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The Origins of the Current Era of Early Childhood Care and Education

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A small set of core ideas has directed developments in early childhood care and education (ECCE) over the past two centuries. The ideas have endured across time, and to the extent they have been exported or borrowed, they have reflected transnational ideas and movements. One of these ideas is that even very young children can benefit from extra familial education; a second is that early experience has a significant influence on later development. ECCE promoters have advocated “bending the twig early” and in a particular direction. A third idea is that ECCE can ameliorate a host of academic and social problems, including the effects of poverty. While it seems likely that many parents also hoped for better circumstances, nineteenth-century school promoters did not consider poor parents to be the best “first teachers.” This was a motivation for philanthropists in Boston to form the Infant School Society of the City of Boston, an organization that aimed to provide schooling for poor children. As explained in the society’s report in 1833, schooling needed to be “brought to the mind so early” to counteract the “power of bad example” of parents (as cited in Vinovskis, 1995, pp. 31–32).

This chapter describes the history of ECCE services for children prior to compulsory school-starting age, with attention to institutional models rather than family-based training and socialization. While the earliest ECCE promoters were mainly interested in children’s moral and intellectual development, the young age of scholars meant that education often needed to be combined with at least some elements of care, such as providing the children a noon meal. For this reason, this history’s broader reach includes child care in a review of the main models of early childhood education (infant schools, day nurseries, kindergartens, and nursery schools) over the past 200 years.

Infant School

Education for young children had long been assumed to be the duty of the mother within the home, and yet, by the early nineteenth century, many parents sent children aged 4 or 5 to dame schools to learn to read at the knee of a neighbor, or to private schools to learn to read and write alongside their older peers. Many schools admitted even younger children, too, to the same lessons offered to the older pupils (May & Vinovskis, 1976).

The first widely known institution expressly designed for the education of young children outside the home was the infant school, devised by the Welsh social reformer Robert Owen in 1816. Owen's educational institute for female millworkers' children welcomed them from about age 2. Eventually named the "infant school," it eschewed book-based and rote learning for the youngest, who instead engaged in a mix of supervised play in the school's outdoor playground and a range of physical activities and informal instruction, including object lessons (May, Kaur, & Prochner, 2014). A utopian socialist, Owen saw early education offered to very large groups of children in an efficient, factory-like environment as a means to achieving a new world order. Others in England and elsewhere soon developed iterations of the infant school with different priorities entirely, seeing it, *inter alia*, as a seed of Pestalozzian pedagogical reform, a site of moral training, a means of spiritual uplift, a form of workforce investment, and an effort to rescue children from the streets (Beatty, 1995; Prochner, 2009). Infant schools were thus touted as an investment for the future, in which the promise of early education was to reduce social problems.

So it was that American educationists and social reformers learned of and began to experiment with different versions of infant schooling by the late 1820s, matching them to various local interests and concerns. Numerous infant schools were founded by philanthropic infant school societies in the country's burgeoning eastern cities, including Boston, Charleston, and Providence, but some appeared in rural areas of Tennessee, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, for example, and dozens opened in Canada as well (May et al., 2014; Winterer, 1992). Most were staffed by female teachers whose training came from the diverse manuals on infant schooling published in the 1820s and 1830s, many written by teachers who were themselves untrained but who had experience in starting schools (May et al., 2014).

Historians have attributed the rapid proliferation of infant schools to a variety of factors, including "millennial optimism" and "glowing endorsements in the popular literature" (Winterer, 1992, p. 293), as well as an increasingly widespread belief in the power of education as a means of social reform. Most infant schools were philanthropic ventures, many with evangelical religious backing, aimed specifically at the poor, but some were opened or subsumed by public school districts (such as in New York City and Philadelphia). Some middle- or upper-class mothers—encouraged by the burgeoning literature on training young children—sought infant schooling for their own children as well (Beatty, 1995; May & Vinovskis, 1976).

Ultimately, however, U.S. infant schools were rather short lived, their number declining precipitously in the 1830s. Historians point to shifting intellectual currents, including the rise of a romantic emphasis on the primacy of mothers' care and the proliferation of popular and scientific literature fanning fears that extra-familial education—regardless of form—put young children's physical and mental development dangerously out of balance (Beatty, 1995; May & Vinovskis, 1976; Winterer, 1992). Infant schools' decline also coincided with public schools' drives to exclude all children under compulsory school age (May & Vinovskis, 1976). Since U.S. infant schools were never a uniform entity, their proponents struggled to defend them and their diverse priorities in a rapidly changing cultural and educational landscape (Winterer, 1992).

