DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 133 053 PS 008 974

AUTHOR McDonald, Geraldine
TITLE Two Windows on Research.
PUB DATE 20 Oct 76
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the meeting at the Auckland Institute for Educational Research (New Zealand, October 20, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Early Childhood Education; *Educational Attitudes; Educational Objectives; *Educational Practice; *Educational Research; *Educational Researchers; Educational Theories; Individual Differences; Nursery Schools; *Preschool Education; Preschool Programs; *Preschool Teachers; Program Evaluation; Research Problems; *Research Utilization; Sex Differences; Teacher Attitudes; Teaching Models; Testing
IDENTIFIERS New Zealand

ABSTRACT

Differing attitudes of researchers and preschool teachers towards research in early childhood are discussed in this paper. These differences are seen as arising from causes such as the special training of each group and the nature of the work they do, the distribution of the sexes in each group and the social institutions which back them. The concept of the whole child, generally supported in preschool teacher training, may conflict with the researcher's need to analyze and dissect. Emphasis on individual differences among children is noted as basic to general teacher thought, yet difficult to follow in research designed to develop programs for a wide range of children. Research workers' tendency to impose school-type models on preschools is attributed to their affiliation with university departments of education and psychology rather than, for example, anthropology or linguistics. Cited as a major source of differing viewpoints between preschool personnel and researchers is that workers in the preschool establishment are almost all female, while workers in the educational research establishment are predominantly male. Differences in research topics related to researcher sex are discussed in detail and attitudes towards program evaluation and pupil testing are noted. The involvement of preschool personnel in the planning of research projects affecting them is urged. (BF)

TWO WINDOWS ON RESEARCH[1]

Geraldine McDonald, NZCER

I have come here tonight to discuss the rather daunting topic of research from the viewpoint of research workers and from the viewpoint of their subjects drawing my illustrations from the early childhood area. And "subjects" will be interpreted as pre-school teachers rather than as pre-school children. I shall be quoting from overseas writers but I have tried to choose comments that fit our circumstances in New Zealand.

I am starting with the assumption that research workers and pre-school teachers usually do not see the world through the same window. And that this may lead to misunderstanding and possibly to conflict. Perhaps I had better warn you that I will be speaking of general tendencies and that when I speak of "research workers", for example, I will be ignoring variations among them in favour of emphasising trends.

I cannot hope to do more than touch on a number of issues and I hope that later you will be able to contribute to the discussion. My present task is to try to give such a discussion a basis.

Perhaps we could start by asking whether there is evidence that research workers and pre-school personnel do not always see eye-to-eye. The Oxford Pre-School Research Group (under the care of Jerome Bruner and set up by the Social Science Research Council) has been reporting its progress by means of newsletters. In Newsletter No. 3, September 1976 which described the preparation of an observation schedule for use in pre-schools, there appeared the

---

1. Address to the Auckland Institute for Educational Research, 20 October, 1976.

following passage.

> It has not all been plain sailing. The playgroup leaders have been spurring the researchers to give much more weight to social and emotional aspects. They feel the [observation] schedule, as it now stands, is too "cognitive". Granted. But how do you measure a child's happiness, insecurity, etc. Some say, for, instance, that "cruising" (a child wandering about, looking for something to do), may look bad in terms of a child's cognitive development, but the child may need a long enough period of looking on before he feels secure enough to get involved.

I think that this comment could apply to New Zealand if for playgroup you substitute playcentre or kindergarten. If you examine this extract you can see that it refers to the two views of preschool education that are currently in opposition. Stukát (1976), in a review of European research, sums up these two opposing views: "Nursery school is no more than a child-minding institution" as against, "it is merely an anticipation of regular schooling".

Lilian Katz (1970) speaking of the situation in the United States says that today the instructional model is "in". But she adds, "... I sense a great resistance to it among teachers whose ... training and experience are rooted in the pre-Sputnik, pre-Head Start era". (Katz, 1970, 44). The main reason for the instructional model of pre-school education being "in" in the United States is, I think, that it has been vigorously promoted by researchers. Perhaps we can accept then that there are differences in outlook between research workers and pre-school teachers and I shall offer some explanations for their different perceptions of the young child and of the process of education. That is, their perceptions of early childhood education. Therefore, I shall be looking at differences arising from different occupational roles and from the training for these. I shall also try to show that men and

and women have, probably by virtue of their different experiences, different perceptions of "the child" and of "education". Since pre-school teaching is almost entirely a female profession and research workers are predominantly male it would be surprising if this did not make some differences to perception. I shall, therefore, be looking at variation arising from differences in socialisation. Then I shall suggest that the ideas of research workers and the ideas of pre-school teachers may each be backed and supported by a different section of society. And, here, we have what can be called the politics of the situation. Who has most power? Who has higher status? Pre-school teachers? Research workers?

