to both professionals as well as clientele has also rapidly advanced with the advent of the Children, Youth, and Families Education and Research Network (CYFERNet), making research-based FLE resources available at the click of a mouse. While traditionally, marriage education programs in communities have been offered through the church, more programs are being offered through community adult education and extension programs and other nonreligious settings (Stahmann & Salts, 1993).

### Other University-Based Outreach Efforts

In addition to organized efforts within the land grant university system, other outreach activities have been established at universities of recent date that have also contributed to what FLE is today. Perhaps most prominent

in this movement has been the explosion of service learning and internship opportunities that, while helping the student, richly benefit the communities that receive the associated services. Service-learning pedagogies, of which internships are a type, enhance traditional modes of learning and actively engage students in their own education through experiential learning in course-relevant contexts. But they also foster lifelong connections between students, their communities, and the world outside the classroom (Crews, 2002). These experiences enable students to contribute to the well-being of families within the context of their service-learning assignments. For example, students in the School of Family Life at Brigham Young University can select from more than 300 family- and youth-serving agencies in surrounding communities and in other parts of the United States and the world. Some examples of these agencies include writing for FLE websites, designing and marketing FLE curricula, and visiting families one-on-one to offer direct services.

### Community Movements

In addition to developments within the land grant university system, outreach FLE was also fostered by the contemporary expansion of parenting education volunteer groups and community organizations. Certainly one of the earliest aspects of FLE is actually the growth of parenting education (Brock, Oertwein, & Coufal, 1993). For example, the National Congress of Mothers was founded in 1897, renamed the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations in 1908, was dedicated to promoting the notions of mother love and mother thought (Bridgeman, 1930, cited in Lewis-Rowley et al., 1993). In addition, the Society for the Study of Child Nature had also grown to several chapters and by 1908 was consolidated into the Federation for Child Study. Among other things, this organization performed FLE functions such as distributing information on children, promoting lectures and conferences, and cooperating with other like-minded groups (Bridgeman, 1930, cited in Lewis-Rowley et al., 1993). The federal government began to realize the value of these efforts when, in 1909, the first White House Conference on Child Welfare took place, becoming the first of many for continued governmental support and funding of family parenting programs (Tilsen, 2007).

Expansion of FLE continued into the 1920s with the growth of parenting education. In 1924, the Child Study Association held a conference that invited the participation of 13 smaller organizations. The outgrowth of this conference was the National Council of Parent Education, which had as

one of its goals to suggest guidelines and qualifications for the training of parents. By 1924, 75 major organizations were conducting parenting education programs (Brim, 1959, cited in Lewis-Rowley et al., 1993). Parenting education grew with the support of the Spelman Fund, and the Child Study Association of America was born, with the primary purpose of development and supervision of the use of parenting education materials. By 1930, there were some 6,000 members of this association acting as parenting educators (Bridgeman, 1930, cited in Lewis-Rowley et al., 1993). Parenting education declined somewhat during the 1930s as attention was turned to financial survival. We also saw the end of the Spelman Fund and some organizations focused on parenting. Growth picked up again in during the 1940s as a preventive intervention but with largely a mental health perspective (Lewis-Rowley et al., 1993).

Parenting education has come to be both preventive and remedial (Brock et al., 1993). Even some specific parenting programs are more preventive or remedial, depending on the needs of the clientele. In recent decades, parents, churches, courts, and community mental health professionals are turning to parenting education as a remedy. Divorcing couples are being assigned to divorce education to minimize stressful and destructive aspects of divorce on children. Abusive parents are being court-ordered to parenting education classes. More programs are becoming available for teenage parents.

The medical community—namely, physicians—has also been an active contributor to the FLE movement, often offering child development–related advice to scores of patients. Professionals trained as medical doctors with a specialty in pediatrics have written very popular parenting advice books (e.g., Brazelton, 1992). The American Academy of Pediatrics, a highly respected professional group, periodically issues news releases containing recommendations for parents on such things as limiting the amount of television watched by children under age 2 (see <http://www.aap.org>).

