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AUTHOR Shinman, Sheila M.
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ABSTRACT

An overview is provided in this discussion of major developments in preschool education in the United Kingdom from 1973 to 1983. The first section offers general observations and covers major trends: rapid social change, the low priority accorded to preschooling, diversity as a key feature of early childhood education, children with special needs, day care, and part-time provision. The second section reviews recent research and development initiatives; discussion focuses on research conducted in institutional and home settings. Institutional research reviewed centers on (1) play in nursery school, playgroup, and day nursery; (2) an ecological perspective on children's play and behavior; (3) the adult role in language development; (4) the impact of organization and structure on the quality of care; (5) transition and continuity in early childhood education; and (6) parental involvement. Research reviewed on home-based services and support covers (1) childminding (home day care), (2) educational home visiting, and (3) community-based support and preparation for parenthood. The third section summarizes the review of research, and the fourth section points out implications for educators. It is concluded that considerable progress has been made in understanding the needs of families with young children and in responding effectively to those needs. (RH)

TRENDS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Sheila M. Shinman
Brunel University

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
College of Education
University of Illinois
805 W. Pennsylvania Ave.
Urbana, IL 61801-4897
(217) 333-1386

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this discussion is to provide an overview of major developments in preschool education in the United Kingdom from 1973 to 1983. Research emphasis will be on later studies, since ongoing work of the early 1970s has been comprehensively reviewed elsewhere (Tizard, 1975).

Interests have changed considerably over this period. The preoccupation with issues of compensatory education, with class-based studies of cognitive and linguistic programs, and with topics encouraged by anticipated expansion of preschooling gave way in the mid-1970s to a concern about the overall structure and efficacy of preschool policy and practice. Questions that latterly occupy the minds of researchers and practitioners include the following: What constitutes "quality" in the various preschool contexts? What is meant by parental involvement, and how can it be fostered? How can disadvantaged parents who do not come forward to use services be reached? and, How can parents be supported in bringing up their children? It is clear from these questions that the extension of interest from child and school to include parents and home, which is characteristic of the 1970s, also dictates that "preschool education" be interpreted here in its broadest sense and not be confined to formal preschool settings.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS AND MAJOR TRENDS

Rapid Social Change

Heightened tension has been a feature of the 1970s and early 1980s. Ironically, improved living conditions--new towns, tower blocks, estates on

city outskirts--have resulted in unforeseen problems, notably increased isolation, especially for mothers with young children (Brown & Harris, 1978; Gittis, 1976).

Emotional strain clearly underlies figures that show a dramatic increase in the dissolution of marriages (one in three currently end in divorce). One in eight families is likely to be headed by a single parent. Because many divorced parents remarry, an increasing number of children will be brought up by a stepfather or stepmother (Wicks & Rimmer, 1980). All this is not to say that happy adjustments cannot be made, but is rather to suggest that the process leading to adjustment and the business of coping alone carry additional pressures and strains (Ferri, 1976; Ferri & Robinson, 1976).

Added to these changes in family structure are the contrast in conditions and values between urban and rural families (Centre for the Study of Rural Society, 1978), changing patterns of women's employment, economic and psychological pressures of high unemployment, the impact of technological change, and over it all the malaise of living in a nuclear age. Clearly, we have a rapidly changing environment conducive to tension, self-questioning, and political and family debate.

Low Priority Accorded to Preschooling

The 1970s began with high expectations. The Conservative government of the United Kingdom affirmed the importance of the family and the intention of making preschooling available for all children aged 3 and 4 whose parents wanted it. Provision was to be mainly in the form of part-time places in nursery classes. According to the Conservative administration, particular attention would be paid to disadvantaged families (Department of Education and Science, 1972).

However, doubts concerning formal education as a medium of social change, together with economic uncertainty and latterly recession, have resulted in substantial cutbacks in government support for education and social services. A falling birthrate initially cushioned children under 5 from these effects, but since the upward turn in the birthrate in 1978, drastic and uneven pruning of much state provision has become increasingly evident.

Diversity: A Key Feature of Early Childhood Education

Preschooling is not compulsory in the United Kingdom. In theory, children under 5 (that is, those of preschool age) may stay at home or attend some form of external provision. Nursery schools are provided free by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) or offered on a fee-paying basis by private enterprise to meet the educational and other needs of children between 3 (sometimes 2) and 5 years of age.[1] There are normally two sessions each day, from 9:30 a.m. to 12 noon and/or from 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Schools are open during term time only--about 40 weeks in the year. Attendance may be full or part-time. Nursery classes are similar to state-run nursery schools, but they are attached to a primary school. The majority of preschool places made available in the post-1972 period of expansion were in the first classes in infant schools--that is, in reception classes. Age of entry varies between 4 and 5½ years. All these types of provision generally conform to high standards. They are staffed by qualified teachers and by assistants who are nursery nurses. Increasingly, parents are made welcome.

Playgroups are another care alternative. They are usually set up outside the statutory provision by parents, by private enterprise, or by

voluntary organizations to give 3- and 4-year-olds the opportunity to mix with others and to provide them with safe and satisfying play. While a small proportion of playgroups have extended hours to meet the needs of working mothers, the great majority offer only part-time facilities.

The main sources of income for most playgroups are still the charge they make to parents and fund raising. Fees vary considerably. About one-third of such groups receive minimal grant aid, mainly from the county or district council, which is also responsible for social services in the area--that is, the local authority (Pre-School Playgroups Association National Training Committee, 1982). Some groups have trained supervisors, and all playgroups are registered with a local authority social services department. Many playgroups are characterized by the extent to which they involve and support parents.

Children of working mothers may, if they or their parents fulfill certain criteria of need, attend state-run day nurseries. Parents are tested for means of support and are often referred by welfare services. Premises are open year-round from about 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Most children attend full-time and are often cared for in family groups. Most staff are qualified nursery nurses, with some assistants without specific qualifications. Some day nurseries or creches are provided by private or voluntary organizations, as well as by employers. Such nurseries may be free or heavily subsidized, but all must register with the local authority social services department.

Otherwise, children of working mothers are cared for by relatives or by childminders. A childminder is defined, under the 1968 Health and Public Service Act, as any one who "for reward takes any child to whom they are not related into their homes and cares for him for two hours or

more during the day" (Law Reports Statutes, Pt. 1, 1968, p. 1183). Childminders are normally, though not necessarily, women. They are required to register with the social services department of the local authority; it is the responsibility of the local authority to inspect homes and to ensure they meet statutory health and safety regulations.

In general, the standard of staffing and equipment in state-run provision is high, but elsewhere a wide range of precept and practice is found. Proportions of children attending different forms of provision also vary greatly. Overall, approximately 30% of children receive no formal preschooling (Bone, 1977). The chart provided, representing day care for children under 5, shows that in national terms, childminders provide the majority of day care places. However, even more children are cared for by relatives (Central Statistical Office, 1983). Playgroups account for most part-time places.

Insert chart about here

The statistics shown in this chart fail to convey the considerable differences that exist in the availability of provision. For example, more than half the children living in rural areas attend no form of registered provision, as compared with 18% in the inner cities (Department of Education and Science, 1975). Similar wide regional variations are found within and among local authorities (Haystead, Howarth, & Strachan, 1980).

Further inconsistency stems from the division of responsibility for services between the Department of Education and Science, and the Department of Health and Social Security. Nursery schools and nursery classes are the responsibility of the former, while all other forms of provi-

sion fall under the aegis of the latter. Consequently, part-time and full-time provision are usually separate, both physically and administratively; there is a clear distinction between "education" and "care." Day nurseries, for example, are staffed by nursery nurses and not by qualified teachers. As a result, there is concern over a possible lack of educational input in that form of provision. Thus, even though it is widely held that there is very little difference among types of provision with respect to the way children spend their time (Tizard, 1975), children under 5 in the United Kingdom nevertheless may have widely different preschool experiences. The problem is compounded in inner-city areas characterized by cultural diversity. There the gap between home and school experience may be even more considerable (van der Eyken, Michell, & Grubb, 1979).

