



Title: *Family: The Vital Factor*

Author: Moira Eastman

Publisher: Collins Dove, 1989

Length: 239 Pages

The mixed responses likely to be elicited by this book are a measure of its significance. Eastman argues for a re-evaluation of the role of 'family factors' in individual and social well-being, denying that this is necessarily a conservative position, but claiming that those committed to social change are seriously mistaken if they continue to neglect the importance of the intimate relationships associated with family life. Her own position seeks a middle way, arguing that 'Evidence of fragmentation of families... poses tough questions about the whole direction of modern societies' (p.x), but that 'to concede family imagery and family values to the ultra-right is a failure of critical thinking' (p.xi). Rather, she sees families as the source of an alternative set of values to those of the competitive, technocratic and profit-oriented public sphere, and perceives a major source of contemporary social problems as lying in the devaluing of private, familial life.

In this book, based as it is on her own doctoral thesis, Eastman develops this argument through a careful review of a range of evidence concerning the effects of family experience on intellectual development, emotional, mental and physical health, and social skills and competence. She draws on a wide range of American, and some Australian, research to show that the relationships within the family setting, even from maternal-child interaction immediately after birth, are more significant than formal schooling in affecting educational outcomes and general development and well-being. Eastman recognises that much debate had focused on family type, problematising single parent families in particular, but in general, she avoids this by suggesting that family interaction and resources, not only material but emotional, are the important factors. Where families, of whatever actual constitution, are supported by wider networks of kin and friends, and children are responded to with interest, it seems the coping skills of all family members is enhanced. While in Part 1, Eastman mounts a substantial case for acknowledging the salience of family life in shaping human experience, she leaves actually explaining the differences between more and less

successful families to Part 2. Here she turns more to psychological studies of 'well-functioning' families to argue that interaction between family members is a critical variable and that we can now identify its positive characteristics. These include styles of communication which allow a range of emotions to be openly expressed, including anger and hostility, without attack on other family members, who are accepted as themselves and responded to with empathy and appreciation. Conflicts are negotiated and power is shared between adults and with children, although 'parents are clearly in control' (p.75). Support networks, shared family time and religious or spiritual beliefs are also, so several American studies claim, important in maintaining family functioning. Eastman's argument then, is that the widespread belief amongst health and welfare professionals that the 'intangibles' of family life are too difficult to identify, and that no optimal family pattern is conceivable, is mistaken. What she calls 'creative family processes' are neither class nor culturally specific, but are central to 'making human beings human', and are seriously undervalued and undermined in contemporary Western society.

The implications, argues Eastman, of neglecting internal family processes, is a whole series of inappropriate policy choices. Somewhat controversially, she argues that the neglect of family life by the new professional middle class reflects their self interest in carving out a niche for themselves as 'experts' and results in attempts to denigrate those who maintain the importance of family factors in human development. The policy outcomes, she argues, have included directing resources into formal educational programs to remedy social disadvantage, generally with little effect, and a superficial response to the dilemmas of marital breakdown - one which channels resources into 'patching up' problems and trying to offer economic supports to single parents, but which shows gross neglect of preventive strategies of family counselling or education. One of the most interesting chapters in the book, I believe, is the last, in which Eastman offers some alternatives by way of family intervention programs such as directly

involving parents in children's reading development, forming community support structures through family clusters and other strategies and educative programs to improve communication skills at crucial lifecycle stages such as marriage and the birth of the first child.

The arguments which Eastman puts forward are important and deserve widespread debate, but her contribution has some significant limitations. Coming from a background in education and social psychology, she does not provide an adequate framework for understanding the historical development of contemporary social structures which impinge on family processes, and her cautious skirting of the issue of family structure does not overcome the difficulty of explaining the relationship between family forms and the personal pain so clearly evident in many family settings. There is no mention of anthropological research on other societies in which families are not undermined in developing human beings as children and sustaining them as adults. These are not mere academic quibbles, for accurate analysis of the causes of contemporary family problems is essential to formulating effective strategies in response. Eastman seems to regard the undermining of optimal family interaction as an unfortunate side effect of industrial capitalism and its devaluing of the private sphere, including women's social contribution. However, she neglects the entrenched patterns of male power over women established through many centuries and enforced through overt violence as well as ideology. The modern 'nuclear' family emerged as a family form amongst the new bourgeoisie of capitalism. The separation of public and private, and the devaluing of the latter, was no mere ideological matter, but rested on structural changes from domestic to industrial production which in turn reflected the class and gender interests of the dominant group. Contemporary consumerism and the values of the 'throw away' society are no unfortunate accident with unexpected consequences for family life, but are intrinsically connected, as the Frankfurt School of social theorists in particular have pointed out, with the internalisation by the individual of destructive

emotional patterns characteristic of the public sphere and an unhealthy intensity, yet emptiness, of familial relationships.