Linked with the movement of FLE, especially that of early childhood intervention through parenting education, is the family support movement, developing essentially since the mid-1970s (Weissbourd, 1994). During the 1970s, a call for more preventive services, rather than customary, crisis mode interventions, led to more family service agencies taking a more active part in FLE. Influenced by a human ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), family support focuses on a strengths-based approach to strengthening and empowering families and communities so that they can foster the optimal development of children, youth, and adult family members (Family Support America, 2003). The family support



movement was founded on the following guiding principles (Weissbourd, 1994) that cut across disciplines:

- The most effective approach to families emanates from a perspective of health and well-being.
- The capacity of parents to raise their children effectively is influenced by their own development.
- Child-rearing techniques and values are influenced by cultural and community values and mores.
- Social support networks are essential to family well-being.
- Information about child development enhances parents' capacity to respond appropriately to their children.
- Families that receive support become empowered to advocate on their own behalf.

Family support initiatives strongly rely on the use of collaborations to carry out programs. A number of family support program offerings have emerged throughout the United States. Resource centers for parents in schools and family-strengthening services offered through nonprofit agencies have become part of the family life educational landscape. FLE programs in communities following a family-support model often use home visits and peer educators as major methods of teaching principles and skills.

### Reaching Diverse Audiences

For years, observers have acknowledged that FLE receives “underwhelming participation” from the masses (Bowman & Kieren, 1985). But even more alarming is the finding that FLE is not reaching audiences at greatest need (e.g., Sullivan & Bradbury, 1997). There is a movement afoot to help change that. For example, the CYFAR initiative of the Cooperative Extension System mentioned earlier is an example of taking FLE beyond the traditional audience to meet the needs of groups at greatest risk, who are often socioeconomically and racially diverse. Government agencies are also increasing their efforts in this regard. For example, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), an agency of the U.S. federal government, has contracted with family scholars, family life educators, and professional organizations to develop, implement, and evaluate programs for strengthening marriage among audiences that historically have been underserved, such as disadvantaged families (Dion, Devaney, & Hershey, 2003), who are disproportionately Black and

Hispanic. Practical approaches for working with diverse audiences will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8.

### Professional Associations and Professionalization of Family Life Education

In 1938, the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) was established as a “multi-disciplinary non-partisan professional organization focused solely on family research, practice and education.” One of its key missions is to promote the field of family life education. Thus in 1984, NCFR created guidelines, standards, and criteria for the certification of family life educators. NCFR now administers an internationally recognized credential—the Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE). Approximately 100 college and university Family Science degree programs in the United States and Canada use the NCFR Family Life Education curriculum standards as guidelines for their undergraduate and graduate students.

Professionals holding certification are expected to be able to demonstrate competence in 10 substance areas, including the following: Families and Individuals in Societal Contexts; Internal Dynamics of Families; Human Growth and Development Across the Life Span; Human Sexuality; Interpersonal Relationships; Family Resource Management; Parenting Education and Guidance; Family Law and Public Policy; Professional Ethics and Practice; and Family Life Education Methodology (see Appendix B for more details about these 10 content areas and guidelines for practice).

Ordinarily, those desiring CFLE status first complete coursework at one of the approved schools. At completion of coursework in the 10 content areas, graduating students may apply for *Provisional Certification*. After an additional equivalent of 2 years of full-time work experience related to family life education (which can be accumulated over 5 years), professionals may apply for *Full Certification*. In 2007, NCFR did a practice analysis survey and created another avenue to receive CFLE status: the CFLE exam. The CFLE exam can be completed in lieu of completing coursework at an approved university. For details on CFLE and the application process, see [www.ncfr.org](http://www.ncfr.org) under “CFLE Certification.” The first Certified Family Life Educators were approved in 1985, and currently there are 1,425 practicing Certified Family Life Educators (Bredehoft & Walcheski, 2009, p. 14).

In 1996, NCFR created the Academic Program Review to recognize university and college degree programs that offer coursework necessary to complete the certification courses. In 2002, 235 incomplete family programs in the United States and Canada offered undergraduate, master’s,

and doctoral programs. As of 2008, there are 83 approved schools with 101 complete undergraduate and graduate programs in the United States (Bredehoft & Walcheski, 2009, p. 15).