Children with Special Needs

The last decade has seen considerable progress in ensuring coherent and comprehensive provision for handicapped children and their families. Higher financial benefits have gone some way in alleviating everyday problems. Professionals have manifested greater awareness of the difficulties facing many such families and, more importantly, of the role parents can play in helping their children. The Court Report on Child Health Services (Committee on Child Health Services, 1976) underlined the support that professionals should give all parents: "We have found no better way to raise a child than to re-inforce the abilities of his parents to do so" (p. 2). The report of the Warnock Committee (Department of Education and Science, 1978) on the education of handicapped children (estimated nationally at 20% of pupils) spelled out the following message: "Unless parents are seen as equal partners in the educational process, the

purpose of our report will be frustrated" (p. 150). In the light of the report, the Education Act of 1981 established a new framework requiring special educational provision for children whether in special or ordinary schools. Archaic terms like "educationally subnormal" have been replaced by the concept of special educational needs; this new concept embraces not only physical and mental disabilities but any kind of learning difficulty experienced by a child, providing it is significantly greater than that experienced by the majority of children the same age. This concept excludes difficulties that arise solely because the language of instruction is different from the language of the child's home. Parents have also been accorded new rights: for example, to information and consultation, to make their views known during formal assessment, and to a copy of all the evidence on which a decision has been made regarding a child's needs.

Significantly, the Act gives legislative backing to the principle of integration, whereby authorities have duties to provide for children with special educational needs in ordinary schools (Department of Education and Science, 1981-a). While the 1981 Act does not go as far as legislation already in force in other countries (for example, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in the United States), it nevertheless marks an important step forward towards a genuinely multidisciplinary and flexible approach in which "shared care" is the keynote.

Day Care

Growing demand. As the 1970s progressed, it became clear that provision of part-time and nursery places as envisaged in the Education White Paper (Department of Education and Science, 1972) was inappropriate for a substantial proportion of children under 5 (Bone, 1977; Tizard, Moss, & Perry, 1976). This fact is hardly surprising given the dramatic

changes in attitudes and lifestyles that gathered impetus in the 1970s. The postwar trend towards smaller families of one or two children has meant women spend less of their lives bearing and rearing children and feel more able to work outside the home (Wicks & Rimmer, 1980). Recession has forced many women into the labor market to supply or to supplement the family income. Many others are determined both to follow a career and to have a family. While data for 1978-80 suggest that the trend for married women ages 16 to 59 with dependent children to seek paid employment has leveled off at 54%, a substantial proportion (46%) remain at home (Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, 1982). The explanation for this situation may lie in an increase in the general fertility rate and in the effect of the recession on availability of jobs and day care rather than in any significant decrease in the numbers of mothers wishing to work outside the home.

Thus the persistent and ongoing lobby for more day care gained substantial ground during this period (Equal Opportunities Commission, 1978; Hughes, Mayall, Petrie, Moss, & Pinkerton, 1980). This lobby is identified largely with the view that the state should take increased responsibility for children, for they represent a major investment in the country's future. Day care in the form of day nurseries is perceived as being just one pressing aspect of adequate health, education, and social services. Others, however, have argued against any form of group day care for children under 5 (Leach, 1979), expressing the view that adequate benefits should be available for mothers who wish to stay at home with their young children (Pringle, 1979) and that no one should bring a child into the world without being prepared to devote 3 years to it (Pringle, 1980).

Improved status of childminding. Also during this period, attitudes toward childminding changed. Childminders offer the nearest alternative to a child's own home, and there has been growing recognition on the part of central and local government that good childminders have a significant part to play in the total day care provision for children under 5. This trend is indicated by the appointment of specialist childminding support workers by local authority social services departments, a procedure that has become commonplace since the mid-1970s. It is notable too that the National Childminding Association has received a large proportion of government funding for "new initiatives" by voluntary organizations in the preschool field.

Family centres. Emphasis has also shifted away from simple care provision for children of working mothers to the need to educate and support mothers deemed inadequate. Community-based projects called family centres have mushroomed. They range from quite large centres, which have day care as their core activity, to small neighborhood projects. Such schemes vary widely, but they are normally part of preventive social work and are generally committed to merging the lessons of community work with social work so that neighborhood becomes important and organizing groups becomes a regular activity (Birchall, 1982-a; Warren & Adamson, 1982).

Combined nursery centres and children's centres. Attempts to combine day care and education in nursery centres, which offer a choice for mothers and a comprehensive form of provision, were initially disappointing. In spite of greater educational emphasis for children in day care, the distinction between care and education lingered in staff attitudes toward parents and children (Ferri, Birchall, Gingell, & Gipps, 1981).

Nevertheless, ideas pursued in some pioneer children's centres--providing open access to all parents in a defined catchment area and encouraging parental involvement in management as well as in everyday activities--have made a considerable positive impact on practitioners and policy makers (Moss, Bax, & Plewis, 1979). Overall, findings have drawn attention to the need to reconsider the training and preparation of all who work with young children and their families.

Part-time Provision

Continuing demand. A comprehensive survey (Bone, 1977) supported by General Household Survey figures for 1982 suggested not so much an overwhelming demand for full-time work by women with children under 5 as their desire for progressively more part-time preschool provision as their children grow older (see Bone, 1977, p. 15, Table 3,6). Indeed, between 1971 and 1981, the percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds attending nursery schools and classes (i.e., part-time provision) increased from 19 to 40% (Central Statistical Office, 1982), a reflection of demand as well as increased provision. The growth of the playgroup movement over the past two decades also testifies to demand for part-time provision. By 1982, there were 12,000 member playgroups belonging to the National Pre-School Playgroups Association and catering to 555,000 children (Pre-School Playgroups Association Research and Information Committee, 1983).

Consolidation and extension of the playgroup movement. It is a striking fact that playgroups have achieved such remarkable status and credibility. The Pre-School Playgroups Association is a mere 21 years old, with its roots in the determination of a few mothers to set up what was initially seen as stopgap provision against government inaction over nursery schooling. Yet the needs of the embryo association as defined in the

1974 address by the organization's president (Plowden, 1974)-- for recognition by all local authorities as a service valued by those who use them, for support for volunteers and area organizers by social services, for extension of courses, for research and documentation, and for finance for individual playgroups, especially in disadvantaged areas--have, to a marked degree, come about. It appears that a solid core of women are prepared to take considerable responsibility for their children's preschooling and show a high level of satisfaction both on their own behalf and on the behalf of their children (Gray & McMahon, 1982).

Activities among member groups have diversified over the past 10 years. In spite of doubts expressed about the ability of playgroups to meet the needs of some disadvantaged children and families (Ferri & Niblett, 1977), there has been an expansion of work in this field (Overton, 1981; Scottish Pre-School Playgroups Association Playgroups in Areas of Need Sub-Committee, 1977). This includes pioneer projects aimed at breaking down the isolation of childminders and the children in their care by setting up informal groups and courses along playgroup lines (Shinman, 1979). Increased work among ethnic minorities and involvement with families and children with special needs also followed the Warnock Report (Department of Education and Science, 1978) and the Education Act of 1981 (Ferri, 1982; Pre-School Playgroups Association Research and Information Committee, 1983).

Cooperation between secondary schools and playgroups followed the rise in the school-leaving age from 15 to 16 in 1972-73. Many schools were anxious to give pupils in child development courses practical experience and, with the dearth of state preschools, sought placement for them in playgroups. At this time, youngsters are also being placed in playgroups

from a wide range of Further Education College courses and from government-funded projects designed to help unemployed school-leavers (Scottish Pre-School Playgroups Association Working Party (1978). Overall, 54% of playgroups are involved in this work (Pre-School Playgroups Association Research and Information Committee, 1983). In consequence, playgroups now figure in the school-based examination Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), taken by pupils around the age of 15 or 16 years and aimed at students of middle ability. Increasingly, a significant part of the Pre-School Playgroup Association's work has been provision of opportunities for adults wishing to learn more about preschool children. Comparison of figures for the years 1979-80 and 1980-81 show dramatic growth. In 1 year, courses that aim to enhance parents' confidence in their ability to meet their children's needs increased from 1,700 to 2,300, and the number of students increased from 27,000 to 38,400 (Pre-School Playgroups Association National Training Committee, 1982).