Kindergarten

By the time the first attempts at kindergarten education reached the United States in the 1860s, the infant school had all but disappeared. The kindergarten was a philosophy and a pedagogy developed by the pedagogue Friedrich Froebel in Thuringia, now eastern Germany, in the 1830s and 1840s. Froebel understood childhood as a crucial period in human development, and he developed a pedagogy he felt would support the natural unfolding of children's innate abilities from infancy onward, and encourage harmonious growth in body, mind, and spirit. He valorized play as "the highest phase of child-development ... the purest, most spiritual activity" in childhood and later life (Froebel, 1906, pp. 55–56); at the same time, Froebel's vision was of ordered play in which highly trained, motherly teachers supported one-on-one and group activity in the social setting of the kindergarten. To this end, Froebel's kindergarten included a collection of recommended songs and games, contact with nature, and a series of simple play-things and activities (known as the "gifts" and "occupations") for use with children from infancy well into childhood. He believed they would promote children's "all-sided" (holistic), "natural" development (Froebel, 1906, pp. 9, 6) in line with "God's plan for moral and social order" (Shapiro, 1983, p. 24).

Froebel's teachings were carried to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century by politically liberal women fleeing the aftermath of a failed revolution in the German states in 1848. One, Margarethe Meyer Schurz, is credited with founding the first German-speaking kindergarten in the U.S. in her home in Wisconsin in 1856; others followed in New Jersey, Kentucky, and Michigan soon after (Beatty, 1995). Chance interactions and reports in American educational journals attracted Anglophone middle- and upper-class educational reformers to the kindergarten, including the transcendentalists Elizabeth Palmer Peabody and her sister, Mary Peabody Mann, in Boston, as well as Susan Blow in St. Louis. All three would eventually become leaders in the American movement for kindergarten education.

In the first decades after the introduction of the kindergarten to U.S. shores, there was a boom in private kindergartens for the middle class, which were promoted in women's magazines, kindergarten handbooks and guides for mothers,

the educational press, and in society more generally. Several different iterations of the kindergarten were exhibited at the 1876 and 1893 World's Fairs in Philadelphia and Chicago, respectively, and resulted in increased demand for kindergarten education. Much of the work of publicizing the kindergarten was accomplished by the rapidly growing networks of grassroots kindergarten associations and Froebel societies around the country, including a number specifically for African American kindergarten teachers and proponents by the century's end.

By the late 1870s, American Froebelians started opening free kindergartens for the poor, both as a means of child-saving and social reform and for demonstration purposes in the hopes of convincing local education authorities to open kindergartens as part of rapidly expanding public school systems, especially in booming cities. Funded by large-scale philanthropy and small-scale fundraising, free kindergartens expanded rapidly, from a few dozen around the country in 1880 to more than 350 in New York City alone in 1906 (Nawrotzki, 2009).

Such experiments with free kindergartens led numerous school districts to open public kindergartens by the start of the twentieth century, especially in urban centers with large immigrant populations. However, the going was slow, as many states now had laws forbidding the use of public funds for children below compulsory school age—a vestige of the backlash against too-early education outside the home, which forced the closure of infant schools decades prior. Many people did not see the value in kindergartens, given that they did not teach the three Rs; in addition, school budgets were already strained by population growth and the need for more schools in general. The National Kindergarten Association (NKA) was founded in 1909 to promote universal public kindergarten education. Nevertheless, as late as 1929, only about one in six American 5-year-olds had access to kindergarten education, with African American children and those in the rural South having the least of all (Nawrotzki, 2006).

Ultimately, the institutionalization of kindergarten education as part of U.S. public schools was something of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it ensured public funding for kindergarten education and provided it to a larger number of children than private or free kindergartens had ever reached. On the other hand, the kindergarten lost its distinctiveness—and, some would say, its very purpose—in the ensuing clash of institutional, pedagogical, and professional cultures between the kindergarten and the primary grades (Beatty, 1995; Lazerson, 1971; Prochner, 2009). The institutionalization of public school kindergartens was accompanied by the training and certification of kindergarten teachers alongside their primary school colleagues; by the end of the nineteenth century, kindergarten teacher training could be had at over 50 normal schools and universities in addition to nearly 140 kindergarten-only training institutions (Dombkowski, 2002).