### Web-Based Family Life Education

An overview of the history of FLE is not complete without some discussion of the role of evolving technology in FLE. For example, individuals are increasingly turning to the Internet for all kinds of information, including matters of personal and family well-being. Because the Internet is a powerful medium that has much to offer family life educators (Elliott, 1999; Hughes, 1999; S. N. Morris, Dollahite, & Hawkins, 1999), over the past few years, many family life educators have developed websites (Elliott, 1999). In fact, currently hundreds of FLE websites are available (Elliott, 1999). Some argue that this medium of FLE has revolutionized the manner in which FLE is disseminated to the masses (Smith, 1999). Limited evaluation data suggest that web-based FLE can positively benefit its audiences (Steimle & Duncan, 2004), even rivaling more traditional means of educational delivery in marriage education (Duncan, Steed, & Needham, 2009). But whether it is an adequate substitute for face-to-face FLE is still largely unknown and an important area of needed research.

With the advent of social networking sites such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and Twitter and recent data suggesting Internet populations are spending an increasing amount of their browsing time at these sites, we expect the role of the Internet in FLE to increase. Much has yet to be learned about reaching the next generation of FLE participants, who are marvelously literate in technology, which, according to some observers, is “literally changing the dynamics of informal social relations, the exchange of information and support within social networks and affecting learners’ skills, expectations and development” (Walker & Greenhow, 2008, p. 3).

Using technology in FLE will be discussed in detail in Chapter 12.

## EVOLUTION IN THE DISSEMINATION OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE ABOUT FAMILIES •

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The field of family sciences emerged during the 1920s largely with the belief that problems plaguing the family could be addressed through systematic research. The ideal envisioned the university as the institution that

could, through research, address the real-life problems and concerns pertaining to children, youth, and families. Doherty (2001) explains, “[Family science] embraced a vision of making the world better through the work of University-trained professional experts who would generate new knowledge and pass it on to families in the community” (p. 319). What evolved, according to Doherty, was a “trickle-down model of research and practice” (p. 319). According to this model, scientific knowledge for families is generated by university researchers, who then transmit this knowledge to practitioners (e.g., family life educators), who then, in turn, disseminate the information to the masses. The strength of this model, according to Doherty, lies in its ability to address problems scientifically when experiential knowledge about a topic is relatively lacking or when the issue is so hotly debated as to prevent a more objective view of an issue. The weakness of this model is that it ignores the collective wisdom of families and communities garnered through experience, although it is from families that much of what we call research data is generated. In addition, instead of being seen as partners in knowledge generation, this perspective relegates families to the “role of consumers of academic knowledge” (p. 321).

There are other dangers inherent in the traditional model of research generation and dissemination. Historically, researchers have failed to engage and partner with communities in the research process, neglecting to study the issues of greatest interest to them (Lerner, 1995). Without community/family collaboration in the research process, research that becomes available to pass on to communities can become increasingly irrelevant to the needs of real families, causing the vision of scientific information benefiting families to go unrealized. In fact, Richard Lerner (1995) argues that much of the research generated by universities is of little value to communities. Furthermore, this top-down model of knowledge dissemination has been criticized as being inadequate at best, evidenced by the fact that the problems targeted still continue to plague children, youth, families, and communities (Lerner, 1995), even many of the same problems that experts were trying to fix when they first had a vision of a better world, made better with their discoveries.

A new model of taking family scholarship is emerging, critical to effective FLE in community settings. Scholars are now arguing that effective FLE will integrate the best scientific information with the knowledge, lived experience, culture, and expertise of community clientele (Doherty, 2000; Lerner, 1995; Myers-Walls, 2000). To accomplish this requires a community-collaborative approach where there is extensive interface of the worlds of families in communities and institutions where scientific knowledge about these families is generated (Lerner, 1995). Families and professionals become

partners in identifying strengths and needs and mobilizing to address identified problem. FLE professionals bring their expertise not to dominate or give pat or complete answers but as “a potential part of a confederation of community members, a partnership that brings to the ‘collaborative table’ knowledge-based assets” (Lerner, 1995, p. 114). Hence, such FLE professionals would seek to be “on tap” but not “on top” (Doherty, 2001, p. 322), viewing themselves as one of the many sources of knowledge in a community, but being careful not to “stifle families’ own wisdom and initiative” (p. 322). The next section expands the discussion of the many roles family life educators in community settings can take in their professional role, including those most consistent with the perspectives above.

## VARIED APPROACHES OR “ROLES” IN FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION •

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There are many educational approaches one can take or “roles” one can play as a family life educator. These approaches, reflecting various teaching philosophies and paradigms, are based on one’s sense of responsibility for program content and methods, as well as the assumptions one has about education, the educator, the learner, and the content. It is important for family life educators to be knowledgeable about each of these various approaches, their strengths and limitations, and when a certain approach might be recommended over another. While by no means exhaustive, these approaches comprise several prominent options: an expert approach, a facilitator approach, a critical inquirer approach, a collaborator approach, an interventionist approach, and an eclectic approach.