Distance learning. The Open University was established at Milton Keynes in 1969 by Royal Charter. Its first aim was to provide university education for adults in their own homes through correspondence texts, radio, television, and a network of contacts and local tutors. During the latter part of the 1970s, however, it began to work in close collaboration with outside agencies, notably the Pre-School Playgroups Association and the Health Education Council, in an attempt to meet the needs of people who might be deterred by a conventional academic approach. Thus, Open University community education courses tend to be short, easily assimilated, and of practical relevance to people at all stages of life, including parents expecting their first baby or those bringing up a toddler or preschool-age child (Wolfson, 1982).

Rapid growth of mother and toddler clubs. During the 1970s, clubs for mothers with very young children at home also became widely recognized as a vital link in the network of family support, filling the gap between postnatal care and the child's introduction to nursery school or playgroup. Such clubs are started and supported by mothers themselves, by community workers, health visitors, or vicars, as well as by playgroup leaders (Hanton, 1977). Each club is independent and is not obliged to register with the local authority social services department. Consequently, there are no official figures to indicate the extent of growth. Nevertheless, in a survey of over 1,000 clubs carried out in 1977, 56% had been started since January of 1975 (Pre-School Playgroups Association Working Party, 1978), and growth appears to continue unabated (Pre-School Playgroups Association Research and Information Committee, 1983):

> The "typical" club meets in a community or church hall for up to two hours one afternoon a week, except school holidays. Mothers sit and chat in the same room as the children and play with the children at activities which probably include some kind of "messy" play. There is probably no regular playleader, tho' there is an organizer who may include this among her roles. Fees are supplemented by fund-raising. Some, if not all, the mothers take some share in organizing the group and running the session. (Pre-School Playgroups Association Working Party, 1978, p. 1)

Summary

The foregoing discussion indicates the broad developments of early childhood education in the United Kingdom. Overall, emphasis lies in flexibility of approach and preference for local solutions to local needs rather than in the imposition of a national blueprint.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

It is diversity of experience and our lack of knowledge about how to promote competence and skills in all preschool children that have formed

the baseline for recent research and development. Following the 1972 Education White Paper, when major expansion in preschool care was anticipated, much research was commissioned by the Department of Education and Science, the Scottish Education Department, the Department of Health and Social Security, the Social Science Research Council, and the Schools Council (Department of Education and Science, 1981-b). Research into the processes of early childhood education has been pursued in both institutional and home-based settings. Observational techniques were frequently employed, for the 1970s witnessed a turning away from experimental design.

The Institutional Setting

Play in nursery school, playgroup, and day nursery. One common aim of all preschooling is to provide an environment that will stimulate and satisfy the child's developing needs. Yet doubts have been voiced as to how far all children in the preschool play to their best advantage (Bruner, 1980), given that there is little difference among types of provision in the way children spend their time (Cleave, Jowett, & Bate, 1982; Ferri et al., 1981; Hutt, 1979). Advocates of the traditional philosophy of nursery schools maintain that free play in a planned, prepared, and organized setting is all that is required. Ideally, the teacher will be aware of the child's activities and will respond in such a way as to encourage neglected occupations, prolong concentration, and foster language skill (Parry & Archer, 1975; Webb, 1975).

Even though belief has waned that highly structured compensatory programs can be successfully integrated into the English nursery school curriculum (see literature reviewed by Woodhead, 1976), several recent studies have noted that children too often seem to pass the time in occupa-

tions that do not demand imaginative or complex play (Tizard, Philips, & Plewis, 1975). About 10% of 3- and 4-year-olds spend their time "cruising" and drifting about aimlessly (Cleave et al., 1982; Ferri et al., 1981). One inference is that, when fostering skills involving thought rather than feeling or movement, a more structured approach is needed. The basis for this argument is that children benefit intellectually from activities when they choose their own goals; they know how far their efforts are successful because there is feedback and a consequent sense of achievement. In comparison, pretend games (such as play with dolls and cars) entail no commitment to a goal; these games are even used for "cover or just plain rest" (Sylva, Roy, & Painter, 1980, p. 64). Yet children undoubtedly benefit in other ways from relaxing activities that encourage talk among themselves or from physical exertion indulged for the sheer pleasure of it. Indeed, it has been suggested that a sense of relaxation and ease is the necessary precondition for fantasy play (Hutt, 1979). But such occupations do not, it is argued, involve goals or planning--or consequently complex, elaborated play (Sylva et al., 1980).

In the study conducted by Sylva et al. (1980), observations of 120 children for a total of 4,800 minutes were carried out, focusing on the extent to which a child is enabled to concentrate and to elaborate play. A painstaking method of observing and recording the activities and language of one child (the "Target Child"), developed by Holmes and McMahon (1977), was used. Attention was divided between boys and girls ages 3½ to 4½ and 4½ to 5½ enrolled in three kinds of part-time preschool: nursery school, nursery class, and playgroup.

Activities were then examined to decide how "challenging" they were and how far they were likely to "stretch" a child. In rank order, high-

yield activities included music (when not led by an adult), small-scale construction, art (where the child chose the medium), large-scale construction, and activity with structured materials. Moderate-yield activities were pretend play and manipulative play with small toys, while low-yield occupations were defined as nonplayful interaction, informal games, rule-bound games, and gross motor play. Least challenging of all were social play, "horsing around," and giggling. Two other indications of richness in play identified by the investigators were longer spans of concentration and the degree of absorption. These were manifest primarily in play with structured materials, pretend, small-scale construction and art, and adult-led groups such as singing or storytelling. Least absorbing activities were informal games and adult-directed art.

When a distinction was drawn between centres that required children to take part in at least two compulsory educational activities each session and those with no such patterning, it transpired that children in the structured programs had three times as much play with structured materials as those in entirely unstructured environments. Importantly, much of this was in free play sessions, a situation indicating that children chose to persist with such activities.

An ecological perspective. Another focus of research interest has been the effect of environmental factors on children's play and behavior. Such factors include, for example, group size, noise levels, playroom design, and the way staff utilize resources.

In the study just described (Sylva et al., 1980), advantage lay with small groups (most usually playgroups), which manifested greater contact between children and adults, a higher level of intellectual play, and more pretend play. More physical play was characteristic of larger centres,

while small, secluded areas like the "home corner" encouraged rich dialogue.[2] Further evidence that smaller areas are associated with more educationally valuable activities accrue from a correlational study of staff and children in three types of preschool building: conversions of old buildings with fairly small rooms; open, airy buildings with high ceilings and rectangular playrooms; and open-plan designs with low ceilings and an irregular shaped room. Findings suggest that more open settings are associated with higher noise levels, which interfere with activities of potentially high educational yield (like staff-child dialogue). In addition, those children who tend to wander aimlessly about are also those least likely to attract staff attention in open-plan units, while new children spend more time alone during the settling-in period (Neill, 1982).

Experimentally based studies largely support this "small is beautiful" thesis. For example, Smith and Connolly (1980) set up a playgroup in a church hall in a north country industrial city and employed three experienced staff to run it. Two independent groups of socioeconomically mixed children attended two mornings a week. The environment was then manipulated by varying each of the available resources for up to 60 sessions and observing and recording individual children's behavior. Classes of 10, 20, and 30 children were varied in such a way that the same children could be compared in a large or small class. On balance, here too the advantage lay with smaller classes, though for reasons different from those in the previous studies cited. Specifically, in small groups children were more likely to make friends and to become involved in sociodramatic play. Shy, withdrawn children were found to be particularly vulnerable in large groups.

As the ratio of staff to children was increased from 1:4 to 1:14, so talk between children increased and that between adults and children became more prohibitive and one-sided in character. Further, the more outgoing, competent children tended to monopolize conversation with staff to the detriment of those who were shyer and more withdrawn (Smith & Connolly, 1980). Similarly, children with special needs placed in ordinary schools, as recommended by the Warnock Report, also tend to be those who stand ignored on the sidelines (Chazan, Laing, Shackleton-Bailey, & Jones, 1980; Clark, Robinson, & Browning, 1984).

The adult role in language development. Many studies (notably Tizard, 1979) have reported disappointingly low levels of conversation between adults and children in the preschool setting. Evidence from tapescripts of adult-child interaction take us a stage further. In their own classrooms or playgroups, a total of 24 nursery teachers and play-group leaders each made ½-hour recordings designed to catch typical but varied segments of the day. Analysis of approximately 1,500 minutes of talk aimed to discover the effects of different "teaching styles" (Wood, McMahon, & Cranstoun, 1980).