The Whole Child

One of the fundamental tenets of the pre-school establishment, and here I use the word "establishment" not in any derogatory sense but simply to refer to the mainstream in early childhood education, is that the child is a whole child. (Incidentally, this was one of the issues that Susan Isaacs pressed so strongly.) The training of people for pre-school work commonly stresses this viewpoint.

Research workers, however, work by analysis, by division and dissection. The whole child is virtually unresearchable, whereas one can come to grips with cognition (currently trendy) or of the emotions (currently lacking in chic). This difference in training is one of the major causes of differences in perception between those working in pre-schools and those studying the activities of those who work in pre-schools.

There are many people besides research workers who do not accept the "whole child" view. And of course some research workers do

accept it. One reason for non-acceptance is that the claim that every child is a whole child absorbs the moral and the rational side of human nature into the social, emotional and creative. Free play, for example, a practice which rests on the belief that the child is a whole child is often criticised on the grounds that it "allows the child to do as he pleases", that the child "does not have to take responsibility for his actions", and that he does not complete any task but simply "flits from activity to activity". It seems to me that criticisms of this kind arise because the critics are concerned that the child is not being required (or disciplined) to act morally and consciously. Those who see essential differences between the moral and rational, and the emotional and playful, find it hard to accept that free play has value. (Of course, those who support free play have a different explanation for the genesis of self discipline favouring the explanation that it emerges from a strong and happy self.) There are, however, people who do not accept the "whole child" viewpoint because it camouflages the intellect, and there are others who reject it because it camouflages the work of the will. Pre-school workers on the other hand are trained to see the child whole and their teaching experiences usually confirm this view.

Individual Differences

Another of the firmly held beliefs of the early childhood establishment is that of individual differences among children. Here again research workers may, perhaps unconsciously, have a different view. The pre-school teacher believes that she should respond to each child in her care on an individual basis. Now, say that a research worker wants to carry out some action research and plans to develop an

experimental pre-school programme. It is, in these circumstances, very difficult to follow the idea of individual differences. If you want to develop a pre-school curriculum which will apply to a wide range of children how can you possibly cater for individual differences? Montessori tried it and the result was a set of equipment that the child used in sequence. An early example of programmed learning. But how much more difficult it is to develop a teacher directed programme which caters for individual differences. So difficult, in fact, that what most of the action research carried out in the last ten years has ended up with, is a set of formalised plans for teaching children in groups.

Now even if research workers believe that children differ they may not necessarily be worried by formal teaching in groups because they have a tendency to view pre-schools as schools. By this I mean that, judging from much of the research that has been carried out in pre-school institutions, there is a predisposition for them to see classrooms and teachers rather than for them to see social groups. Certainly, in the past, they have tended to see products rather than processes. They often see the teacher's role and the child in relation to this. Pre-school workers, however, frequently ask whether the school model is appropriate for the pre-school child. And, as most of you here tonight will know there has been world-wide controversy on this issue for over a decade.

We can ask ourselves why research workers in different countries have so frequently embraced school models as appropriate for the education of the young child and I think that one of the answers is that the research workers have come mainly from university departments of education and psychology and that they are simply using ideas with which they are familiar. Had the research workers come from departments of anthropology, say, the model might have been that of

the human group. Again, had they come from departments of linguistics their research into language would undoubtedly have been different. A further explanation for the proliferation of experimental school model programmes is that research workers have felt obliged to introduce something new. Nursery school programmes based on play were the norm and so research workers couldn't repeat these, and in producing something new they turned to the model with which they were most familiar - one of a teacher and small groups - in other words a model which is derived from contemporary formal schooling.

