

Education for Parenting



A baby in the classroom—even when he or she is the object of systematic study—is always the center of attention.

*Photograph by Myrna Ludwig
Courtesy the Philadelphia
Inquirer*

By observing a mother and baby at monthly intervals, students learn about the demands of parenting.

The 3rd grade students sit in a circle around Tommy Jacobus, age 17 months, and his mother. Smiling expectantly, they watch with interest as the mother sets Tommy down and begins to unzip his jacket. While his mother struggles to peel off the jacket, Tommy is passive and uncooperative. But he looks around with shining, curious eyes at the ring of friendly faces surrounding him.

As soon as he can, he escapes from his mother's restraining grasp. Toddling purposefully toward the globe in its stand, he points to it. "Ball!" he announces. The students get very excited. "Look! He is doing what we guessed. We said he would notice the globe and think it is a big ball."

The classroom teacher nods assent and allows Tommy to remove the big globe from its stand and hold it a moment. Then she offers him an attractive substitute—a big blue rubber ball.

This is a typical scene in a classroom participating in the Education for Parenting (EFP) program. In Education for Parenting, K-8 students acquire knowledge about babies and toddlers through direct monthly observations of one parent and one baby in their classrooms. Throughout the school year, students keep systematic records of the baby's physical growth and development, emotional and cognitive development, and interactions with the parent. They learn, for example, that babies are not capable of thinking as they do and that each child has its own temperament and capabilities. Students also learn how important the mother's interaction is and how this vital relationship affects the child's development.

Students in the program become extremely invested in their particular

baby. Teachers report that, even in troublesome classrooms, the presence of mother and baby generates a gentle, loving atmosphere and so rivets the students' attention that little disciplinary action is necessary. Moreover, students apply basic academic skills when they observe, predict outcomes, and ponder the probable effects of the parent's actions on the child's development.

What the Program Offers

The Education for Parenting program includes a written curriculum of 8 units, with a handbook for teachers clarifying the problem-solving/decision-making theory on which it is based. The units deal with pregnancy, newborns, infants 6 to 12 months old, toddlers, and "partnering." (This latter unit teaches students ways to interact with children younger than themselves.)

If students have a more realistic understanding of parenting, we believe they will be more cautious about becoming parents.

Education for Parenting trains teachers to use the curriculum effectively, and EFP staff members act as liaisons to support these teachers as they begin the program in their classrooms. Education for Parenting also tailors the training process to the specific needs of individual schools or districts.

Why the Program Works

Education for Parenting reaches students before they are sexually active, when they are still amenable to changing their attitudes. One important message the program imparts is that parenting takes time, energy, knowledge, and skill. The program makes students think about the consequences of becoming parents, especially before they are ready emotionally and economically; it teaches them how having a baby might affect their own lives. If students have a more realistic understanding of parenting, we believe they will be more cautious about becoming parents.

Unfortunately, systematic education to equip young people for parenting is rare. It is time for educators to play an active role in changing that. Our program enables schools to assume part of the challenge of teaching essential parenting skills, attitudes, and information to the parents of tomorrow. □

Judy Lechner Knowles is Principal, George Washington Elementary School, Philadelphia, PA 19128. **Sara Park Scattergood** is Executive Director, Education for Parenting, 31 W. Coulter St., Philadelphia, PA 19144.

Copyright © 1989 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.