Chapter 6
Talk and Play Family Education Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The early childhood period is the most important time for a child’s development. In the early years of a child, the responsibility of caring, training, and support lies upon the family. The child should be supported at home by family as well as the school. For maximum development of potential of children in the early period, the family and the school should be supported by various education programs. All programs that support preschool-aged children and their families in terms of child care and education can be called family education programs. Family education consists of various educational programs that include providing information to parents on becoming more knowledgeable, caring, responsible, happy, and healthy families and to maintain a good life with their children by guiding and advising them to acquire the necessary skills. Family education programs could be beneficial both for social and economic gains. This chapter aims to analyse various aspects of family education programmes in Turkey and abroad in a comparative perspective.

INTRODUCTION

In Turkey parent education programs do not have a long history. In the beginning, the programs targeted families living under difficult conditions. In recent years the number of so called “new generation” families was gradually increased. These families demand more education for both children and parents in home and at school. New generation families are characterized as people who recognize the importance of education in early years of their children, demand such education programs, try to create close emotional relationships with their children and schedule their time for playing and talking with their children. These new generation families are not necessarily high income and well-educated people but their understanding and approach to their children and families are “new”. They want to know best ways for communicating and connecting with their children. It seems that playing and talking with their children is the most appropriate ways for this demand, especially in early years of childhood. Talk and

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5167-6.ch006
play is symbolized as a novel approach for parent education programs in this chapter, where, “parent and children” indicate the families who have children in early years. In Turkey, the terms family and parent education programs are used interchangeably and we mostly use the term “parent education programs”. After presenting the underlying ideas of parent education programs, a brief background of parent education programs, current status of parent education programs, comparison of programs shall be introduced and some suggestions will be discussed.

UNDERLYING IDEAS OF PARENT EDUCATION

Early childhood period is the most important time for a child’s development. In early years of a child, the responsibility of caring, training and support lies upon the family. Children thus should be supported at home by family as well as the school. Parenting, caring, loving, protecting and educating children seem to be still important in almost every part of the world; from modern societies to small communities and from the very early humans. However, the concept of childhood and children has emerged in the last few centuries. The idea that the child is different from adults and need to have appropriate education which is organized according to developmental characteristics of children have arisen (Karpowitz, 1980; Elkind, 2001). Leading thinkers who wisely pondered about the nature of human beings, have also put emphasis on the characteristics of early childhood. Comenius, Locke, and Rousseau thought that childhood experiences and the environment of childhood are influential (Aytaç, 1972; Dokecki & Moroney, 1983; Oktay, 1999; Meisel & Shonkoff, 2000; Ural & Ramazan, 2007). These effects may shape the characteristics of adulthood after childhood. Comenius says that human beings come to the world as “good” and the main aim of education should be to develop this natural structure of human beings, while Locke says that the child comes to the world as “Tabula Rasa” and child will gain adult characteristics under the influence of environmental conditions. Locke states that the purpose of the education is that the child gains good experience in a good environment (Morrison, 1998). Rousseau was impressed by Comenius’s view that states the importance and innocence of the first year of childhood should be guided by the adult and stated that the child came into the world with innate “good” characteristics, but the environment child lives in is also important. He argued that the education of the child should be done in accordance with nature, paying attention to the child’s mind and emotions (Aytaç, 1972).

These views have been followed by studies about the importance of early childhood education. It has also been suggested that education or interventions in early childhood would provide social development. The assumption was that the early education given to the child would positively impact his/her adulthood period and make them “good” human beings. The idea was that “good” adults would create the “good” and improved societies. As such, early education or intervention would provide social benefits. These views and assumptions have led to the creation of schools for children in early age. The first preschool educational institution was founded by Froebel under the name “Kindergarten” in Germany at the beginning of the 19th century (Meisels & Shonhoff, 2000). In Kindergarten, Froebel included in school curriculum games and other educational practices that will provide social, cognitive, and emotional development of children. The curricula of these schools were mostly designed to support cognitive, social, emotional and physical development of children. Froebel emphasized the importance of learning through supervised games. The idea of the child learning through games in Kindergarten continues to be used nowadays. Similar to Kindergartens, early childhood schools started to be established in Europe and USA after a short while (Scholossman, 1983).