Male and Female

If there is one major source for difference of viewpoint between pre-school workers and research workers it is that the workers in the pre-school establishment are almost all female. Workers in the educational research establishment are predominantly male. In research into pre-school, it is true, you probably find more females than in other areas of research but males are still very prominent no matter in which country one looks. What kind of differences in research are the result of the sex of the research worker? I have some information collected by Keith Pickens about educational research workers in general in New Zealand.

In Dr Pickens' survey of the research interests of members of New Zealand university departments of education and the staff of higher education or tertiary research units (NZCER, Research Information Division, 1975), there are 94 persons listed. Of these, 84 are male and 10 are female. Of the females 1 is a lecturer in nursing studies, 1 is temporary and 3 are junior lecturers.

It is clear from this survey that educational and related research by staff in tertiary institutions is almost entirely in the hands of males. If males and females carried out the same kinds of research

this difference in representation would, perhaps, be of little account. Do males and females do the same kinds of research? A study of the topics listed in the survey suggests a number of differences. The females tend to study the family, the role of women, and the development of young children. The men study the control of persons and institutions, "philosophy", and methodology. Large scale surveys tend to be carried out by males. By and large the men appear to be attracted to research into power relations (examples are: at the level of the individual the exploration of behaviour modification and studies of achievement motivation; and at the level of society the exploration of class variables). There is, of course, associated with this division, a status difference. "Objective", "mathematical", "large-scale" (and therefore remote from the subjects of study), are generally thought to be desirable research characteristics. "Subjective", "anecdotal", "small-scale" are generally considered undesirable characteristics. Which set of words apply to masculine research and which to feminine?

Pre-school research, both in New Zealand and overseas, does have a greater proportion of female practitioners than is characteristic of research at other levels of the education system but since to get their work accepted, the women, many of whom are students not staff, have to follow the general practices of the research community their work is frequently of the same kind as that of the males.

Women are often said to be nurturant and men instrumental. If men were the ones to teach very young children they might easily develop nurturant qualities. Young children suffer, become fatigued, can't cope, and experience deep shame. They burst into tears and need

consoling, they suffer rebuffs from other children and they need to be told they have worth. They lose control of their bladders and need help in changing their clothes. A young child often evokes a nurturant response in those who care for it whoever they may be, male or female. It just so happens that in our society women get a great deal more practice in nurturing than do men and hence become the experts. Both pre-school teachers and mothers may say that instrumental methods (changing behaviour, shaping responses, training children) are sometimes only marginally effective with the very young and may have unpredicatable or short-range effects.

Evaluation

The application of the school model to the pre-school can be seen very clearly in the kinds of evaluation that have been used to judge the effects of pre-school education on young children and particularly to judge the effects of different pre-school programmes. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, the Reynell Developmental Language Scales and the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale have been widely used overseas and must have created a fortune for whoever holds their copyrights. The reaction of the pre-school establishment when it found that their programmes did not appear to produce many gains on standardised measures was to say that the measures did not represent the objectives of early childhood educators. Research workers have responded by saying that early childhood educators do not seem to have measurable objectives, for example, how do you measure the development of the whole child? Research workers might also say that pre-school workers do not appear to have alternative and more acceptable methods of evaluation. Indeed in the absence of

appropriate tests, pre-school workers have often had to accept tests which clearly did not measure anything that pre-school education customarily encourages. The Bank Street College of Education in New York, however, has always been committed to the ideals of play and development and this is what one of the staff of the college has written.

> At Bank Street we long have advocated that schools be viewed as psychological fields, that education be seen as an intervention in the psychological development of a child and that evaluation of schools entail a comprehensive assessment of the developing child. While participating in the national evaluation of Project Head Start, we deplored the simplistic quality of prevailing evaluations and urged that more comprehensive evaluations be conducted .... We also believed that, without comprehensive evaluation, educators failed to assess the negative impact of some forms of schooling.
>
> The new work being done today under the auspices of behaviour modification demonstrates my point. Here we find a single-minded preoccupation with a very specific segment of behaviour change... We must begin evaluating educational programmes the way biochemical interventions are evaluated, looking for negative side-effects as well as recording the effectiveness of the treatment in achieving the main goal.
>
> (Zimiles, 1975, pp.21-22).

Of course new approaches to evaluation are now being developed and the growing popularity of open education in the United States has stimulated a search for process rather than product evaluation.