If Eastman is right that many families manage to avoid the pathological effects of modernity, we do indeed need to learn how they do so and use them, as Eastman suggests, as a basis for resistance. However, the model of human development upon which she draws, that of 'social competence' is limited in that it refers primarily to cognitive and affective skills, not explicating the deeper layers of the self and the ways in which social arrangements, those of class and gender domination especially, become embedded in psychosexual structures and are mediated through the family. The complexity of the effects of material deprivation is glossed over by Eastman's assertion that more than economic factors are involved in family problems, but without offering an account of how class differences interact with family styles, it is hard to establish policy goals to mesh material aid with other forms of support.

Similarly with gender, Eastman plays down

the power dimensions, and this is hardly a feminist analysis, although one not unsympathetic to many feminist goals. While she recognises feminist criticism of the institution of the family, she does not adequately address the structural as distinct from interactional aspects of male dominance. In criticising many feminists for joining 'the male, public, disparagement of child-care and work in the home' and ignoring its economic and social value (p.155), Eastman seems to think that only recently have feminist writers discovered the home, ignoring much of the theoretical controversy of the 1970's and the lively debates over oppressive aspects of patriarchal family structure since then. In particular, she misses the psychoanalytic feminist analysis of the ill-effects of assigning all childbearing to women on gender identity and familial relationships. In conclusion, this remains an important book, not for the research it overviews nor even the conclusions it reaches, but for asking difficult and often avoided questions about what makes us human and how can

we preserve our better human features in the face of the massive social dislocation of the twentieth century. In asserting the need to reject technocratic values and goals and hold onto those of collectivism, intimacy and unconditional acceptance of others and their needs, Eastman presents a powerful case, one arising out of and reflecting her own religious and cultural values. It deserves sustained critical debate, particularly amongst the education and welfare professionals and the policy makers who may have to ask themselves some painful questions about the role they play in undermining 'creative family processes'. The solutions though will require structural change in the political economic context surrounding modern families and change in the power relations within the family, as well as community supports and education for family life.

*Reviewer: Dr. Kerreen Reiger
Sociology Department,
La Trobe University, Melbourne*

Title: *You Can't Make Me! Developing Effective Classroom Discipline*

Authors: Malcolm N. Lovegrove, Ramon Lewis, Eve Barman

Publisher: Latrobe University Press, 1989

Length: 66 Pages

It is somewhat refreshing to find a book that gets to the point quickly and states what it is at the outset.

This little book is a sound analysis and a drawing together of a plethora of theories and myths that surround discipline in schools.

The authors conducted a ten year study of hundreds of students in hundreds of schools to ascertain classroom management techniques as seen from students, teachers and parents points of view. Having this information in mind the authors put together a book that is divided into three parts. 1. the different theories of discipline; 2. their research undertaken during the past 10 years; 3. the presentation of what the authors call a 'CR' system of classroom management.

The model is based on Communal Responsibility, Classroom Rights, Classroom Rules and Consequences – Recognition with the first named being the basic educational aim.

Detailing of the model follows with a step by step discipline procedure ranging from NON VERBAL RECOGNITION "The teacher

nods, smiles or stares near the student who is behaving appropriately" to TANGIBLES, George is offered a tangible reward. "George, you've earned your 100 points so you may have a dip in the stationery bag."

The need for a publication like this is timely, in fact, classroom management is always timely. I do, however, have some misgivings as to its success in secondary schools. I would think that by the time the 'CR' steps were followed it would all be too late. So too with lower primary grades. Surely, classroom management is not a problem at this level where the 'reasoning process could hardly apply.

As I read the implementation section of the twelve step 'CR' system my mind drifted to the present day classroom. I pondered the consequences of such a system with a year 10 group from the principal's point of view as compared to that of a first year teacher. I fear, that without any knowledge of classroom management techniques, the implementation of the system might create even more difficulties. I could see, however, a teacher of five or six years experiencing some joy during the experimentation with

such a model. Then again we don't have many Georges or Keiths at our school.

Unfortunately, whatever the system, (and this system is worth trying) it all gets down to the same thing in time – parents, discussion, suspension, discussion, conference, motivation, discussion. Mind you, the authors are quick to point this out and also see suspension as the end of a long line of steps. Too often suspension is implemented far too early in disciplinary procedures. As the authors point out, "the CR System does not aim to use extreme recognitions or punishments, but to work students back to the CR circle."

This little book is well worth looking at. It is very reasonable and presents some neat solutions to an age old problem. I am not sure of its target, but I would suspect very junior secondary or senior primary would be appropriate. I certainly wouldn't try it at middle or senior secondary.

*Reviewer: Hugh Evans
Principal, Newlands Secondary
College, Victoria.*