In general, styles that involved shared experience and play with children--activities that in more structured programs encouraged elaborated play--were those least in evidence. Yet it was the adult who, to a great extent, had control over the ease and fluency of children's conversation. Two characteristics of children's talk with adults emerged as major obstacles in the development of sustained conversation: Children were inclined to jump into a conversation without preamble, and they tended to pick up a word from an ongoing conversation and go off at a tangent.

Adults tended to react in one of three ways. Some acknowledged and responded to every opening gambit or interjection (a style that manifestly did not prolong conversation). Others used a strategy that ignored the child and persisted with their own line of questioning. To the surprise of teachers participating in the study, this latter style of conversation was their most frequent type of response. A third type of response was also noted: teachers asked a question aimed at stimulating the child to reply, then showed interest in a nondirective, relaxed way so as to leave room for the child to elaborate along lines of his or her own choosing. Tape-script evidence suggested that for the adult to then respond with another question was often to constrain the flow of conversation. A more constructive strategy was to recast what the child had been saying or make a noncommittal response. In probing further the question of control of conversation, analysis suggested that those children talking with adults with the least "controlling" style asked more questions, contributed more often, and went on to elaborate the subject. In contrast, adults who exerted most control appeared to inhibit prolonged and complex conversations.

Such conclusions have much in common with studies that emphasize the potential of adult-child dialogue in fostering language development (Clark et al., 1984; Donaldson, 1978; Tough, 1977; Turner, 1977). Sensitivity in the adult is crucial. Tough (1977) argues the need for the teacher to work in an informal situation, building on the individual child's innate curiosity and assuming that, if the child is helped to use language with meaning, he or she will progress naturally from the simple to the complex. Tough's pioneering studies focused on disadvantaged children, however, and were recorded under quasi-experimental conditions; she

assumed that differences among children in the ways they used language were a reflection of differing kinds of talk they experienced with their parents.

Other challenging evidence has shown that even disadvantaged children have rich conversations with their mothers at home (Tizard, 1979). Few language differences were found to emerge between middle and working class children in a direct observational study of 165 children at home (Davie, Hutt, Vincent, & Mason, 1984). Further, Wells (1981) examined talk in the context of school and home in a broad-based and carefully controlled two-stage study of 129 children assessed between 15 and 42 months and again between 39 and 66 months. Each child was observed 10 times at 3-month intervals. In the home, this was achieved by a radio microphone on a lightweight harness under the child's top garment; the microphone transmitted continuously and did not hinder the child's movement. This "fly on the wall" technique revealed scant evidence of mismatch between home and school in the patterns of asking and answering questions. What differences there were concerned grammatical structures and speaking rights that, Wells argues, stem from different social relationships and different ratios of adults to children. Here again, it was suggested that it is the strategies that adults use to develop and extend children's language that count.

Impact of organization and structure on the quality of care. Several studies have shown that, in actuality, the amount of adult-child contact is disappointingly low in most care settings (Cleave et al., 1982; Ferri et al., 1981). In particular, staff in day nurseries tend to be less involved in children's activities than those in nursery schools and playgroups. Yet contact with adults (even as passive presences) has been associated with

children's spending longer periods in concentrated play (Garland & White, 1980; Sylva et al., 1980; Tyler, Foy, & Hutt, 1979).

One question raised by this observation is how far organization and structure of the preschool affect the style of adult-child interaction and hence the quality of care (Bruner, 1980). These twin aspects--care provided for children and organizational patterns--were the focus of a study of nine day nurseries in London, three of which were recommended for good practice by local authority social services departments (Garland & White, 1980). Each day nursery was distinctive in its organization and ethos. Programs ranged from a specialist nursery staffed by trained teachers, who lay particular stress on language training for ethnic minority children, to an all-day playgroup in unprepossessing premises but with a friendly relaxing atmosphere; from a state day nursery designed and built for that purpose, which encouraged and achieved a high degree of parent participation to a nursery based in a suburban hospital specifically for the children of nurses who worked there. The researchers were hoping to determine aspects of organization or structure that would promote a secure environment. They took emotional security to be paramount and a necessary basis on which cognitive skills could develop.

The range of care and organization observed was wide, yet certain related patterns were discernible. These patterns owed much to the objectives of the organization and to the philosophy of the person or group (both internal and external to the institution) reponsible for policy and day-to-day decisions. Clearly, nurseries with roots embedded in child-centered progressive education will differ fundamentally from those in the "caregiving" tradition, which historically tends towards condescending and authoritarian attitudes. The existence of such differences underlines the

importance of an explicit contract between staff and parents to make clear what both have in mind. The study further suggests that a collaborative relationship among staff members within the unit and among adults and children enhances the quality of children's play and conversational exchanges (Garland & White, 1980).

Transition and continuity in early childhood education. A somewhat different orientation to quality of care and to the effect of different styles of control and deployment of resources concerns transition from one type of setting to another. Starting school or moving from one setting to another is an important event in the child's life. It can be a traumatic experience for parents and children as they adjust to the emotional, social, and intellectual demands of a strange environment.

Two recent studies pinpoint problems of transition from home to preschool (Blatchford, Battle, & Mays, 1982) and from preschool to primary school (Cleave et al., 1982). The first focused on one geographical area and involved interviews with parents and with staff in nursery schools and playgroups, with the addition of an intensive study of a small sample of children from a few months before they started school until about 1 year into the nursery. Major sources of discontinuity were found by Blatchford et al. (1982) to be the wide range of settings, different ages of entry, and different levels of curriculum planning, together with parents' lack of knowledge regarding available services. A gentle, staggered introduction into preschool, with mothers present, eased the child's adjustment to the new environment and encouraged parents' later involvement.

Mothers experienced greater stress when their children started school than had been anticipated but adapted over a period of about 10 weeks.

Most children, however, did not show signs of stress and settled in within 3 weeks. Much of the first 4 weeks was spent in solitary play; from the third to ninth week, preschoolers engaged in contacting other children. There was relatively infrequent contact between adults and children. Popular activities included outside play with sand and water, play with constructional toys, and dramatic play, although in terms of time spent "just waiting and watching" predominated.

The second study (Cleave et al., 1982) followed the progress of 36 children in five different LEA areas through the transition period from preschool to primary school by means of direct observation and face-to-face interviews with parents and teachers. The study was both longitudinal (where children were concerned) and cross-sectional (across six types of provision).

Discontinuities were most marked for children coming to the infant school straight from home or from a childminder or small group. Such children had to adjust to a longer day, to larger numbers of adults and children, and to a very different curriculum with unfamiliar activities in a school setting that could be confusing in both design and layout. Physical education was identified as a particular source of anxiety; this activity called for very sensitive handling. As Ferri et al. (1981) reported in relation to experimental centres that combined nursery education and day care, large numbers of staff and children and many comings and goings tended to inhibit the development of confidence, independence, and sociability in new entrants.

Practical recommendations made by Cleave et al. (1982) to ease such problems include a very gradual introduction to the new setting and experiences (for example, postponement of school dinners for a week or two)

and imaginative preparation for introductory visits to the infant school, in which familiar playthings like sand and water are made available. Finally, the importance of encouraging parental support is given particular prominence.

Parental involvement. The influence parents can have in the achievement of their children is well documented (see reviews in Smith, 1980; Tizard, Mortimor, & Burchall, 1981), and exhortations to foster "parental involvement" to this end are commonplace. The value of such involvement to parents as opposed to children is less widely acknowledged. Despite all that has been written, considerable confusion and lack of consensus persist. A major task for research has been that of clarifying the issues and teasing out ideas underlying use of the term (Ferri & Niblett, 1977; Smith, 1980; van der Eyken, 1979).

The development of community nurseries in the 1970s illustrates one interpretation in which parental control is the crucial variable. These nurseries (of which there are now about 20, mainly in the London area) are set up by groups of parents or local people to serve the needs of their neighborhood. They aim to provide flexible, integrated services whereby parents assert their right to have a say in their children's education (Hughes et al., 1980; van der Eyken, 1979).