Tests

The early childhood establishment is often opposed to the use of standardised tests of intelligence and achievement with very young children on the grounds that it takes a long time for very young children to become used to strange examiners and that a young child's performance varies according to a number of variables only one of

which is intellectual ability. If I may digress for a moment, I know that when I was testing four-year-old children for their comprehension and production of a set of English words I had three sessions with each child and hence I was able to observe the changes in behaviour which took place between the first and the third sessions. Typically, on the first testing session it was difficult to get most children to do any more than point and, accordingly, the first session was entirely taken up with items which the child could answer by pointing to one of an array of objects. The second session included some more items which the child could answer by pointing. Only in the third session did the child have to speak in order to answer the tester's questions. At all three sessions, however, the child was invited to give explanations for his choices. And with these it was possible to observe the marked change in willingness and ability to respond that took place over the three sessions. One small boy, for example, was so reticent that during the first session he refused to point anything out to me and we got through the session only because he was willing to indicate objects to his dog. On the third session, however, he not only talked to me spontaneously, but in a fit of euphoria he rode his tricycle down the passageway of his house in order to attract my attention. It also incurred the wrath of his mother since he was only supposed to ride it outside.

Pre-school research projects carried out overseas have regularly employed standardised tests in order to measure what are euphemistically labelled "cognitive gains" in pre-school children. In at least a proportion of the experimental programmes reported in the literature it would appear that young children are often tested within a week of their entry to pre-school and although I have kept

my eye open for reports of exactly how the testing in various programmes was carried out, the testing procedures are seldom discussed. I was delighted, therefore, to come across the following comment in a report by Scott and Derbyshire of a pre-school project for Aboriginal children.

> Early contacts with children indicated that communication and control could not be established sufficiently in a test situation to obtain valid data; trying to force this would be a very poor start for teaching purposes and, by artificially depressing initial test scores, would inflate any "cognitive" changes measured from this baseline.
>
> (Scott & Derbyshire, 1973, 18).

I suspect that in many other projects children are taken away to a quiet room (a fear-provoking procedure for a young child) and are tested over one or two sessions, usually by someone who is not a staff member. I know that many pre-school teachers in New Zealand have objected to procedures of this kind being used with children in their care.

Here I would like to comment on something I find curious. The so-called "new" pre-schools are structured, i.e. they use teaching programmes on the school model. But their results are measured by standardised tests - which are old, not new. Furthermore, there is a tendency for items similar to the items of standardised tests to be incorporated in teaching programmes of experimental pre-schools. So what is new and what is old is rather hard to disentangle!

Reporting the Results of Research

It is widely accepted that reports of research should go first to the subjects of research if only so that the research worker can

check his results. This means that if a research worker works in a kindergarten he or she should report to the teacher and possibly to the parents of the children. It can be noted that there are certain substantial difficulties facing those who wish to communicate research results when these results relate to children from minority groups. To quote from Scott and Derbyshire again,

> If ... one is taking responsibility for trying to reduce the educational problem, the inclusion in a television broadcast of findings which added very strongly to the existing negative stereotype which the community holds for Aborigines is a source of frustration and concern ... Publicity for a project may be helpful in obtaining recognition and further funds. It may, however, have exceedingly negative outcomes for those for whose benefit such funds are solicited.
>
> (Scott & Derbyshire, 1973, p.23).

The Distribution of Power

Because early childhood education has only very recently become accepted as a proper subject for study within the university the pre-school establishment has very little intellectual authority. If differences of opinion arise about the proper way to carry out research and the views of pre-school teachers and of university teachers are in opposition then, presumably, the university view would prevail, not by virtue of its essential rightness but because of the power of the university. I think pre-school teachers often feel, "Who are we to challenge ideas that emanate from the Universities?" - or from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, I suppose! Research workers are backed by universities, pre-school workers tend to be backed by voluntary groups and by mothers.

Consciousness Raising

The Oxford Pre-School Research Group from which I quoted at the

beginning of my talk also reports that as a result of its experiences in trying to work with pre-school teachers it has developed a new aim and that is, " 'consciousness raising' for researchers and practitioners alike". I believe that this is both a desirable thing from the point of view of getting research done satisfactorily and also because it widens the horizons of both researchers and pre-school practitioners.