### The Expert Approach

An expert approach fits a liberal educational philosophy, which is the oldest and most enduring educational philosophy, with roots tracing back to classical Greek philosophy (Price, 2000). A liberal education philosophy emphasizes the development of intellectual powers through the mastery of a disciplinary area of study. According to Elias and Merriam (1995), “Liberal education produced a person who is literate in the broadest sense—intellectually, morally, spiritually, and aesthetically” (p. 26).

Family life educators operating from an expert approach view themselves as “subject matter authorit[ies] whose function it is to transmit a fixed

body of knowledge to the learner” (Price, 2000, p. 3). Family life educators are seen as possessors of important knowledge and skills that others do not have and who rely on them to transmit them. Those who follow an expert approach believe that answers lie with informed experts and that the lives of participants will be improved if they learn the materials and skills, according to their instructions (Myers-Walls, 2000). Thus, materials tend to be highly structured with predetermined curricula and agenda, leading to the acquisition of predetermined knowledge and skills. Most packaged educational programs ostensibly follow this assumption, especially those that are particularly concerned that programs be delivered as written. A family life educator teaching parenting using the expert approach to teaching would follow carefully a designated curriculum and insist on content mastery before moving on to other concepts.

An expert approach makes certain assumptions about learners as well. One tacit assumption is that the audience is relatively uninformed as to the content or that the experiential knowledge they have regarding a topic is of less importance than the specialized knowledge the expert is bringing to them. Lecture is often a common mode of delivery; the learner’s task is to soak up, reflect upon, and analyze the information. This traditional form of education is often referred to as the “banking” model of education, where students are viewed as empty cash receptacles needing to be filled with the instructor’s exclusively possessed knowledge. The transfer of knowledge often occurs in a static exchange with little discussion. This FLE perspective also fits with Doherty’s (2000) notion of trickle-down research and practice discussed earlier.

### The Facilitator Approach

Facilitator-oriented family life educators often have no specific agenda. Instead of facilitators deciding how programs are to proceed, participants decide what is important to them and then set the learning agenda. Facilitators acknowledge that participants are already fairly well informed about a topic. The facilitator, while often possessing specialized knowledge, doesn’t seek to share that information except as a coequal and as it fits the flow of the group. Instead, the facilitator seeks to help participants gain access to the knowledge they already have within them. Thus, a facilitator approach may best be used when the audience members possess a substantial amount of knowledge and are highly motivated learners. This approach fits the personalistic paradigm (Czaplewski & Jorgensen, 1993) and humanist educational philosophy (Price, 2000), with its emphasis on maximizing

the growth of the total person. Humanist adult educational philosophy is based on the assumption that human nature is essentially positive and that each person possesses unlimited potential; therefore, humanist educational goals are bent toward the holistic development of persons toward their fullest potentials. Learning is essentially a personal, self-directed endeavor, and while disciplinary knowledge is important, it is bent toward the ultimate goal of self-actualizing individuals (Elias & Merriam, 1995). Learners know best what their learning needs are. Collaborative learning, experimentation, and discovery are all a part of learning methods used. The learner's background and individual experiences are taken into account. Educators with a humanist philosophy act more as facilitators of individualized learning than as disseminators of fixed knowledge. In fact, the educator is "a colearner in the educational process, and assumes an egalitarian relationship with learners" (Price, 2000, p. 4). A standardized curriculum might not even exist, making evaluation of outcomes more difficult. After welcoming participants to a parenting workshop, family life educators working from this approach would have parents generate the list of topics to explore what would be most beneficial to them.

A related philosophical orientation that fits with a facilitator approach is the progressive philosophy, perhaps the most influential educational philosophy in adult education (Price, 2000). This educational philosophy stresses holistic, lifelong, and life-wide education and an experiential, problem-solving approach to learning as opposed to didactic, passive learning. The experiences of the learner become paramount in determining areas to be learned and problems to be solved. The educator is primarily a facilitator of the learning processes through guiding, organizing, and evaluating learning experiences within which she or he may also be actively involved. Thus, learning is collaborative between the learners and instructors (Price, 2000). Family life educators following this philosophy in a class for married couples might present problem scenarios, then have participants identify possible solutions to the problems or have them try out solutions they generate for a time and report back to the group.

