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ABSTRACT

Recommendations are made in this discussion concerning priorities for action by early childhood educators, and the history of early childhood education is selectively reviewed to identify patterns supporting these recommendations. It is argued that the experiences of educational pioneers reveal the need to work for program funding from a variety of sources and the need to assure that professional organizations provide support for family-operated child care centers. Similarities and differences between the kindergartens of the early 1900s and Head Start in the 1970s are pointed out. The need for vast changes in the urban job picture to encourage substantive social change and the growing professionalization of early childhood education are also briefly discussed. Concluding remarks focus on ways pioneers of early childhood education overcame their many difficulties--ways, it is asserted, that might well be emulated today. (RH)

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SELECTED PIONEERS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:
THEIR RELEVANCE FOR TODAY

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SELECTED PIONEERS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION:
THEIR RELEVANCE FOR TODAY

Early childhood education is a fascinating and challenging field, because it builds on its past and adapts to fit current situations and needs. The purpose of this paper is to note some aspects of the current early education scene which have benefitted from the models devised by and the standards set by the aforementioned pioneers of early childhood education.

Today we have an increasing need for day care services. Child care centers serve children of working families, of teenage parents, and of those who are deemed unable to care for their children because of child abuse or problems in the home. Many of these centers are serving children of low income families in slum areas of both cities and rural counties. This work parallels the work of the families discussed by my colleagues this afternoon. In all cases mentioned today, our predecessors initiated nursery schools and kindergartens for poor children. They were funded by wealthy patrons or by government agencies. Margaret McMillan, for example, wrote stirringly of her difficulties with the Education Committee of the Council of London and the Board of Education, and the trials which led to the death of her sister Rachael prior to the opening of the London nursery school which bore her name. (Braun and Edwards, 1972, P.351)

Patty Smith Hill utilized the money obtained from a copyright lawsuit regarding her composition, "Happy Birthday", to start nursery schools and kindergartens in "project" housing in New York City.

Abigail Adams Eliot directed the Ruggles Street Nursery School, charitably funded by the Women's Educational Association and located in a low income neighborhood in Boston. (Pearson, 1925, P.19) Margarethe Meyer Schurz, Kate Douglas Smith Wiggin and Elizabeth Peabody emphasized learning through play and the work of Froebel, in schools funded by their friends and other patrons of means. Hull House, the Educational Alliance, the Henry Street Settlement House and other charitable groups began preschool programs for poor children.

The Federal government has historically been involved in the funding of early childhood education programs, for example, the WPA Nursery Schools and the Lanham Act Child Care Centers. Each of these programs was organized to meet the specific needs of the nation's workforce. They were not altruistic programs for children. The first Federal preschool program was designed to give unemployed elementary school teachers jobs, and the second to provide for the children of the war industries' primarily female workers, who kept the United States military machine moving during World War II. The Head Start programs of today began with an equally pressing need - the necessity of breaking the poverty cycle in a large number of United States families.

Colleges and Universities have funded nursery schools and kindergartens in the past. Again, their purposes were not altruistic. The schools served as research stations, providing young subjects for the psychological and educational researchers at Iowa, Cornell, Yale, Chicago and Columbia Universities, to name a few. Often the preschool centers were used as laboratory schools for the preparation of teachers. This is a worthy

purpose. I am not saying that these schools were harmful to the children who attended. Quite the contrary, they usually had excellent facilities and educational programs. My point is that this function was not the purpose for which University Boards and administrators approved the opening and continued budgeting of such facilities. Study of the actual papers tracing the history of such preschools can help current College and University faculty members plan their presentation of the rationale for the continuation of early childhood laboratory schools across the country.

Therefore, what does history say to us? The pioneers' stories remind us that we must work tirelessly for the funding of early childhood education programs (nursery school and kindergarten) by public school districts (State of New Jersey - new legislation on programs for the preschool handicapped, mandatory kindergartens in all fifty states). We must work for funding by Universities, by the Federal government (Head Start, Parent Child Centers, Follow Through, Title XX day care), and funding by the "wealthy patrons" of today, namely American industry, through industry sponsored day care.

The previous speakers have informed us of the many ways our early childhood education forerunners and their families worked together and interacted with each other. The influences of religion, health and nutrition, music and literature in other family members had profound effects on the early kindergarten and nursery school developers. This type of familial early childhood center exists today, mainly in private schools run by husband

and wife or by siblings. The founders/directors of such schools have a wellspring of strength to draw on as they share and modify ideas and utilize the expertise of each to benefit the children enrolled in their programs. We should not forget that this familial pattern formed the foundation for early childhood education as we know it in the United States today. Therefore, we must make sure that support systems for family operated centers exist in our local and national early childhood professional organizations.

Early childhood education has been an agent of social change throughout the decades, beginning with Robert Owen. He abolished the labor of young children in his mill and shortened the working hours of elementary school age children. Owen's school featured music and dance, and emphasis on the outdoors. It did not have corporal punishment. Nor did it engender fear in the children. Owen felt that the things a child learns in the first years of life have serious consequences. He saw his day nursery as the beginning of his community social experiemnt. The practice of using the infant school to serve the needs of poor and working class children was spread by word of mouth and by Owen's books. (Spodek, 1983, P.15)

Free kindergarten in the United States, the next manifestation of social change, came about as a result of urban tension and the reform measures designed to deal with the problems of non-English speaking immigrants living in slums. The publicly funded kindergartens were organized to foster the integration of immigrant families into the American way of life. Better housing, public health facilities, social services in the schools and

pedagogical change were some of the reform measures initiated during that time period. (Lazerson in Anderson and Shane, 1971, P.29)

The day care center in the United States moved from "preoccupation with physical care, manners, habits and orderliness, and protection" toward incorporation of educational curricula, professionalization of caregivers and expansion of the health and welfare and the parent education aspects. (Fein and Clarke-Stewart, 1973, P.15,18) This trend was accelerated by Head Start and its companion Parent Child Centers and Follow Through Programs.