So far I have been discussing the research worker's perception of pre-school education. To give the picture a better balance I must also say something about the misperceptions of pre-school teachers about research. And here, as elsewhere, I am not suggesting that all pre-school teachers think this way, merely that there is a tendency for them to do so. Pre-school teachers often think that research can solve problems. Perhaps in the physical sciences and in the medical field it can. In the social sciences it can rarely do more than shed light on issues. It can enable one to make more sensible choices.

Smith and James say that,

> The early optimism about the effects of pre-schooling was matched by an equal optimism about the ease of translating research findings into practice. The belief was that research and experiment would conclusively demonstrate which were the best options, leaving the policy makers only the simple task of wider implementation.
>
> (Smith & James, 1975, p.238).

What faith we had!

Often, however, people select from research only those parts which fit their preconceived notions. Little that is new is accepted and all that happens is that already established notions are supported. Those

who work in research can usually tell you of how their own work is used in this way and even how it is misinterpreted. There are numerous examples of incorrect or misleading research findings being endlessly quoted because people want to believe them. Once a piece of research is written down it often acquires the force of Holy Writ and no amount of counter-evidence prevails. There are examples of this with John Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation, with the Getzels and Jackson claim that creativity and intelligence are two separate entities, with the Rosenthal and Jacobson claim that teacher expectation affected academic results, with the work of Bloom as interpreted to mean that half a child's adult intelligence is developed by the age of four, and with the Bereiter and Engelmann claim to have raised the intelligence of young children. All of these claims may be true but none can be supported by the evidence collected in the studies. And yet the claims were ones which, like the stories of wolf children, people desperately wanted to believe. So, therefore, people will believe anything if it suits them. And they are remarkably resistant to ideas if they do not suit them. Incidentally I am talking here about people in general and I do not intend to impute any special tendencies on the part of pre-school teachers.

Pre-school people often think that because a research worker is looking at a particular practice or procedure that the research worker believes in the worth of that practice or procedure. For example, a research worker may observe the interactions between adults and children in a particular pre-school. The pre-school teacher will tend to think that the research worker thinks that there should be lots of interaction between adults and children. Of course the research worker may think this but on the other hand he or she may not.

The fact that he or she investigates something doesn't mean that he or she supports it. After all criminologists investigate crime - presumably they do not support it.

I feel that I have hopped round touching briefly on a number of points in an effort to show that research workers and pre-school workers do have different views and that these arise from causes such as the special training of each group, the nature of the work they do, from the distribution of the sexes in each group, and from the social institutions which back them. I have not tried to decide which view of children or of education is the correct one. The truth probably lies, as it usually does, somewhere in between. I shall now stop fluttering around and offer a few concrete suggestions.

I would very much like to see pre-school workers drawn into consultation in the planning of research affecting them. The KTA could possibly have a sub-committee which examined research likely to need the co-operation of its members. Playcentres could have a similar group. Or, institutions conducting research could have advisory committees representing pre-school interests. But the suggestion I would most favour would be the inclusion of pre-school people as planners in particular research projects. I recall that David Barney has made good use of pre-school teachers for this purpose.

Secondly, it is time we all discussed such matters as the rights of children and their families with respect to research. The matter of reporting also needs to be aired. It is disappointing to the subjects of research if they are never told the results and it is insulting for them to discover that everyone else knows except themselves.

Tape recorders may make it hard to preserve confidentiality.

This needs to be discussed. And parents, especially, are often worried about their children being tested and then classified in some way which might affect the children's future lives and careers. Altogether there are many issues which need to be aired by research workers and their subjects and I hope that in the pre-school field there will be moves in this direction.

REFERENCES

KATZ, Lilian G. Teaching in pre-schools: roles and goals. *Children,* March-April, 1970, 43-48.

SCOTT, Phyllis M. and DARBYSHIRE, Margaret. ***Early Education Programmes and Aboriginal Families in Victoria.*** Bernard van Leer Foundation Pre-School Project Report, Monash University: 1969-1972.

SOUTH, George and JAMES, Terry. The effects of pre-school education: some American and British evidence. ***Oxford Review of Education*** 1:3, 1975, 223-240.

STUKÁT, Karl-Gustav. ***Current Trends in European Pre-School Research.*** NFER Publishing Company, 1976.

ZIMILES, Herbert. Relevance in evaluation: will it continue to elude us? ***CEDR Quarterly,*** 9:3, 1975, 21-24.