### The Critical Inquirer Approach

Educators using a critical inquirer approach use questions to help participants think critically about the issues that are presented. This perspective acknowledges that participants have a responsibility to contribute meaningfully to their society and thus need to critically assess issues about them (Czaplewski & Jorgensen, 1993). This approach is tied to a

critical/humanist philosophical orientation, which, like traditional humanistic approaches, promotes self-actualization of the learner. Yet for a critical/humanist, personal fulfillment is achieved through “becoming an autonomous, critical, and socially responsible thinker through an emphasis on rationality” (Tisdell & Taylor, 2000, p. 8). Family life educators might use a critical inquirer approach to help participants evaluate proposed or existing public policies designed to strengthen families.

### The Collaborator Approach

Falling somewhere in between expert and facilitator approaches, in terms of responsibility for content and methods (Myers-Walls, 2000), is the collaborator approach. This approach recognizes that both family life educators and participants bring specialized knowledge to the learning experience. The educator brings research-based principles to the learning environment, and the participants bring their own lived experience regarding these principles. The collaborative educator brings a prepared agenda and curriculum, but these materials are fitted around the needs of participants. Participants are encouraged to contribute ideas for the agenda, but the educator maintains some control over the schedule and content of the discussion. After presenting the agenda for a Principles of Parenting program, collaborative family life educators might ask, “Are there any additions you’d like to make to the program, any topics you’d like to see covered that aren’t listed?”

### The Interventionist Approach

Interventionist-oriented family life educators are change agents; they seek cognitive, attitudinal, and behavior change, even transformation of participants through education. They believe that education for family life goes beyond simply learning for knowing but extends to learning for living (Mace, 1981). Such professionals are not mere knowledge transmitters or discussion facilitators (Guernsey & Guernsey, 1981). Interventionist approaches can be traced to both behaviorist and radical educational philosophies. For example, a behaviorist philosophy centers on changing behavior through the shaping of the environment to promote the desired behavior. As noted by Elias and Merriam (1995), a behaviorist-oriented educator is a “behavioral engineer who plans in detail the conditions necessary to bring about desired behavior” (p. 88). Such educators extensively use behavioral or learning objectives, model desired behavior, provide behavioral reinforcement for achieving the desired behavior, and use systematic instructional



design. Learners are engaged in step-by-step learning of desired behaviors, receiving instructor support and evaluation through the processes. Family life educators working from this perspective with couples might teach and demonstrate Five Steps to Handling Conflict, then have couples practice the skills with the aid of a personal coach, who provides both reinforcement and corrective feedback.

Radical educational philosophies form the basis of educational strategies aimed at bringing about social change and combating social, political, and economic oppression of society. Developers of this approach (Freire, 1971; Mezirow, 1995) saw the traditional liberal forms of education as limiting and paternalistic, because it treats knowledge as a gift of the learned to those who are not. One such approach deduced from the radical philosophical traditions is transformative learning, which promotes increased self-awareness and freedom from constraints, necessary to help create social equity for the oppressed and for real learning to occur (Christopher, Dunnagan, Duncan, & Paul, 2001). In this context, educators are liberators, not facilitators, who help learners become social activists. This kind of learning occurs in three steps (E. Taylor, 1997): (1) Learners engage in critical self-reflection about assumptions and present approaches, (2) learners transform or revise their perspective, and (3) learners actually adopt new ways of behaving, consistent with their renewed perspective. Family life educators working from this philosophy with a group of parents might ask their participants to reflect on the approaches they use to parent their children and reflect on what is effective and ineffective. The family life educators might then discuss a variety of helpful approaches with the group and have parents create parenting plans to try in the coming week.

### The Eclectic Approach

Educators coming from an eclectic approach would use elements of all the approaches, depending on the situation. For example, family life educators might wisely use an expert approach to teach others about a topic where little or no experiential knowledge exists or about a topic that is more controversial and needs an expert voice to set the record straight with empirical data (Doherty, 2000). An interventionist approach may be the best approach when working with oppressed and marginalized families who need to realize they have a voice, great opportunities, and unlimited potential.