The culture clash with the primary schools was not the only thing that dramatically changed the kindergarten in the early twentieth century. There was conflict within the kindergarten movement itself as well. The rise of the child study movement and the work of John Dewey and G. Stanley Hall in particular

inspired a new generation of liberal, progressive kindergarten educators, led by Patty Smith Hill, Anna Bryan, and Alice Temple, to launch a wide-ranging critique of the conservative, gift-focused Froebelian pedagogy propagated by Peabody (who died in 1894) and Blow (who died in 1916). After years of sometimes hostile debate in kindergarten-specific journals as well as at meetings of the National Education Association and the International Kindergarten Union, formed in 1892, the progressives ultimately emerged as victors, empowering new generations of teachers to reinterpret Froebelian pedagogy in light of scientific research findings and to experiment with new materials and activities with a view to Deweyan and other progressive curricular and pedagogical reforms taking place in the primary grades as well (Cavallo, 1976; Dombkowski, 2001; Prochner, 2015).

Origins of Child Care

The main inspiration for the day care centers established in the mid-nineteenth century in Europe and the United States was the French *crèche* (Prochner, 2003). Because most infant schools enrolled children from about 18 months to 2 years of age, there was a gap in daily care services for younger children, except for private, community-based arrangements. Married working mothers requiring daytime-only care for their infants often employed neighborhood women. Poor single mothers had few options in the early nineteenth century, driving some to leave their babies alone at home or in workhouses. Institutions arose, mainly through private and church-run charities, to serve working or impoverished mothers and their children. These followed two main models. The first and more common approach was long-term care— orphan homes for older children and, for infants, boarding homes under the direction of a foundling institution. The second was daytime-only care, sometimes combined with basic education for slightly older youngsters, in a day nursery or *crèche*.

In France, *crèches* operated according to state regulations to provide health-oriented care for children of wage-earning mothers. In the United States, there were few regulations, and *crèches*, also called day nurseries, were operated by philanthropic organizations often twinned with other services that were considered complementary, for example, women's employment services or medical care. The first *crèche*-style nursery opened in New York City in 1854 (Prochner, 1996). The growth of the institutions in the late 1870s coincided with the development of free kindergartens. Both types of institutions grew in relation to phenomenal population increases, including large numbers of immigrants, in cities such as New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. The growth of day nurseries and free kindergartens also followed patterns of industrial expansion where they were established to prevent child neglect and promote American values. Private kindergartens had existed in the United States since 1856, and despite sporadic developments in the intervening decades, they did not establish themselves on a wider scale until the end of the century, when there were 3,000 in 1898 (Beatty, 1995). In the same year, however, there were only 110 day nurseries (Dodge, 1909), with most located in large eastern cities; more than one-third of all day

nurseries in the United States in 1898 were in New York City (*Trow's New York City Directory*, 1898).

The National Federation of Day Nurseries was organized in New York City in 1898 to incorporate scientific ideas focused on health and hygiene into group day care. However, day nurseries in the Progressive Era were not progressive, resisting, for example, social work practice and ideas from nursery education and retaining their earlier charity orientation (Rose, 1999). The operation of day nurseries was generally not governed by municipal or state laws and regulations until the 1910s. Few mandatory regulations applied to the children's program, materials, length of day, numbers of children and caregivers, or training for caregivers, and day nurseries persisted as a Victorian-era charity well into the twentieth century. With few exceptions, they were financed through private donations and managed by philanthropic women.

While some day nurseries showed an understanding that older children, aged 4 or 5, needed a more stimulating environment during their long days at the day nursery, the care was mostly custodial, in line with its social welfare role. However, where day nurseries were located near a kindergarten in a school, children were sometimes sent to kindergarten for the half-day. In the 1890s, some day nurseries added kindergarten classes staffed by trained teachers. A similar development occurred in the 1920s with the introduction of nursery schools in day nurseries and the hiring of trained nursery school teachers.