Another viewpoint commonly held in playgroups emphasizes shared responsibility. Playgroup philosophy holds that the "deepest involvement and shared responsibility often occur when all parents want to be involved in the decision-making process" (Pre-School Playgroups Association Working Party, 1980, p. 41). Most recent evidence suggests, however, that it is in parent-run playgroups where mothers help and are welcome at playgroup sessions, as compared with those where participation is solely at the

management level, that mothers who worry about how they are bringing up their children appear to gain confidence in themselves (Gray & McMahon, 1982).

A further aspect of experiential thinking within the playgroup movement is the belief that involvement is essentially a learning process for parents and carries with it a core element of active responsibility at every stage (Pre-School Playgroups Association Working Party, 1980). Indeed, parents may derive benefit from involvement, gaining in confidence and self-esteem as parents (Smith, 1980), as well as developing skills in dealing with adults (Henderson, 1978). In contrast, the rationale for parental participation in the nursery school is based on benefits derived by the child. This approach tends to be child-centered and to expect a more passive role from the parents (Hughes et al., 1980).

This distinction between parent-centered and child-centered settings emerged clearly in an observational study concerned with the process of involvement in 15 Oxfordshire groups. Three nursery schools, four nursery classes, and eight playgroups were slected to provide a mix of rural and city-based provision, in which it was known that two-thirds had parents helping (Smith, 1980).

Five categories of parent participation were identified: (1) working with children on educational activities, with little apparent difference in the role between the professional teacher and the parent as a teacher; (2) working with groups but doing chores; (3) servicing a group, but not always working alongside children (e.g., fund raising); (4) performing miscellaneous functions to do with the openness and "welcomingness" of the group and shared experience (e.g., visiting before a child starts school, staying to settle the child in, dropping in casually); and (5) involvement

in management. In the groups studied, participation in nursery schools was more likely to fall into categories 2, 3, or 4, whereas involvement in playgroups included categories 1 and 5. There was, of course, some overlap.

Two main patterns of parental involvement emerge from Smith's (1980) group-oriented analysis: an open/professional model and an open/partnership model. In both cases, the atmosphere is open, welcoming, and warm, but in the first instance professionals involve parents simply to provide continuity and information about home background, remaining somewhat directive and aloof themselves. By contrast, the second pattern is based on shared experiences and a partnership between parents and professionals involved in a collaborative process of educating children.

We do not yet know which model is more effective (Smith, 1980). But even where, in principle, there is acceptance and exploration of the partnership model, difficulties abound. Some parents do not wish to be involved, but are happy and confident in keeping their children at home (Shinman, 1981; Smith, 1980). Others are alienated from society and "authority"; characterized by negative attitudes, they keep to themselves (Shinman, 1981). A major inhibiting factor is parents' lack of confidence (Haystead et al., 1980; Sandow & Clarke, 1978). Some parents also feel they lack power in the school setting. In addition, mothers working full-time and non-English-speaking parents present obvious problems in communication (Tizard et al., 1981).

What teachers expect from parents is not always the same as what parents expect from teachers; good communication between staff and parents is often lacking (Tizard et al., 1981). Nevertheless, there is general consensus that a substantial majority of parents whose children attend a

preschool--including those from minority and disadvantaged groups--want to be involved (Clark & Cheyne, 1979; Haystead et al., 1980; Shinman, 1981; Smith, 1980; Tizard et al., 1981; van der Eyken, 1978; Watt, 1977).

Reported changes in parental behavior are not all that dramatic, however. A 2-year study of involvement in seven nursery schools suggested that passivity previously associated with working-class parents is giving way to more active and lasting concern for children's education (Tizard et al., 1981). Parents in this study were also more likely to allow "messy" play at home and to buy toys they had seen in the nursery. Supporting evidence (Haystead et al., 1980) suggested that parents became critical of children's activities in nursery units and playgroups on the grounds of lack of structure and direct teaching.

An approach through before-and-after experimental design (Clark & Cheyne, 1979), designed to test the efficacy of a 4-month program in which schools involved mothers of 3- and 4-year-old children, resulted in marked changes in behavior, notably in the amount of time mothers spent reading to their children. In general, however, even where considerable effort has gone into intensive programs involving parents in school-based activities, results have disappointed those who wanted to increase parental appreciation of what nursery schooling was about. Apparent increase in personal trust between parents and teachers, by itself, was not judged likely to achieve the aim of parent involvement programs (Tizard et al., 1981).

Undoubtedly, some of the most encouraging results have occurred in programs in which both strong motivation and step-by-step learning were combined. Outstanding examples concern the parents of handicapped children who have been involved with professionals in workshops and

taught to help their children (Collins & Collins, 1976; Cunningham & Jeffree, 1975; Pugh & Russell, 1977). Nonetheless, a dispiriting aspect is that, since provision is inadequate to meet demand, many children whose parents would appreciate the opportunity of a workshop, nursery school, playgroup, or day nursery do not have that experience. Furthermore, there is a substantial minority of young, isolated, and depressed parents--often with large families--who are not only at a disadvantage in society, but also unlikely to seek or sustain the use of existing preschool facilities even when they are available (Shinman, 1981). In such subgroups (for example, families with handicapped children officially designated "in need of help"), as many as 60 out of 150 (40%) parents have been found unwilling to participate in a school-based program designed to meet their needs (Jeffree & McConkey, 1976).

Home-based Services and Support

The 1970s saw a dramatic expansion in family services and support outside the formal institutional setting. Specifically, such efforts include those in which the child is cared for in someone else's home, in which a service or support is provided in the child's home, and in which support is community-based.

Childminding. In the early 1970s, few people even in the field of early childhood education were aware of the existence of childminding, or home day care. Attention was focused on this issue by an alarming account of children of working mothers, who were kept in Dickensian conditions in some northern towns (Jackson, 1973). This revelation coincided with generally increasing need for day care followed by cutbacks in education and social services. Home day care became a politically charged issue. Childminders were seen by some as offering low-cost day care, to

be encouraged; others saw childminding as provision on the cheap and consequently a second-class service (Department of Health and Social Security & Department of Education and Science, 1976).

Given insufficient day nursery places to meet demand, as outlined previously, many mothers are obliged to fall back on childminders. A total of 57% of children under 5 and 40% of children under 2 in day care are with childminders (Bone, 1977). Available evidence (Community Relations Commission, 1975; Jackson & Jackson, 1979; Gibson, Nandy, & Russell, 1977; National Educational Research and Development Trust, Childminding Research and Development Unit, 1974, 1975) suggests that in spite of statutory oversight, considerable variation exists in the quality of care offered by childminders, as well as marked differences between local authorities as to the amount of supervision and support they provide.

Against this background, two influential studies were carried out. One was London-based and concerned "an unusually favored sample of 39 daily minders from four London Boroughs" (Mayall & Petrie, 1977, p. 63). The second (Bryant, Harris, & Newton, 1980) consisted of a survey in Oxfordshire, a comparatively rural county, of 66 active minders, 73 inactive minders, and 26 ex-minders, together with a sample of 63 mothers of children in their care. Both investigations were concerned with the quality of care offered and aimed to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the service. Both were also particularly interested in the minder-child relationship, as compared with the mother-child relationship, since one of the alleged advantages of childminding was that the minder was a mother substitute.

Findings were remarkably congruent in spite of the fact that samples were drawn from urban and rural areas, respectively. Concern focused on

the findings that (1) lack of communication existed between parents and minder, (2) two-thirds of children tended to be withdrawn and passive at the minders', (3) the minder-child relationship differed markedly from the mother-child relationship, and (4) minders "care" rather than "educate or stimulate"--in other words, they lack a sense of profession. A followup study carried out in 1977 (Mayall & Petrie, 1983) of 66 minded children under 2 found a very high turnover of children, also revealing that over a third of minders were reluctant to take ethnic minority children and babies while 70% were unwilling to take handicapped. These findings prompted the conclusion that childminding could not be recommended--even that "the present practice of childminding will increase maladjustment in the generation exposed to it!" (Bruner, 1980, p. 127).

This research raised two fundamental questions: Is the assumption justified that children cared for by childminders are disadvantaged in their language and social skills by virtue of that care? and, Is an improvement in the skills of childminders possible? A verdict of insufficient available evidence on the first count (Raven & Robb, 1980) followed comparison of two groups of children who differed only in that one group had been minded and the other had not. As in Mayall and Petrie (1983), each group was given standardized tests of language and social ability. There was no appreciable difference between the two groups, but the performance of both was below the norm.

