Practice and Research of Parent Education: Review and Prospect

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Abstract. Parent education can help parents gain experiences of being competent parents and help people who want to be parents get ready to be good parents. The idea of parent education has been advocated in countries (areas) all over the world, especially in western society since 1930s. Parent education has obtained general concern and prosperous development in different levels of planning, research, legislation, practice and implementation. In last hundred years, surrounding “how to be good parents”, the study of parent education develops correspondingly accompanying with and leading practice to obtain rich achievements. In China mainland, “parent education” marked with the establishment of parent school was originated at the beginning of 1980s. At present, the coverage of family education services and guidance institutes in all levels expands gradually. Similar with foreign research, domestic research on parent education also develops successively with practice. All of these studies promote parent education develop from sensitization and socialization to professionalization, institutionalization and systematization, and from simple “skill training” to “all-round development”, and from “remedial and corrective” training to “preventive and developing” training. In the future, theoretical research and corresponding practice exploration of parent education should be launched as early as possible for future parents, “potential parents”. By understanding and grasping basic knowledge and skills of “pregnancy, birth, feeding, education and teaching”, these youth can give better education for their children and establish better family with good physical properties, ideas (especially values) and connotations in the future.

Family is the basic cell of society and the primary environment for children’s growth. In the first class for children, parents are the first teachers of them. Therefore, the educational concept and cultivation skills of parents are not only private in the family, but also related to national quality and future. It is necessary to provide various ways for parents to gain such essential education and training which is “parent education” (also called as “parenting education”, “parental education”, “father-and-mother education”) in the society. This kind of education and training can help parents gain experiences of being competent parents and help people who want to be parents get ready to be good parents (GAI Xiao-song, 2006).

I. Foreign Practice and Research of Parent Education

According to nurture assumption which emphasizes the important influences of parents on children’s growth, and believes the functions of family (parents) will directly affect the growth of children, and education assumption which takes parenthood as profession, and believes parents can only be efficient parents after taking education and training, the idea of parent education has been advocated in countries (areas) all over the world, especially in western society since 1930s. Parent education has obtained general concern and prosperous development in different levels of planning, research, legislation, practice and implementation. For example, in Germany, “living assistance” is
developed by establishing couple workshop, parenthood school and mother school. In America, “parenthood behavior scale” is prepared, National PAT (Parent As Teacher) Center established, and PET (Parent Efficiency Training) developed. In Australia, “parent self-improvement” is advocated, parent empowerment program developed and constructed, and educational activities, including Positive Parenting Program(3P) and Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) developed. In Japan, children protection career is developed and “mother school” organized by Japanese Ministry of Education. In Singapore, Community & Parents in Support of Schools (COMPASS) and School Family Education plan are carried out.

In last hundred years, surrounding “how to be good parents”, the study of parent education develops correspondingly accompanying with and leading practice to obtain rich achievements(such as Leibowitz, 1977; mBlau, 1990; Cataldo, 1991; Bornstein, 1995; Carter, 1996; Simpson, 1997; Lamb, 1997; 吉長真子, 1999; Peña, 2000; Hammer, 2001; Bornstein, 2002; 文部科学省, 2003; 文部科学省, 2003; Desforges, 2003; Gervilla, 2004; Anderson, 2007; Guryan, 008; Lee, 2009; Martinez, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; Rodrigo, 2015; 浅野俊和, 2016; Ceka, 2016).

II. Domestic Practice and Research of Parent Education

In China mainland, “parent education” marked with the establishment of parent school was originated at the beginning of 1980s. At the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s, governments started to pay attention to the guidance of family education for parents and made plans and arrangements. Program for Chinese Children’s Development in 1990s issued by State Council in 1992 established that the goal for family education guidance is that “parents of 90% children (under 14 years old) grasp knowledge about children care and education to different extent” at the end of the twentieth century. After 1990s, State Education Commission, All-China Women’s Federation prepared “The 9th Five-year” Plan for Family Education, Behavior Code of Parent Education, Guidance Opinions of Parent Schools and other documents to lead the family education guidance to orderly development in the whole country. At present, the coverage of family education services and guidance institutes in all levels expands gradually; parents schools in all levels, as well as guidance centers, hotlines, broadcasts and websites of family education guidance are established; schools for new couple, pregnancy schools and parents schools for infants, pupils and middle school students in cities, as well as broadcast parent schools in rural area, parent schools and guidance stations for family educations in counties, countries and villages are generally established.