ECCE Between the Wars

Public education in the 1920s was influenced by a mix of ideas, including those from progressive education and child study, with the overall aim to prepare children for citizenship in modern society. Through the International Kindergarten Union (IKU), the U.S. leaders in kindergarten education proposed a standardized program influenced by ideas from the British nursery school movement and U.S.-based child study research, which shared a concern for citizenship education. However, the IKU's *Kindergarten Curriculum* (United States Bureau of Education, 1919), centered on children's free play, cooperative activities, and self-expression, was a poor match with expectations of later grades. While Teachers College Professor Patty Smith Hill had "advocated the combination of kindergarten and first grade to lessen the academic emphasis of first grade, *not* to increase the academic focus of kindergarten" (Bryant & Clifford, 1992, p. 150, italics in original), this did not always turn out to be the case. When kindergartens were introduced into public schools, they were exposed to "the currents of thought playing upon the schools at large" (Weber, 1969, p. 27). However, while kindergarten teachers were pressured to bring their program into line with that of the primary grades, they resisted providing formal instruction in reading and writing. School readiness in kindergarten centered on children's social and emotional development, along with pre-reading experiences, such as listening to stories read by the teacher.

The IKU's *Kindergarten Curriculum*, for example, did not contain a single reference to reading instruction.

By the 1920s, most kindergarten teacher education programs were public and state-run, and certification was standardized, along with examinations, reflecting a trend started in the 1890s (Dombkowski, 2002). Training was longer than in the earlier period of private schools, with 3-year courses more common and programs more likely to be combined as kindergarten–primary courses. (Kindergarten training in private schools in the late nineteenth century was generally 1 or 2 years, with a separate credential offered at the end of each year, e.g., a diploma or certificate). However, as one study found, in the longer training, while more time was spent on each subject, the range of the subjects studied remained the same (Thompson, 1929).

A major development in the 1920s and 1930s was the start-up of educational programs called nursery schools for children younger than kindergarten age. While many nursery schools served children from wealthy families, a small number targeted poor children, based on the schools in England established by Margaret and Rachel McMillan and pioneered in the United States by social worker Abigail Eliot. Economic conditions in the Great Depression prompted the U.S. government to fund emergency nursery schools as an employment program of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) starting in 1934. The schools provided work for unemployed teachers and targeted poor children aged 2–4 in a mix of full- and half-day programs. In 1930, there were 262 nursery schools in the United States (Nawrotzki, 2015), whereas in the same year 700,000 children were enrolled in public kindergartens (National Center for Education Statistics, 1993). Five years later, there were 1,800 emergency nursery schools enrolling 72,000 children (National Advisory Committee on Emergency Nursery Schools, 1935). The Chair of the National Advisory Committee for the program was moved to write that the nursery schools were “epoch-making in the history of early childhood education” (National Advisory Committee on Emergency Nursery Schools, 1935, preface).

Day nurseries remained a marginalized social service during the 1920s and 1930s, when the focus was family preservation. As such, out-of-home care for young children was a last resort. The numbers of day nurseries decreased in the years of the Great Depression, from 800 in the early 1930s to 586 in 1938, with 15% of day nurseries located in New York City (Beer, 1940).

As well as shrinking numbers of programs, day nursery care was increasingly limited to children from about age 3 upward, with greater attention to educational child care, which was believed to benefit older children. Moreover, day nurseries with nursery school classes for older children were staffed by trained teachers who were unprepared to work with babies. While not all emergency nursery schools operated both morning and afternoon, from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., those that did served a limited child care role for older children, which would become their predominant purpose during World War II. Nevertheless, the WPA leadership pointed out that “the emergency nursery school is not intended as a convenience for the relief of parents; it is not a crèche but an educational institution” (Campbell, Bair, & Harvey, 1939, p. 107).

ECCE During World War II

In contrast to the WPA nursery schools, which were created as an employment program for out-of-work teachers, the federal government sponsored child care in World War II as a support for wage-earning women. An estimated 8 million women responded to the government's propaganda campaign, which included the Rosie the Riveter image, calling women to work for the war effort. As the title of *The Atlantic* magazine article on the situation asks, "Who Took Care of Rosie the Riveter's Kids?" (Cohen, 2015). The answer was a limited plan for government child care provided under the Lanham Act (1940) and managed by the Federal Works Agency. Some WPA nursery schools near defense industries were converted to child care centers in 1942, with funding split between the federal government and the local community. The first Lanham Act centers opened in California in May 1943.