As to change, evaluation of a project in which 10 black women in a predominantly West Indian district of Inner London were paid to attend a crash course on childminding, child care, and playleadership was not encouraging (Jackson, 1976). All women found the experience highly enjoyable, but when reassessed after 6 months, changes in physical con-

ditions and in quality of care at the minders were all of "near nil." In discussing findings, Brian Jackson, the principal investigator, drew attention to mistakes of trying to do too much in a short time; of using informal, heuristic methods with women who had always seen learning in authoritarian terms; and of the lack of an adequate support system for minders.

With these comments in mind, findings from an in-depth study of all 70 registered and active childminders in two separate priority areas of Inner London are relevant (Shinman, 1981). They afford a comprehensive picture of legitimate home day care on offer and, more importantly, describe how it developed and improved over an 18-month period of increased support, informal training, and encouragement of self-help. Comprehensive assessment schedules incorporated measures used in the Jackson study (1976) with an Index of Maternal Alienation (IMA), which reflects degree of isolation and alienation in a mother or childminder together with differences in attitude and behavior towards the child and his or her perceived needs. This index had previously proved predictive of hard-to-reach families who make use of services irregularly or not at all (Shinman, 1978).

Initially, there were clear indications of problems reported in previous studies, of difficulties in communication, and of cultural barriers and lack of stimulating play for the children. However, findings failed to confirm a preponderance of passive children. Reassessment of minders after 18 months revealed striking change and development. Care and counsel in placing children with suitable minders dramatically reduced movement from one minder to another and substantially scaled down difficulties that stemmed from diverse cultures and languages. Other changes related to

tolerance and encouragement of "messy play," to choice of toys, to how minders talked and listened to children both in the home and at drop-in centres, and to the way minders coped with problems inherent in looking after other people's children. Considerable antagonism gave way to willingness to follow training courses and to a distinctly professional attitude toward the job. Analysis also showed that reported instability among minders, a source of disquiet, was due on one hand to an influx of new and well-screened minders and on the other to the removal of the least satisfactory minders (20% of the sample). The residue of more responsible minders remained remarkably stable. Overall, given support and supervision for minders, there was a more hopeful prognosis for childminding than previous studies had suggested. A similar conclusion emerged from a study of a random sample of 69 active minders and parents of minded children in Staffordshire (Davie, in preparation). In this study, children were not characterized as being withdrawn and passive, minders manifested a professional attitude toward the job, and the major cause for concern was the attitude and behavior of some parents.

The studies discussed were small and localized, and, as with earlier studies (Mayall & Petrie, 1983; Bryant et al., 1980), one cannot generalize from them. However, the likelihood that they reflect a genuine and widespread trend finds support in subsequent developments. The National Childminding Association was started by a group of childminders, parents, and other interested people in 1977, during the first showing of a British Broadcasting Corporation television series for childminders entitled "Other People's Children" (see Jackson, Moseley, & Wheeler, 1976). By October of 1982, there were over 5,000 members in 208 local groups. Although members constitute a small proportion of the total number of registered

childminders (approximately 9%), their existence as an organized group is a development that less than a decade ago was unthinkable. Other positive effects of the television series and its supporting material, evident from a nationally spread sample of 100 childminders, included improved physical surroundings for children and more time spent by minders playing and listening to them (Department of Education and Science, 1981-c). These effects were still apparent after 1 year.

One of the National Childminding Association's aims is to advance the education and training of minders. It is revealing that in 1978 it was not even thought appropriate in an association survey to ask whether a minder had attended any training or preparation course. Answers to that question, by 1981 considered to the point (Goddard & Smith, 1981), showed that 34% had attended a course. Of the remainder, 63% said they would like to. Subsequently, regional meetings held nationwide during 1981 testify to the ability and enthusiasm of a solid core of minders toward pursuing a vigorous training policy (Beckwith, 1982).

Diverse support schemes have mushroomed; these include an experiment in salaried childminding in which minders work together as a team and as paraprofessional staff attached to a day nursery (Willmott & Challis, 1977), as well as drop-in centres, training schemes, phone-ins, and television and radio programs (Jackson & Jackson, 1979; London Council of Social Services, 1977; Shinman, 1979). Thus the decade has witnessed considerable change and development in this still controversial form of day care. Many issues still give grounds for concern. The crucial question, unanswered in research terms in the absence of a longitudinal study, is whether or how much children benefit from such developments.

One consequence of raising standards of childminding and creating an accountable and acceptable service is that unsatisfactory minders, who are usually mothers with young children of their own, are dissuaded or prevented from minding. Thereby, they often forego any form of oversight or support since they are not always known to social workers or health visitors. They drop below the horizon of the statutory body unless and until they become crisis cases (Shinman, 1981), joining the ranks of those whom other forms of home-based day care may reach.

Educational home visiting. Acceptance of the overriding importance of the mother and home in early childhood education, commitment to the need for early intervention, a structured approach in fostering cognitive development, and desire to reach the "hard-to-reach" family all feature in educational home visiting in the United Kingdom. The number of these schemes has grown rapidly during the 1970s, although there are no official figures of the numbers of mothers involved (Birchall, 1982-b).

Early projects stressed the need to raise the morale of the mother and her ability to cope as well as the desirability of fostering the child's social, linguistic, and emotional development (Poulton & James, 1975). Initially, visitors were trained teachers who operated from nursery or infant schools. Typically, within a school catchment area, each week for about an hour they visited mothers with children between 18 months and 4 years of age. Some schemes involved all parents within the area to avoid possible stigma attaching to the few parents that interventions were most hoped to reach. Workers in these programs took appropriate books, toys, and games and worked with the mother to develop specific skills.

Subsequently, schemes have developed that aim to reach multiproblem families who often do not participate in parent involvement schemes.

Diversity is a key feature of home-based programs; these have mostly grown up to meet local needs and provide local solutions. The philosophy behind such schemes ranges from a concept in which people work together to solve their own problems to professional intervention with specific goals in mind (Aplin & Pugh, 1983).

The Portage Scheme is a particularly successful home-based model designed to help parents with handicapped children. Imported from the United States to Britain in 1976, its core components are direct teaching and a positive monitoring system. A peripatetic behavioral checklist helps parents identify a child's existing skills and pinpoint those they would like him or her to acquire. Portage cards provide specific teaching suggestions for each of approximately 700 teaching objectives on the checklist; activity charts contain clear directions to enable parents (or other direct contact people) to teach the handicapped child new skills and to record the results of their teaching efforts. There is a reported 80 to 95% success rate (Cameron, 1982). The model has been extended into settings other than the home; it now operates in hospitals, children's homes, schools, pediatric units, opportunity groups, playgroups, and adult training centres.

Only a small proportion of early home visiting projects have been evaluated. In general, children have shown only short term gains and the tendency to settle better at school than their counterparts not involved in such projects (Jayne, 1976). Main effects have been on parental attitudes. Parents of 20 children who took part in the first Educational Priority Area action research project--the Red House experiment in the West Riding area of Yorkshire--were found, 5 years later, to have far more positive attitudes toward education than did a comparable group not

taking part in the project (Armstrong & Brown, 1979). In the South East London Educational Home Visiting Scheme again the most marked difference between participants and nonparticipants was that mothers who had taken part saw their role as "extremely" or "very" important (Anders & Costerton, 1979), whereas before they had rated their role as being of lesser importance.

Clearly, quantitive evaluation of such schemes is fraught with difficulty and is often even considered inappropriate (Pugh, 1981). Concentration on program aspects that can be measured may result in neglect of most important but elusive features: the development of a child's confidence and the improvement of a family's quality of life (Raven, 1979). Resources and/or research instruments to probe such areas are often lacking. Thus the accounts that follow serve merely to highlight stages in experience and thinking; they are not definitive, but rather raise fundamental questions.

The East Lothian Home Visiting Scheme is an example of a program that uses mainly teachers or other professionals. The purpose of the project evaluation, conducted by Raven (1980), was to assess whether educational home visiting should be routinely available in the region. Attention focused on six trained teachers, five of whom were appointed to the staffs of five schools judged to be in areas of disadvantage; the sixth worked with handicapped children. All teachers were selected for their capacity to use professional skills without undermining mothers' confidence. Their brief was to work with 2- and 3-year-olds in their parents' presence for about 1 hour a week over a period of about 9 months, so as to encourage the mother to play a more active part in her child's development.