Lazerson (in Anderson and Shane, 1971,P.30) has noted the following similarities between United States kindergartens of the early 1900's and Head Start in the 1970's:

1 - Both derived from a theory of "cultural depravtion" that believes that parents cannot provide a foundation for success in the larger society.

2 - Educational reformers began with a fundamental hostility to the home and lifestyles of the poor. They sought to overcome the gap between social classes by creating a bridge between home and school. They sought to close the gap by modeling middle and upper class beliefs, actions and activities. They started parent education programs. Initially, kindergarten teachers visited homes in the afternoons, after class. Later, nursery school and kindergarten teachers invited parents to meetings at the center or classroom. Parent cooperative nursery schools had parent boards of directors, as well as comprehensive parent education programs. This bridge approach is evident, for example, in aspects of the Brigham Young University and

Trenton State College programs today.

3 - The new preschool programs usually represented pedagogical innovation, in terms of philosophy, theoretical approach, staffing patterns, teaching methodology and teacher training.

4 - Preschooling has been a source of protracted conflict between the educational establishment and the new reformers. This is evident in the embracing of the child development research of G. Stanley Hall by Anna Bryan and Patty Smith Hill when the Froebelians would not listen. It is evident from reading the reports of the International Kindergarten Union, Committee of Nineteen, where conservative, progressive and middle of the road views were presented. The fragmentation is readily apparent in examining the formation of the NANE (National Association for Nursery Education, forerunner of NAEYC) by Patty Smith Hill in New York, in 1929.

However, because of our increased sophistication about education, there are distinct differences between the kindergartens of the 1900's and early childhood education programs today.

1 - Federal financial and supervisory involvement increased through the 1960's and 70's, although it has decreased slightly in the Reagan administration. These facts have altered the decision making processes in educational circles and political debate on educational issues.

2 - Head Start and other compensatory education programs were/are aimed explicitly at the poor, while nursery schools and kindergartens began with middle and upper class children and were then made available to poor children.

Problems foreseen by Lazerson in the seventies, which we must address today are:

1 - The view that substantive social change can occur through preschooling and therefore that early childhood education is a panacea. Longitudinal studies by Weikart and the Cornell Consortium have shown that the programs begun in the 1960's led to changes in children's school related behaviors and to some changes in family life. However, Lazerson's contention that vast changes in the urban environment and the job picture were/are necessary in order to have substantive social change has proven to be valid.

2 - Lazerson's second statement, that the growing professionalization of early childhood education had led to withdrawal from community activism has proven less valid. The growth of the Children's Defense Fund, under the direction of Marion Wright Edelman, and the movement of parents into policy making roles in many Federally funded education programs has formed a foundation for greater political action. One graphic demonstration of this point was the twentieth anniversary March on Washington in June, 1983. (Anniversary of Martin Luther King's "I Had A Dream" speech).

How did the pioneers of early childhood education overcome their many difficulties? They used techniques which might well be emulated today.

1 - They had sound knowledge of the principles of child development, and curriculum and methods appropriate for young children. They were able to articulate their beliefs based on their knowledge, and to answer questions posed by potential

patrons (sources of funds) and professional educational administrators.

2 - They firmly believed that all young children needed, and could benefit from early childhood education. They, therefore, kept working, even when the going got rough.

3 - The pioneers had contacts with potential benefactors which they maintained and added to over the years. For example, Snyder (1972, P.48) tells us that Milton Bradley, the toy manufacturer, had been asked to produce Froebelian materials and to publish Froebel's books in English. He was not interested until he heard a lecture given by Elizabeth Peabody which converted him to an enthusiastic supporter of the kindergarten. He proceeded to produce the materials until 1943. Today we must follow their lead, and make and maintain as many contacts as we can, in as wide a range of disciplines, agencies and areas as we can.

We must believe strongly that young children need quality education and care in centers which support their physical, affective and cognitive development.

We must constantly seek new sources of funding while attempting to maintain existing sources. President Reagan and former Congressman Coyne have exhorted us to pair our schools with agencies in the private sector. We must develop adequate presentations for the business and foundation worlds. We must be able to discuss the benefits of early childhood education in both concrete monetary and concrete social advantage terms.

4 - The pioneers of early childhood education used organizations, existing ones and those they formed themselves, to spread the word about the needs of young children and the benefits

of preschool education. Can we do less? We must strengthen our active participation in our national and international early childhood education organizations. We will gain information and knowledge and make professional contacts. We can use these as a launching pad to publicize the current needs of young children locally, nationally and internationally. We can provide the stimulus for necessary change. There is strength in the numbers of people supporting young children.

What does the history of early childhood education say to us today?

1 - Learn from the past - about the importance of educating the "whole child", about making the program fit the child, and not the reverse, about considering all areas of development - health and nutrition, as well as education.

2 - Know what you are talking about. Historically early childhood educators have espoused individualization and flexibility in teaching methods. Teacher training has been considered of great importance to all the pioneers in early education.

3 - Make appropriate contacts - among business and professional people and among parents and families. All are good resources.

4 - Be firm in your commitment to young children.

In this way, costly problems with people, programs, facilities and money may be avoided, exceptional programs may be replicated, and young children will benefit.

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