While the Lanham Act centers are sometimes remembered as an example of universal child care, as in President Obama's State of the Union address in 2015, the centers met less than 10% of the wartime child care needs. At the Lanham program's peak in 1944, 130,000 children were registered in 3,000 sites in six states, while an estimated 1.5 million children had employed mothers, and "millions of Rosies faced the century-old struggle of securing care for their young children mostly without the aid of the government that called them to service" (Riley, 1994, p. 656). Most younger children were cared for by a relative, while many school-aged children were left in self-care outside of school hours (Lichtman, 1981). Moreover, government was not only ambivalent about its role as a child care provider, it was antagonistic about the very idea. In 1942, the first female Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, wrote to Katherine Lenroot, Chief of the Children's Bureau, "What are you doing to prevent the spread of the day nursery system which I regard as a most unfortunate reaction to the hysterical propaganda about recruiting women workers?" (as cited in Schneider & Schneider, 2003, p. 119).

Lanham Act funding was initially available to programs serving children aged 2 and older; in 1944 it was expanded to include infants. Official program standards were based on the educational child care model of full-day nursery schools (Children's Bureau, United States Department of Labor, 1942). In some cases, centers were underused due to parent fees, restrictive eligibility, and inconvenient locations and hours.

The difficulty accessing Lanham Act funds prompted some industrialists to approach other government agencies. The Kaiser child care centers, built for children of women working in the Kaiser shipyards in California and Oregon, were paid for by the United States Maritime Commission. When they opened in 1943, they were promoted as model programs. The centers in Oregon were described as the largest in the world, with each accommodating 400 children per 8-hr shift. The centers were purpose-built, with their design and functioning influenced by nursery school experts. They were staffed by university-trained teachers, social workers, and dieticians, with daily visits from a doctor. Additional supports for parents through the centers ranged from mending children's

clothing, to shopping for groceries, to a take-out service of low-cost evening meals. Nevertheless, the Kaiser centers were never fully enrolled. Fewer than 100 children were attending the Oregon center in January 1944, although women workers at the shipyard had 3,115 children (“Child Care Centers Go Begging Lately,” 1944). One reason for the low enrollment was their lack of appeal to shift workers who would need to wake their children at midnight to take them home or bring them to the center at the start of their shift.

Child care continued to be available in charity day nurseries during wartime. The Golden Gate Kindergarten Association in San Francisco served children from poor families not engaged in defense work or not able to pay parent fees in the Lanham Act centers. The association extended its hours to accommodate mothers’ work schedules and offered a dinner program for families, as at the Kaiser centers (Fousekis, 2011).

When Lanham funds for child care ended in February 1946, most programs were abruptly closed. Some programs continued with state funds, for example, in California, which had the largest number of children in Lanham Act centers, along with an established child care advocacy movement. While government involvement in child care during World War II was limited due its complicated bureaucracy, its lack of coordination between departments, and its failure to commit to the right of employed mothers to child care, it had a lasting influence by demonstrating the wider need for out-of-home child care.

Child Care and Preschool in the 1960s to the 1990s

A U.S. Children’s Bureau study in 1958 found 6% of children under age 6 caring for themselves while their mother was at her employment (Lajewski, 1959). Just 2% of preschool-aged children in out-of-home care arrangements were in day care centers. Most were cared for by neighbors or relatives. In 1960, a national conference on day care was organized by U.S. government agencies and held in Washington, DC. The aim was to “call the country’s attention to the potential for positive living that day care services provide both now and in the future” with the focus on women’s labor force participation (United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare & United States Department of Labor, 1961, pp. 1–2). The conference signaled the start of a shift in attitude among leaders in day care, social work, and government regarding child care as a normal support for working mothers. It is notable that there was no mention in the report of educational or developmental programming or any benefits for children. There were, however, concerns over the possible negative impact of out-of-home child care on children’s development.