The usual practice was to take in some object to provide a focus for activities (sand, water, colored paper), but an underlying aim was to persuade mothers that they could utilize ordinary household materials to help their children learn. Visitors were given considerable latitude as to how they might tackle the job. In practice, some pursued a skills-training technique; others developed enabling or befriending styles (McCail, 1981). A total of 41 home-visited families, 200 families from the same disadvantaged area, and 80 families from a more well-to-do area were included in the sample. Participants were selected on the grounds that they were likely to benefit from the scheme. Disturbed families were excluded.

On the credit side, statistical evaluation showed that educational home visits had substantial impact on children's adjustment to school; specifically, children learned to adapt to a teacher-style, and mothers were more favorably disposed to their doing schoolwork. As a result of the scheme, all the five schools in the study established community activities involving groups of parents. Parents also felt able and justified to complain to the school when they were not satisfied. On balance, however, the scheme could not be recommended; its "long-term social implications gave grounds for unease" (Raven, 1980, p. 80).

Following observation and interviews, what emerged most clearly on the debit side was that educational home visiting had a major impact on what parents thought, but not, in the way that was hoped, on what they did. Parents attached greater importance to intellectual and academic abilities like thinking for oneself and reading, but books were seen as opportunities to "test" rather than to stimulate interest and enjoyment. Instead of helping parents to think of themselves as facilitators of development, visits led them to produce a climate unlikely to encourage interest

and joint child-initiated activities. The message that the mother was the child's most important educator appeared to have been utterly undermined. Strikingly, better-off families were preoccupied with intellectual activities and with fostering independence in their children. These families taught by example, whereas "disadvantaged" families valued deference, obedience, and dependence. For them, teaching meant telling, and there was no evidence of change due to intervention.

Raven's (1980) appraisal looked beyond bald results to speculate on the possibility that home visitors, as experts, could lead parents to feel less confident in their own abilities and to entertain the idea that the mothering and teaching roles (that is, a facilitative versus a directive stance) were incompatible. What was undetermined was whether the active element in any success was befriending a mother and helping her establish social contacts or whether the mother and home visitor (in an extra-professional role) worked together to solve the mother's problems. Another relevant factor might be the frequency of visits and the associated style of interaction between visitor and parents (Sandow & Clarke, 1978). In a program of home-based intervention with two groups of severely subnormal preschool children and their parents, it was found that frequently visited children, after initial superiority over infrequently visited children, later showed deceleration in intellectual growth. Less frequently visited children conversely showed a later rise in performance. Explanations centered on the comparative lack of dependence on the visitor by parents in the latter group and on these parents' consequent ability to take more positive action in helping their children.

Community-based support and preparation for parenthood. A 4-year evaluation of Home-Start, a community-based project of family support,

affords some insights into the type of scheme that depends on volunteers (van der Eyken, 1982). This scheme began in 1973 in Leicestershire to offer support, friendship, and practical help for families with children under 5. On the basis of a one-to-one relationship, it encourages parental strengths and emotional well-being in the belief that these qualities are fundamental to children's development. In working towards increased confidence and independence of the family unit, volunteers who have undergone a special course of preparation encourage families to widen their network of relationships and to use community support and services effectively (Morehen, 1982).

Several features distinguish Home-Start and a number of similar schemes from purely "educational" home visiting schemes, though distinctions between the two types of intervention are in practice becoming increasingly blurred as insights are pooled. Specifically, these differences include the following points:

1. The scheme is based on the use of volunteers who are "ordinary mothers," not paraprofessionals or teachers.
2. Attention is focused toward parents as people in their own rights. Parents are not seen as "agents of change," nor is the mother perceived as being the child's first teacher.
3. Families are typically under stress, with many members living on low incomes in poor and overcrowded conditions. Mothers are often of low intelligence, in poor health, lonely, and isolated; all members of the family may suffer emotional or physical battering. Children lack stimuli and new experiences.
4. A self-selected volunteer is carefully prepared and matched to a family, whom she "befriends." This is a contractual relationship

based on trust, reciprocal in that both volunteer and family members stand to benefit from the experience.

5. Volunteers maintain lines of communication with different levels of support within the community; with playgroups and toy libraries; and with the statutory services of health visiting, social work, and education--all within Home-Start's own multidisciplinary support network.

School-based educational home visiting schemes have not been very successful with "hard-to-reach" and disadvantaged families (Raven, 1980). In terms of children at risk not actually being taken into care, and according to assessment by independent professional workers, the Home-Start type of intervention, however, has had a marked beneficial effect on a significant proportion of families referred to it, particularly those suffering from environmental stress (van der Eyken, 1982). Key elements brought out in the evaluation to account for observed changes include the following:

1. Volunteers are person-oriented; they have time and are committed to befriending the family, in comparison with social workers, who are problem-oriented, maintain professional distance, and are often seen as authorities.
2. Volunteers and social workers, possessing different attributes, nevertheless work in tandem, complementing each other's skills.
3. Mothering is the crucial offering made by volunteers. Three stages of growth, having much in common with stages in Reality Therapy (Glasser, 1965; van der Eyken, 1982) are identified: the formation of a trusting relationship between volunteer and family; a corrective stage when u[illegible]alistic behavior, but not the

family, is rejected; and active teaching of better ways to fulfill family needs.

Van der Eyken (1982) has argued that "loss of control" is a key point in description of families under stress from the environment and that Home-Start aimed to help a family gain control to the point where it could, perhaps for the first time, function as a healthy childrearing environment.

The nurturing of a sense of control is descriptive of many recent schemes designed to support parents in the community. Interest in preparation for parenthood has only recently intensified (Pugh, 1980). There has been only one study of fathering (Jackson, 1984). Schemes and services are embryonic and still thinly and unevenly spread across the country; the various approaches tend to be piecemeal and uncoordinated, and there is considerable confusion in aims and methodology (Pugh, 1982). Projects range from informal mother-toddler groups and formal classes in hospitals to post-experience courses promoted by the Open University for parents at every age and stage of life (Wolfson, 1982). There are also a few expanding, documented parent preparation schemes like the Community Education Centre in Coventry (Aplin & Pugh, 1983) and SCOPE in Southampton (Hevey, 1981; Poulton, 1982). The specific aim of this latter program is to help parents gain a greater sense of power and control over their lives. To this end, SCOPE promotes neighborhood groups where children and their parents--mothers and fathers with child management problems, marital tensions, or handicapped children--can get together. It provides creches, toy library facilities, and a family centre that offers free short recuperative residential breaks for families under stress, as well as home visits and training courses emphasizing practical work with schools at primary and secondary levels.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Against the background of a decade of changing social values and economic constraint, this overview has tried to convey the diversity that characterizes early childhood education in the United Kingdom. It has also been the intention to highlight trends--in particular the increasing importance of the voluntary sector, the shift in focus from the child to the family and community, and the growing and unmet need for day care. The discussion has indicated the breadth and range of research and highlighted some particular examples of interest. These studies have reflected two major themes--the need to introduce a more structured approach into the preschool environment and the need for partnership between parents and professionals.

The argument for structuring the preschool environment, in the context of research reported here, rests on the efficacy of structure in promoting cognitive development. Observation of children, adults, and institutional organization has clearly demonstrated how much more could be done to encourage children's concentration through complex, elaborated play and in general to improve the quality of care. "Partnership" between parents and professionals is a far more complex matter than the catchword suggests. Some headway has been made in defining what is meant by parental involvement and in clarifying issues. Especially difficult problems relate to locus of control, differing values and cultural backgrounds of practitioners and parents, and confusion over the nature and requirements of teaching and parenting. Such difficulties extend beyond formal institutional settings to home day care and to community-based schemes.

Beginning to emerge is the need to recognize and build on the disposition of individual parents--to begin where they are. This is particu-

larly important with those who are alienated and under stress from the environment. Such parents may not have enjoyed good mothering themselves and may need to experience something comparable--a committed relationship with a concerned worker--in order to reach a stage where they are able or want to begin to change and respond positively to other approaches.

Finally, it is now widely acknowledged that parenting skills are not always naturally acquired; parents benefit from professional guidance and support, provided it does not undermine their confidence in their own abilities. Schemes that have sprung up to meet local and specific needs reflect the determination of early childhood educators to make both services and support appropriate and acceptable to all families with young children.