Similar with foreign research, domestic research on parent education also develops successively with practice. Study on parent education occurs in the study on “family education” at the beginning. In 1980s, the study on family education recovered and developed after reform and opening-up of China. A large amount of research papers, report publications and works are published every year (LUO Feng, 2005), including some studies on nearly parent education, such as “education ideas of parent” (YU Guo-liang, 1995; SUN Yu-gang, 2003) and “parent quality” (GUAN Ying, 1998; ZHANG Qing-shou, 2007). Before and after new century, professional studies on parent education occurs. Although parent education still belongs to the large category of “family education”, it starts to appear with independent face of “family education guidance” until today (LI Hong-zeng, 1998; LI Sheng-lan, 1999; LI Hong-zeng, 2000; LI Hong-zeng, 2004; SHEN Jian-ping, 2004; LI Yang, 2012; China Center for Children, 2016). Then, research results of “parenting education” (such as YUE Ya-ping, 2004; LI Jun, 2008), especially “parent education” (LIU Hua-li, 2009; LIU Hua-li, 2010; LIU Zi-jin, 2010; FAN Chen-hui, 2013; LIU Zi-jin, 2015; XU Lu-ying, 2016) are presented.

All of these studies promote parent education develop from sensitization and socialization to professionalization, institutionalization and systematization, and from simple “skill training” to “all-round development”, and from “remedial and corrective” training to “preventive and developing” training. With category expanding, parent education starts to pay attention to “developing family life education” for the establishment of family development ability (YANG Qi-guang, 2016).
“Family is the most important environment for children and youth in development” (BIAN Yu-fang, 2016), so parent education has fundamental, decisive and determining effects on the quality of family education. At present, family education, particularly parent education (parenting education and guidance service for family education) as its prelude draws great attention with the emphasis of “paying attention to family construction, family, family education and family tradition” proposed by General Secretary, XI Jin-ping (2015) and the publishing of policy documents, including Guidance Opinions on Strengthening Family Education by Ministry of Education (2015) and Five-year Plan for Guiding and Promoting Family Education (2016-2020) issued by All-China Women’s Federation. Moreover, the voice of “parents should be trained” and “it is urgent to cultivate qualified parents” (CHENG Lu,2015;FU Guo-liang, 2015) rises. It can be foreseen that the study on parent education will be wider and deeper in the future.

III. Prospect: Study on Parent Education for Future Parents

In recent hundred years, especially recent forty years of China, the foreign and domestic practice and study of parent education has had its concerning category expanding, but its research and guidance objects are still population who are already or will become parents (“parents-to-be in pregnancy”).

At present, the role of parents as “management” and “teacher” becomes an essential “professional” occupations, father and mother in the family as the principle bearers in family operating hub, especially family education. As quasi-occupation, parents just like other occupations should receive pre-service training before becoming parents (as potential parents) to possess parental “competence”. Therefore, they can better perform the responsibilities of parents and the role of management.

In the reality, a large amount of irreversible and irretrievable problems of family education, family dissension and unhealthy family tradition also show the severe lack in parent competence.

Therefore, theoretical research and corresponding practice exploration of parent education should be launched as early as possible for future parents, “potential parents”.

The parent education research facing future parents is an exploring, prospective and exploited research because it extends the objects of parent education from population of parents (mainly parents of children in 0-18 years old) to unmarried youth (“potential parents”). The addition of “pre-service education” to existing parent education (mainly “occupational training” for newly married couples and pregnant women and “on-job training for parents”) will make theoretical contribution to the creation of complete chain of “pre-service-occupation-on-job” in parent education and its integration.

This research will inspire, guide and help a large amount of unmarried youth establish the opinions of “family orientation” and “moral character cultivation and family affair management”. Therefore, they can make a plan for relationship and marriage to be good parents and have a happy family in the future. By understanding and grasping basic knowledge and skills of “pregnancy, birth, feeding, education and teaching”, these youth can give better education for their children and establish better family with good physical properties, ideas (especially values) and connotations in the future. With family dream supporting Chinese dream, “tens thousands of families will become the important basis of national development, national advancement and social harmony, developing good social tradition with good family tradition”.

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