Letter from the Editor

Celebrate Being a Childbirth Educator

Abstract

Some of the many reasons to celebrate the work of childbirth educators include Lamaze International's upcoming 40th anniversary, an impressive history of dedicated people who first pioneered childbirth education, and the active role childbirth educators continue to play in promoting consumer advocacy in health care.

Journal of Perinatal Education, 9(3), vi-vii; childbirth educators, Lamaze history, consumer advocacy.

Elisabeth Bing and Pat Mogenson, two pioneer childbirth educators.

As Lamaze International prepares for this year's upcoming annual convention to celebrate 40 years as an organization that promotes childbirth education, how else might you celebrate being a childbirth and/or perinatal educator? Why might you think it fitting to celebrate?

According to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition*, the word *celebrate* has the following definitions:

- to hold up or play up for public notice;
- to honor by solemn ceremonies or by refraining from ordinary business (as in a holiday);
- to mark by festivities or deviation from routine; and
- to observe an occasion with festivities.

In addition to attending the annual convention, other ways a group of childbirth educators might choose to celebrate are as follows:

- Create a celebration display to be used in the lobby of a health care facility.
- Produce a booth at an appropriate community event.
- Plan a local childbirth educator retreat with activities designed to strengthen the bond and commitment of the group.
- Interview young couples who are filled with excitement for their birth experience and offer the piece as a write-up in the local newspaper.
- Submit an article, poem, picture, or letter to the editor of *The Journal of Perinatal Education*.
- Volunteer to talk with youth in your community about the potential richness of a childbirth experience based on the Lamaze Philosophy.
- Simply reflect on the significance of the work accomplished by a childbirth educator.

The Journal of Perinatal Education has entered into celebration by beginning a series of columns covering the history of the earlier childbirth educators. Elaine Zwelling capably interviewed Madame Cohen, who worked with Dr. Fernand Lamaze and Marjory Karmel and who, until last year, was unaware that the Lamaze method was still in practice anywhere (Zwelling, 1999). Elaine followed up this article with an interview with Elisabeth Bing (Zwelling, 2000). For future issues of *The Journal of Perinatal Education*, two additional interviews are in progress with Ferris Urbanowski and Sunnys

Strickland. Both of these women had a national influence in the growth of Lamaze in its early days as the American Society of Psychoprophylaxis in Obstetrics (ASPO).

We also need to celebrate the lives of pioneer childbirth educators whose influence was important to their local community—it is at the local level that progress in improved birth opportunities is made. Recently, I received the following letter:

I am writing, with a saddened heart, to inform ASPO/Lamaze of the death of a pioneer in childbirth education. Her name is Patricia A. Mogenson, RNC, BSN, FACCE, IBCLC, and she died on May 5th of this year.

Pat became certified 40 years ago and practiced as a childbirth educator, first in Brooklyn and later in Northern New Jersey. I met Pat in 1966 when I became certified and she was in the process of forming the northern New Jersey Chapter of ASPO. In later years we often reminisced about our first film showings of *Naissance* and later *The Story of Eric*, selling cooking and other baked goods after the film showing as a chapter fund-raiser. Together, we saw our names in print in the local newspapers as supporters of “natural” childbirth and were often chastised, in print, by the local obstetricians for encouraging women to forgo the benefits of narcotics, amniotics, and general anesthesia and to elect to “suffer” to satisfy the egos of childbirth instructors. Husbands were never allowed to remain in a labor room beyond early labor and attending a birth in a delivery room when encouraged by Pat brought on another avalanche of criticism.

Pat bore the brunt of the negative publicity with the strength that can only come from knowing that you are fighting for the right of others. Many of us who are still active in parent education remember the elation of winning those battles, both large and small. Pat and her husband, Gunnar, raised their own five children along with playing foster parents to six nieces and nephews and still found the time and energy to help anyone in the community who needed anything they could provide. She remained active after retirement from hospital nursing by becoming an EMT and an IBCLC. She also continued to teach childbirth classes at a local hospital and never lost her thirst for continuing education.

It would be an impossible task to count the number of new families she counseled in her 40 years as an ASPO certified childbirth educator. As recent as April, we attended the New York chapter conference honoring her old friend Elisabeth Bing and decided to join the New York chapter as a show of support. She also brought

some of the ASPO memorabilia to Harriet Barry for the archives. Elisabeth and Pat obviously shared a long history of commitment to parent education.

Sincerely,
Johanna Gorab, RNC, FACCE, IBCLC

The above story is about a special life worth celebrating. The experiences described, with slight modifications, parallel the experiences of many childbirth educators across the country who introduced childbirth education to their communities. This activism was in a time when consumer input into health care of any sort was unheard of and consumer advocacy on the part of any health professional was sharply criticized.

Marilyn Libresco (2000) writes:

These early childbirth education classes represented the first widespread, organized, and successful efforts by patient groups to influence medical care, now an integral part of the battle against acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). These educational interventions foreshadowed the emergence of health-education efforts in other areas of health (e.g., smoking cessation programs, arthritis self-management, and other population-management strategies now recognized as potent means of improving health while controlling costs). That the significant contribution of the childbirth movement to the consumer movement in health care is often overlooked may be a remnant of this society's history of dismissing women's efforts to influence their lives” (Libresco, 2000, p. 625).

The above contributes to the *why* you would want to celebrate being a childbirth educator. Recognized or not by the larger society, childbirth educators have lead the way to an accepted active consumer role in health care. The job is far from finished, but the changes over 40 years are remarkable. Now that is something to celebrate!

—Sharron Humenick, RN, PhD, FAAN

References

- Libresco, M. M. (2000). Consumer-Provider relationships. In F. H. Nichols & S. S. Humenick (Eds.), *Childbirth education: Practice, research and theory* (pp. 622–637). New York: W. B. Saunders Company.
- Zwelling, E. (1999). Looking back in time: An interview with Madame Blanche Cohen. *Journal of Perinatal Education*, 8(4), 1–8.
- Zwelling, E. (2000). The history of Lamaze continues: An interview with Elisabeth Bing. *Journal of Perinatal Education*, 9(1), 15–21.