The new wave of ECCE programs in the early to mid-1960s marked what was characterized as a “renaissance of interest in the very young” (Shane, 1969, p. 369). Factors involved in creating this interest were new or rediscovered ideas in psychology, the civil rights movement, and President Johnson’s War on Poverty legislation. The renewed interest in the very young was matched by a shift in the image of the child. In his book *Intelligence and Experience*, psychologist

J. McVicker Hunt (1961) questioned the relevance of the maturationist view of development—or standing back and waiting for development to happen—and proposed instead that experience played the greater role. In Hunt's view, all development, including intellectual development, was influenced by experience. Other psychologists also drew attention to the role of experience in development (Bloom, 1964), a theme from the time of Owen's infant school, further nudging the pendulum's swing from nature to nurture. A similar proposition was applied to social problems, such as poverty, that were once believed to have genetic roots. The civil rights movement sought equal opportunity for those who were historically oppressed. Government responded with poverty reduction strategies that sought to disrupt generational poverty by increasing children's educational opportunities, along with other initiatives. One result was Project Head Start, established in 1965 (at the time it was popularly called Operation Head Start). This initiative was accompanied by many other intervention programs for young children considered "culturally disadvantaged" due to poverty.

At the same time, schools were identified as playing a lead role in perpetuating social problems such as racial and class inequalities, problems Mayer (1964) called a "scandal of modern education for slum children" (p. 33). If experience was a key to development, the quality of experience was important. A new wave of reports on the international scene urged reforms to increase the relevance of schooling (Coleman, 1966; Plowden, 1967) and address the "crisis in the classroom" (Silberman, 1970). The renewed interest in early childhood education was not matched with a mix of old and new ideas concerning curriculum or pedagogy: Maria Montessori's method, for example, although neglected by mainstream education in the United States for half a century, was dusted off and given new life in the 1960s. As Barbara Beatty (2009) explained, such prolonged experiments with ideas were due to the "insulation and isolation of preschools from the norms of elementary and secondary education" (p. 444).

There was a concern that early childhood education had lost its way, that the "time [had] come to seek a new direction for kindergarten education" (Robison & Spodek, 1965, p. 1). A wide range of experimental preschools emerged in the 1960s, with approaches ranging from task-oriented models of direct instruction to cognitively oriented programs (Johnson, 2014; Weikart, 1966). Yet, Bettye Caldwell (1971) challenged that while "the field is being looked to as offering the most hopeful solution to many of our social problems associated with poverty and family disorganization," within the field there was a vacuum of new ideas, an absence of philosophical thinking, and resistance to innovation (p. 251). Evelyn Weber, writing in 1970, called kindergarten too, "the no-man's land of education today" (p. 2).

At this moment, child care, which had developed on a parallel system to early childhood education, lacked political support. In 1971, President Richard Nixon rejected a child care bill that would have offered broad government support for child development, including access to child care centers. As Nixon stated in his veto, he believed the bill would "diminish both parental authority and parental involvement" in favor of "communal approaches to child rearing" (Nixon, 1971, p. 1178). A newspaper editorialist expanded on this opinion, suggesting that the bill "might have caused children to be trained in their most impressionable years

to regard the government ... not only as Big Brother, but also as Big Papa and Big Mama. This is not an idle fear. It happened in Nazi Germany, and has happened in Communist Russia and China" ("Johnny Lindquist's Death," 1972, p. 6).

Some child care advocates and researchers took Nixon's veto as a challenge to prove preschool's worth (Diamond, 1974). Caught up in the rush of excitement and call for reform, many of the programs initiated in the era were half-day school readiness programs for poor children. Moreover, high-profile child development researchers focused attention on changing individual children rather than addressing social problems. This trend in child development research continued along the more general course started in the 1960s, of what O'Connor (2002) called "poverty knowledge," in which poverty is a product of "individual failings rather than structural inequality" (p. 4). Burton White, head of the Preschool Project at Harvard University, claimed that Head Start's basic principle was that "something's wrong with these children at age 6. There was no appreciation of how early that something comes about" (as quoted in Pines, 1969, p. 5). Caldwell and Richmond (1965), describing their experimental day care program at the State University of New York in Syracuse, suggested that of the three ways to improve school success for poor children—changing learning materials, changing teaching, or changing children—"attempting to change the child himself in some way so as to make him more receptive to the whole learning process ... is in many ways the most hopeful of all" (p. 134).

By the late 1990s, approximately 61% of preschool children were in out-of-home care, including 57% of 2-year-olds (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). There was new attention to quality standards using measures such as the *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale*, first published in 1980 (Harms & Clifford, 1980). The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's large-scale study of child care experiences and child development (1991–2009) found overall benefits for children in higher quality, educational child care (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network, 2005). Yet poor families continued to have unequal access to both prekindergarten programs (Bainbridge, Meyers, Tanaka, & Waldfogel, 2005) and higher-quality child care (Maynard & McGinnis, 1992).