Which of these approaches do you most readily identify with? Some research shows most family life educators organize and deliver their

curricula based a collaborative approach (Myers-Walls, 2000). While thematically, family life educators may use one approach over another, the approach they use may depend somewhat upon the context. For example, the expert approach may be the approach of choice when it becomes necessary to share information about which the audience has limited knowledge or experience or when expert opinion is important to help solve a controversy. However, it would not be a recommended approach for use in a group of experienced, highly motivated parents—a facilitator or collaborator approach would be more successful. A critical enquirer approach is best when you want the audience to think deeply about an issue, even if it is about the quality of their own parenting; a facilitator approach likely would lack the structure and impetus to help accomplish this. When the learning of skills is part of the plan, interventionist approaches are likely the best. All in all, having all these approaches at one's disposal may be the most ideal situation of all, pointing to an eclectic approach. Thus, family life educators need to be sensitive to the best times to use a particular approach.

## ● DEVELOPING A WORKING PHILOSOPHY FOR OUTREACH FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION

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Having a sense of our role as a family life educator and its philosophical underpinnings provides a basis for creating a working philosophy of outreach FLE. It is important for family life educators to take time and ponder their philosophical basis for teaching (Dail, 1984). They need to actively reflect on and contemplate *why* they do what they do (White & Brockett, 1987). Given the practical focus of FLE, some educators may question the relevance of philosophical rumination (White & Brockett, 1987), perhaps even seeing it as primarily an academic exercise they simply don't have time for. However, when we fail to tie FLE practice to philosophical underpinnings, our efforts may take on a mindless, ungrounded quality.

Everyone has some kind of working philosophy that is tied to his or her personal values, experiences, and lifestyles and reveals itself in our professional actions (White & Brockett, 1987). It's wise from time to time to clarify and write down our ideas so that they are subject to our understanding and critical reflection, at the same time realizing that a personal FLE philosophy is ever changing, always subject to modification through experiences and reflection.

Dail (1984) suggested several additional reasons for developing a personal philosophy: It provides a sense of direction and purpose, helps the

educator get in touch with his or her own beliefs and their influence, helps the educator assess educational problems (e.g., provide a foundation for deciding what to teach about effective parenting), helps the educator relate FLE to the needs of the larger society, and provides impetus for the scholarly study of families. “In its essence,” says Dail, “a philosophy of family life education provides a deeper meaning to the educator’s life” (p. 147).

Dail (1984) provides a framework for the development of a personal philosophy of FLE, which we have adopted and adapted below.

### Beliefs About the Family and the Nature and Quality of Family Life

Family life educators need to answer for themselves tough questions that even the savviest of politicians would prefer to avoid. For example, what is family? A single father and two children? Grandmother, mother, and daughter? Mom, Dad, and three children? Coparents with each bringing a child to the relationship? The definition of what a family is and/or should be will have profound effects on how an educator relates to clientele, especially those who may be excluded by their definition. Another consideration is the nature of family life. What assumptions do you make about the nature of family life? Are families a mere social arrangement, or do they have greater significance? How important is “family”? Whether family is seen as *the* fundamental unit of society or as one of the major entities among a cast of many players will affect educational practices with families. A third consideration is the quality of family life. For example, what characteristics comprise an ideal family, contrasted with a low-functioning family? Because of our beliefs about how parents ought to treat their children, we could never support coercive parenting as a functional ideal in a family. Your beliefs about the way families should be may lead you to draw the line on some family behaviors.

We think a working philosophy of FLE must also consider the answer to questions at the heart of the human experience. For instance, what does it mean to be human? Since humans have common existence and relationships in families, is membership in a family a key part of what it means to be human? What assumptions underlie our beliefs about human nature?

### Beliefs About the Purpose of Family Life Education

Family life educators must be clear about what they want to accomplish and why (L. H. Powell & Cassidy, 2007), so that appropriate goals

and objectives can be created. Preceding goals and objectives are a sense of vision and mission. For example, what value does education about family life have in society? David Mace (1981) envisioned FLE as something that originates from a cloudburst of information that becomes part of the knowledge base of a learner, which then produces personalized insight that leads the learner to experiment with new behaviors in family relationships. When family members coparticipate and mutually reinforce such action, the result is shared growth of members. Thus, does FLE in communities exist to be a catalyst for such a process? Guerney and Guerney (1981) reflected on whether family life educators could be considered “interventionists.” That is, do family life educators take some “clearly defined” action “designed to induce some change” (p. 591)? The Guerneys argue that if family life educators believe that their purpose goes beyond mere knowledge transmission to “changing attitudes/values and behavior,” they should “class themselves . . . as interventionists and be willing to stand up and be counted as such” (p. 592). This kind of “intervention” is distinguished from the focused, brief intervention strategies and family therapy that constitute the domain of the clinical professional and is outside the scope of FLE (Doherty, 1995). Thus, an important question at the heart of the purpose of FLE for outreach professionals is, “How ‘interventionist’ should FLE be?”

