
Book Review

Berke, Debra L and Steven K. Wisensale. (2005). *The Craft of Teaching About Families: Strategies and Tools*. New York, NY: Haworth Press, Inc., 297 pp. Paperback. ISBN: 0-7890-3250-3.

For many who teach in family studies, there are books that sit on our shelves that serve as resources for a variety of reasons. Some provide the latest statistics on various topics, some offer theoretical and/or empirical insight into content areas, and some offer insight into how to improve the “craft we do.” This edited volume by Debra Berke and Steven Wisensale will serve as one of those books we will want on our shelf as an important resource for the scholarship of teaching and learning within family studies. It is an edited volume that was previously published as *Marriage & Family Review*, Volume 38 Numbers 2/3/4.

The first section of the book focuses on teaching family law and family policy. For educators who are teaching such courses, this section may be particularly useful given the limited teaching resources currently available. An understanding of how laws and policies influence families is often not what draws students in to family related programs. For many students it is only after they become involved in such programs of study and take family law and policy courses that an awareness of such issues emerges. The challenges for the educator are finding ways to increase student awareness, inspire curiosity, and instill an understanding of the relevance and applicability. The five articles in this section provide educators new ideas to meet these challenges.

In “An Exploratory Examination of Students’ Family Policy Beliefs,” Randy Leite and Ruben Anguiano explore the importance of understanding students’ knowledge base on the policy making process and policy. These authors note that students often have a very limited understanding of what policy is, what family policy is specifically, and the relationship between the challenges and issues families confront and policies and laws. Unless these challenges are acknowledged and addressed, they become barriers to effective learning. For the educator teaching family law and policy, the authors offer insightful recommendations to overcome these challenges.

In “Teaching Family Policy: Advocacy Skills Education,” Elaine A. Anderson, Bonnie Braun, and Susan K. Walker offer important on how to engage students as effective advocates for families in the policy making arena. While increasing student awareness is an important first step, providing students with the knowledge to be effective agents of change can be most engaging for many students. This chapter draws from the authors’ experiences teaching both undergraduate and graduate courses in family policy over several decades. The authors note that to become effective advocates requires knowledge of particular issues, understanding the points of intervention in policy formation, familiarity with policy decision makers or those who influence them, knowledge of human nature, and skills of persuasion. The authors go on to offer ideas for curricula and skill development exercises that will be quite useful for new and seasoned educators.

The chapter by Preston Britner and Lily Alpert describes their successful use of *Amicus curiae* (friend of the court), written policy briefs, and class presentations as a tool for educating students. Tammy Henderson and Lenore McWey discuss the effective use of undergraduate and graduate cooperative research teams as a means of educating students on family law and policy as well as qualitative research methods. A final chapter in this section comes from Kimberly Greder and Jeanne Warning who utilize the educational tools *Sharing a Family's Story* and the *ROWEL Poverty Simulation* in educating cooperative extension agents and other educators on family policy. Their contribution helps us understand the importance of involving actual families in the process of educating professionals on the needs of marginalized families.

A second section of the volume focuses on teaching family dynamics. While many family educators may have their courses “in the can,” this section offers educators a new look at content areas and techniques. Linda Nielsen’s chapter “Fathers and Daughters: A Needed Course in Family Studies” explains the lifelong impact that this relationship has on both fathers and daughters and argues that it should be incorporated to a greater degree in family study programs. The author describes the course she has created to help students explore this relationship. While the course utilizes self reflection and self-assessment activities, students are challenged to understand the empirical basis of the course material. Mihaela Robila and Alan Taylor’s “Teaching about International Families Across the United States” and Nilufer Medora’s “International Families in Cross-Cultural Perspective” together emphasize the need to incorporate multi-cultural education into the family studies curricula. Robila and Taylor’s study highlights the fact that too few undergraduate and graduate programs offer courses on international families or cross cultural perspectives. Medora offers guidelines on developing and teaching a course on international families from a family strengths perspective. Together, these two contributions provide important ideas, guidelines, and resources for developing a multi-cultural awareness and.

The third section of the volume focuses on teaching techniques in family studies. Two chapters in this section address the problem of role-play and creating fictitious families in class: Scott Browning, Jeanne S. Collins and Bryan Nelson’s “Creating Families: A Teaching Technique for Clinical Training Through Role-Playing and Tanya Koropeckyji-Cox, Colleen Cain, and Justin Coran’s ”Small Group Learning and Hypothetical Families in a Large Introductory Course.” Both chapters offer insight into how to make course content come alive, real and engaging for students. As the authors note, too often students are challenged by personal self disclosure through such activities, and sometimes educators are hampered by classroom size. These authors provide useful guidelines to address these challenges.

The Craft of Teaching About Families is a valuable resource for educators in family studies programs. It offers insight into the development of courses, and teaching techniques that can be used in the classroom and beyond. Throughout the volume valuable bibliographic resources are offered to the reader on various topics and issues. Published in 2005, this collection will remain a worthwhile investment for any family educator for years to come.

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