Kindergarten in the 1950s to the 1990s

The new wave of interest in ECCE in the 1960s and beyond corresponded with the period of most rapid expansion of provision in the history of U.S. kindergartens. NKA data show that, from the 1950s to the 1980s, 5-year-olds' rates of kindergarten attendance increased from nearly 40% to a steady 98% (as cited in Dombkowski, 2001). The postwar baby boom and relative economic prosperity of the period fed a massive increase in the demand for public schooling in general, including kindergarten places. This demand was further encouraged by extensive pro-kindergarten legislative campaigns coordinated in the 1950s and 1960s by the NKA in those states where public kindergarten provision was either lacking or nonexistent (Ladd, 1982).

As public school kindergarten provision continued to expand from the 1950s through the 1970s, the purpose and pedagogical content of kindergartens changed. For one thing, as increasing numbers of children attended nursery schools (whether private or compensatory), kindergarten no longer served as the bridge between home and school it once had been (Spodek, 1988). Moreover, world events, new sociological and child development research, and domestic cultural shifts led to the kindergarten being increasingly, as Evelyn Weber has described it, “squeezed between two sets of values” (as cited in Dombkowski, 2001, p. 539)—values expressed by the opposing discourses of child development versus academic instruction and represented in two very different logics of instruction (Russell, 2011).

To some extent these opposing instructional logics harkened back at least to the backlash against infant schooling in the mid-nineteenth century, although now the question was not whether young children should receive extrafamilial education, but rather how ECCE could best serve them and the society as a whole. Should instruction be child-centered and play-based, encouraging the natural unfolding of children’s innate faculties and offering the time and space for children to develop skills and mature? Or should it be academic in nature, promoting numeracy and literacy as early as possible to enhance children’s achievement in the primary grades and beyond?

Popular and policymaker interest in the academic option rose from the mid-twentieth century onward in response to growing educational and political discourses about school readiness (Dombkowski, 2001). Moreover, several shocks to the U.S. public education system—in the form of a damning exposé of the failure of American schools to produce competent readers (Flesch, 1955) and the realization that the Soviet Union was winning the space race with the launch of the Sputnik I satellite in 1957—increased federal government involvement in schools and amplified existing calls for more academically rigorous education at all levels, including earlier instruction in literacy and numeracy. The growing body of research related to ECCE in the form of compensatory preschooling in the 1960s and 1970s also helped to raise expectations for attendance at kindergarten to measurably improve children’s achievement in later grades (Fox & Powell, 1964; Kelley & Chen, 1967).

Finally, the publication of a federally commissioned report entitled *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, Larsen, Baker, Campbell, & Crosby, 1983) seemed to many to be yet another nail in the coffin of play-based kindergarten education in the United States, calling as it did for “back to basics” education reforms and ushering in academic instruction, which would become characteristic of the nation’s kindergartens as well (Freeman & Hatch, 1989). Many—perhaps even most—ECCE professionals sought to counteract the trend toward increased academicization of kindergartens, with the guidelines for “developmentally appropriate practice” published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp, 1986), currently in its expanded and revised third edition, being an especially notable example.

Ultimately, the academic logic for public kindergartens as institutions appears to have triumphed, not least as a result of successive federal administrations’ intervention in education policy in the 1990s and 2000s (Russell, 2011).

This included the Goals 2000 Act, a bipartisan effort begun by President George H. W. Bush in 1992 and signed by President Bill Clinton in 1994, which promised that “all children in America will start school ready to learn” by the year 2000 (Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994). The standards-based education reform movements of the late 1990s and early 2000s culminated in the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation signed in 2002 by President George W. Bush. NCLB was characterized by increasingly punitive treatment of schools deemed failing on the basis of pupil test scores, which in turn pressured schools to introduce even more academic work and preparation for testing regimes in kindergarten, if not earlier (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016; Stipek, 2006). NCLB, which was nearly universally disparaged (and not only for its effect on ECCE), was replaced in 2015 under President Barack Obama, who signed the “Every Student Succeeds Act,” a less punitive but equally standards- and testing-focused law now governing public education in the United States from kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Current Scene