Implications for Educators

Practical suggestions. Those concerned with young children will be helped by the wealth of practical advice implicit in much of the research. Variously, the research suggests that teachers may benefit if they incorporate the following suggestions: (1) Create situations in which children play in pairs. This not only helps in the acquisition of social skills but fosters children's language and powers of concentration. (2) Make the most of materials and activities that have a clear goal structure (e.g., constructive toys, drawing, puzzles). These are effective means whereby children progress to more elaborate self-directed play. (3) Balance the daily routine of free choice with prescribed educational tasks. (4) Plan use of physical resources in such a way as to minimize noise levels and facilitate play in small groups. (5) Cultivate a generally relaxed and collaborative style, and aim for fewer but longer chats with individual

children. (One way to free staff and make this possible is by inviting parents in to help.)

In addition, the identification of underlying difficulties that inhibit parental involvement and over which teachers have control implies both the possibility of change and indicates parameters for action. The question is one of creating opportunites for parents and teachers to meet and talk about joint goals, of being willing to take time and listen. Equally important is the fostering of mutual respect and the development of new attitudes among professionals in which parental skills are recognized and valued. As has already been indicated, if a committed relationship akin to mothering is necessary to bring some parents to the point where they can accept and benefit from formal teaching, if a directive stance is counter-productive with some of the parents it is most hoped to influence, then recognition of the complementary roles of teaching and mothering is vital. The clearer understanding of respective skills that emerges from much action research may reassure professionals and volunteers that both roles are valuable in early childhood education and may encourage the setting up of new lines of communication.

The importance of training. These ideas about parent involvement and collaboration between professionals and volunteers represent very different underlying attitudes from those prevalent when many practicing teachers were trained. Consequently, it is of fundamental importance that the form, content, and ethos of initial and inservice training courses take account of such developments. There is a need, not always met, to make experience with families an integral part of training in order to develop sensitive awareness of and communication skills with adults of very different persuasions and backgrounds, as opposed to solely preparing individuals for work with young children.

The tools for self- and for child observation developed and modifed by several researchers, notably Holmes and McMahon (1977) and Clark et al. (1984) have considerable practical relevance. Educators can benefit as never before from being able to assess their teaching styles and achievement more objectively; this may be of particular help in drawing attention to shy, withdrawn children, who it seems tend to be neglected, albeit unintentionally.

There is a more fundamental point, however: reconsideration of the training and preparation of all who work with young children is an issue of crucial and immediate importance. Difficulties encountered in bringing together the two separate strands of "education" and "care" that characterize preschooling in the United Kingdom have largely occurred because of divisive philosophies, career structures, and conditions of work entrenched in training courses and associated with respective types of institutions. Two major concerns exist: (1) the need for a comprehensive and unifying foundation course and inservice training to ensure a continuing supply of suitably prepared workers, and (2) the need to redress the present imbalance whereby there are too few experienced and qualified people working with young children. This problem is made particularly acute with the expansion of nursery places in the form of early entry into primary school reception classes, where neither physical arrangements nor teacher training are necessarily geared to the developmental needs of very young children.

Coordination and cooperation. Clearly, no service can meet all the needs of families with young children. A multidisciplinary approach needs structure and coordination. Consequently, a network of information is needed between local authority administration and other organizations and

individuals working in the field. A national survey of coordination procedures (Bradley, 1982) revealed the existence of only a partial network. Here personal attitudes are crucial; the network has been found to be at its most successful where attitudes support variety and flexibility in meeting changing needs. But policies that encourage variety and flexibility can, without vigilance, lead to imbalance and to inequitable provision.

Balance and objectivity. Equilibrium is vital. All recommendations have to be tested against experience and seen in the wider context. Thus emphasis on strategies that develop children's cognitive abilities must not diminish attention to social and emotional factors--children's happiness, their sense of security, or what may be simply a need to "stand and stare." The new tools and techniques being developed to help workers assess themselves and the children in their care offer fresh but only partial insights into precept and practice. There is therefore a need to extend, refine, and broaden the scope of such techniques to take account of other essentials of the preschool curriculum. Research has an obvious part to play. The need to develop more precise means for observing, recording, and evaluating different approaches in relation to individual families is emphasized by the fact that open access to, among other things, schools and shared experience between teachers and parents does not always bring about desired improvements.

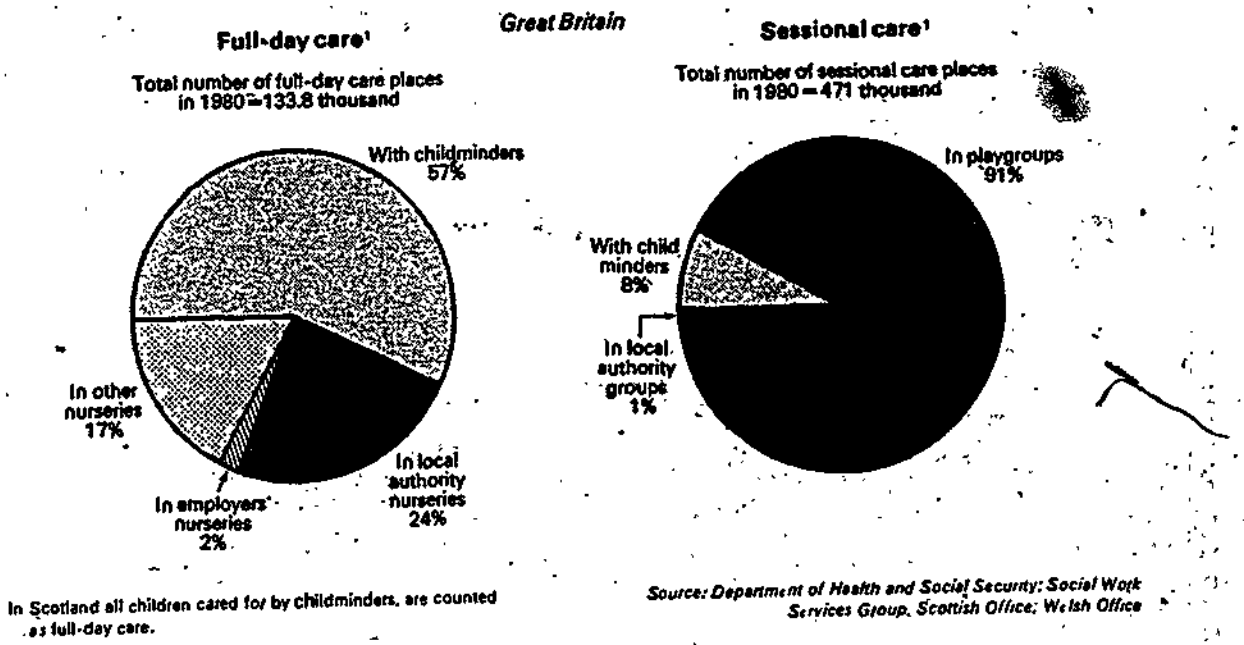
In sum, the last decade has seen considerable progress in understanding the needs of families with young children and the ways to respond effectively to them. It has witnessed growing awareness of the part played by organization and structure in preschool services and the gaps that exist in the present provision. Implementation of policies that make use of what we know demand substantial resources. It remains to be seen where priorities for investment in our future will lie.

FOOTNOTES

[1]A Local Education Authority (LEA) is part of the elected local authority -- for example, a County or District Council. An LEA is responsible for the provision of education (in schools, colleges and polytechnics, but not universities) in a given geographical area of the United Kingdom. The LEAs operate with considerable autonomy (through their education committee, education officers, advisers, etc.) but are always open to pressure from central government. The nearest equivalent in the United States would be a local school board or board of education (Rowntree, 1981). Responsibility for preschool services other than nursery schools and classes rests with the social services department of each local authority.

[2]The "home corner" features in most preschool settings in the United Kingdom and provides an opportunity for rich and varied play. One section is arranged as a "livingroom" and may be divided from the "bedroom" by a curtain or screen.

Day Care for Children under 5: Places Available, 1980



Note. From Social Trends, 12 (p. 229) by Central Statistical Office, 1982, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office. Copyright 1982 by HMSO. Reprinted by permission.

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