

Beth Bruno, school psychologist and freelance writer, just released the book *Wild Tulips*, a collection of entertaining stories about raising and reaching children, told from her perspectives as mother, stepmother and educator. For autographed copies of *Wild Tulips*, send email to: bbruno@snet.net.

Master Parents
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Married couple Joan and Dwayne are attorneys. Joan works for a major corporation and Dwayne is a prosecutor in the district attorney's office. Between the two of them they probably have enough brainpower to run most cities, school districts or corporations. Last year they had their first child. Each of them took three months off, consecutively, to cover the first six months of parenting, while they interviewed potential childcare providers to take over during working hours from there. They sought expert, affordable caregivers whom they could trust to love and educate their baby. Their standards were high. They tried to find a person or group of people with the same level of knowledge and expertise about child development and parenting as each of them has about the law.

What they found was a mishmash of possibilities, from in-house nannies to home care to daycare centers, none of which came close to meeting their standards. With their son's care now their highest priority, they eventually decided to reduce their professional commitments while maintaining enough income to meet their financial obligations. Joan resigned and is staying home with their son, while Dwayne seeks a different position that pays higher wages than he can earn as an assistant district attorney (to at least partially offset the loss of Joan's income). Long term, each of them wants to find part-time positions that will enable them to maintain their careers and raise their children actively and together, with minimal reliance on outside help.

There are many dual-career couples who, when they start their families, encounter the same dilemma that Joan and Dwayne did. Taking a substantial pay cut may not be an acceptable option for many of these couples. After devoting time, energy and money to developing a career, do young adults need to interrupt their careers, possibly jeopardizing them, in order to raise a family? If so, which adult quits? How do single parents handle this dilemma? Do men and women, who have worked hard to gain an excellent education and more equality in the workplace, have to give up these gains because our society has not kept pace by providing outstanding childcare environments staffed with top-notch childcare professionals? If raising children were considered as valuable as developing the next "hot" consumer product, people who are fabulous homemakers and substitute parents would be able to earn salaries of \$50,000 or more, and why not? They are contributing their talents to developing the most valuable resource of all - our nation's children!

I have thought of an approach for addressing this dilemma. Please consider the following scenario:

The growing demand for stellar child care from highly educated, competent and compassionate caregivers prompts a university couple (with small children) to propose a new graduate degree program at their university, a program leading to a master's degree in parenting. Their proposal maps out a two-year course of study from a selection of courses such as: child development (social, physical, emotional and intellectual), infant/toddler assessment, sibling relationships, fathering/mothering, play, CPR and first-aid, anatomy/physiology, language development, natural teaching techniques, creativity, music/art/dance, parenting styles in other cultures, fundraising, indoor and outdoor learning environments, small business management and community partnerships.

In addition to classwork, each semester would include field placement under the supervision of a master teacher/master parent - identified by criteria established by the university. Field placements would change each year to provide experience in different settings and work with different supervisors. Participants would be encouraged to maintain field placements throughout the intervening summer to provide continuity of learning and care to the children.

Graduates would be required to receive the equivalent of one year of post-graduate supervision to receive certification (to be established at the state level). Certification would be renewable every five years based on specific criteria. I think it would be important to establish alternate routes to certification, too, because many people become "master parents" on their own. They could demonstrate the requisite skills in a variety of ways.

This proposed graduate program would accept half male and half female candidates for the degree, so that there would be as many male as female graduates, thus infusing the early childhood scene with equal numbers of male and female role models in teaching and nurturing positions.

High demand for graduates would keep starting salaries high, generally in the same range that graduates of other professional schools like business, engineering, speech/occupational/physical therapy, master teachers and school psychologists can command. Master parents would be qualified to start or run small daycare facilities, provide role models for parents, train other caregivers, maintain partnerships with universities that initially provide funding and supervisory support for models of care and early childhood education. Model childcare centers, created at universities that offer the degree, would offer scholarships to at least half of the families whose children attend, based on need.

I envision Master Parents partnering with corporations and public school districts to restore rambling homes in downtown centers, creating home settings for early childhood care...partnering with downtown businesses for supplies, activities, music lessons, mentoring and other forms of community support. Universities around the country would develop similar programs in response to high demand and recognized needs in their states.

I envision neighborhoods where Master Parents live and stay home (as professionals) to nurture their own children as well as several other children in the neighborhood, thus contributing to the development of neighborhoods - quite a different picture than the emptying of neighborhoods in our communities today).

By creating career parents, we would elevate the status of parenting to a professional level (good parenting certainly requires a huge range of knowledge and skills), thereby making it possible for people to stay home and earn a living as homemakers, rather than arranging for child care outside the home in order to leave home and make a living.

What do you think of these ideas? How can we create a system that assures every child access to the highest possible care, teaching and nurturing in early childhood in environments that celebrate parenting and the full development of each child's potential?