### Beliefs About the Content of Family Life Education

There is no shortage of family-strengthening ideas to teach others. For example, there are literally hundreds of parenting books designed to impart advice to eager readers who want to do the best by their children. Some works are based on sound scholarship, others on clinical impressions, and still others on the simple convictions of the authors. What should be taught in FLE settings? How do you decide what to teach? Of what value is university-based theory and research? Even the best research has limitations in its application to individual/family needs. Much research has been completed with a disproportionate amount of White, middle-class participants. Thus, the data may have systematic bias. Participants in FLE programs also bring with them a rich array of personal experiences. How can the rich learning that is the lived experiences of individuals, families, and communities become part of the content of FLE?

Our personal values may also lead us to choose certain materials to teach certain ideas while ignoring or giving limited exposure to others. For example, if your personal values dictate that teens should avoid having sex outside of marriage and you are called upon to give a 45-minute talk at a high school assembly, your selected material may likely be quite different

than it would be if you valued the full, unlimited, but responsible sexual activity of teens.

### Beliefs About the Process of Learning for Families and Individuals Within Families

There are many ways to share information about family life in community settings. We can teach in small or large groups; through media channels such as radio, newspapers, magazines, television programs, and videos; through newsletters, publications, the Internet, and leaflets; and through one-on-one meetings in homes or an office. How do individuals and families learn most effectively? From a family systems approach, it can be argued that the best learning for family strengthening will occur as a full family group. New knowledge can be co-learned and reinforced at home. However, when any member of the family is missing, newly learned attitudes and behaviors are at risk of being sabotaged by the missing member. Still, one person behaving positively can influence the others. In addition, individuals and families differ in terms of their primary learning styles and sensory modalities (Powell & Cassidy, 2007), which effective education must account for. What learning processes invoke positive change in knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors? How important are learning goals and evaluation in these processes? What assumptions do you hold about learners? Are they lights to be lit or cups to be filled?

## CONCLUSION ●

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Family life education in outreach settings has a long history. It is evolving from an expert top-down approach to addressing family problems to a collaborative, strength-based, community-strengthening model that integrates scientific knowledge from family sciences with the values and experiences of families in communities. It is expanding its reach into increasingly diverse audiences using a wider range of technology and refining its professional core. There are many philosophical bases from which we can craft FLE and varied approaches associated with these philosophies. Generally, the best strategies are community-collaborative in nature, but each approach discussed may have a role depending on the circumstances. Crafting a philosophy of FLE has the potential to purposefully guide and direct our efforts. Following are exercises to help guide you in writing your personal philosophy and approach in FLE.

## ● EXPLORATIONS

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1. Follow the guidelines below and design your own working philosophy of family life education. Address the questions in your discussion.

- What are my beliefs about the family and the nature and quality of family life and the human experience?
  - What is a “family”? How important are families? What values do I hold regarding families and the human experience? What does it mean to be human?
- What are my beliefs about the purpose of FLE?
  - What is the nature of FLE? What value does FLE have in communities? Is it to provide insight, skills, and knowledge? Is it to change behavior? How “interventionist” should FLE be?
- What are my beliefs about the content of FLE?
  - Of what value is university-based theory and research to families? Of what value is the lived experience of individuals, families, and communities, and how can it become part of the content of FLE? How do my personal values regarding families and the human experience influence the content I select?
- What are my beliefs about the process of learning for families in outreach settings?
  - How do individuals and families learn most effectively? What teaching strategies have the greatest impact? How important are learning goals and evaluation in these processes? What assumptions do I hold about learners?

2. Describe what you are like as an FLE. Different FLE settings may necessitate different approaches, but most of us will find a place where we are most comfortable and effective. Review the various approaches discussed in the chapter. Which approach best describes you and why?