Although it was a prototype for later preschool models, the infant school approach to early childhood education has now largely been forgotten. Nursery education methods have been integrated into child care programs, and kindergarten is part of the public school system in all states. What was once simply believed to be young children’s innate ability to learn has been supported by neuroscience research (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). There is general agreement that early learning programs are not only good for all children, but are also important for families, communities, and the larger society. On the new frontier of public school programming, 30% of U.S. 4-year-olds and one in twenty 3-year-olds now attend prekindergarten programs operating in 42 states and the District of Columbia (Phillips et al., 2017), and almost all children attend kindergarten at age 5.

While studies have shown the academic advantage for children from attending preschool disappears by third grade (Peck & Bell, 2014; Puma et al., 2012), some economic and social outcomes are seen in adulthood (Bartik, 2014). There is intense political attention worldwide on the potential for early education as an early years’ investment (Heckman, 2000), based on a notion of social melioration that is not unlike the ideas of earlier times. President Barack Obama’s Preschool for All initiative highlighted cost savings from preschool stemming from “improved educational outcomes, increased labor productivity, and a reduction in crime” (Office of the Press Secretary, 2013). The enduring idea of preschool as prophylactic is so well established that the *Oxford Handbook of Crime Prevention* included a chapter on preschool, describing it as a primary site for “developmental prevention” (Shindler & Yoshikawa, 2012).

While a belief in the importance of preschool has prompted states to make school-based ECCE more widely effective through full-day kindergarten or compulsory attendance (Parker, Diffey, & Atchison, 2016), investment has been weak overall. The United States fared poorly by international standards on UNICEF’s

(2008) Innocenti Research Centre's study of early childhood education and care provision in affluent countries, meeting just three of the ten benchmarks for minimum standards. Although there is a positive recent trend of more state preschool programs meeting the National Institute for Early Education Research benchmarks (Barnett et al., 2016), disparities continue, with lower preprimary enrollment according to income, parent education, geography, and race and ethnicity (Editorial Projects in Education, 2015). Current efforts to expand access to ECCE programming to more children and to younger children have resulted in more state-funded prekindergarten programs and greater numbers of children aged 3 and younger in Head Start programs. In 2006, the enrollment in state-funded public preprimary programs surpassed the numbers in Head Start as the largest provider of ECCE for the first time.

The battle over the "best" approach to compensatory early education in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s revealed the discord among social scientists over an "ideal type." Writing in the early 1970s, David Weikart (1972), a developer of the HighScope approach to ECCE, commented, "The field of compensatory preschool education is littered with debris from the battles ... between the ideas of traditional child-developmental educators and the more modern approaches espoused by educational researchers" (p. 22). The research landscape continues to center on the most basic questions, but also the most difficult ones. For example, is a low-quality preschool better than none at all (Cascio, 2010)? Does high-quality preschool have more lasting impacts than low-quality programs (Peck & Bell, 2014)? Does a greater "dosage" of preschool result in better child outcomes (Jenkins, Farkus, Duncan, Burchinal, & Vandell, 2016)?

And debates continue over the place of academics in kindergarten. Is a focus on early learning and school readiness "crushing kids" (Christakis, 2016) or laying the groundwork for school success? In current times, the ECCE field seems to be going in two directions at once. On the one hand, there is a worldwide trend toward academic preschools. On the other hand, some in the early childhood profession believe the battle has been won in favor of play-based approaches to learning, and many governments, mainly in the West, have established early childhood curricula or frameworks for curriculum reflecting this view. These curricula are designed to achieve widely different purposes, however, including to reinforce a society's Christian and humanist traditions, as in Norway, or democratic values, as in Sweden (Alvestad & Pramling Samuelsson, 1999; Ødegaard, 2013). Although the United States does not have a national early learning curriculum, state prekindergarten curricula and the Head Start curriculum framework (Office of Head Start, 2010) are aimed to improve the efficiency of the sector to promote children's academic readiness.

Conclusion

The core ideas identified at the start of this chapter—beliefs that even very young children can benefit from extra-familial education, the lasting impact of early learning, and the potential for ECCE to alleviate social problems—continue to direct, and, to an extent, limit developments in the twenty-first century.

The economic instrumentalization of ECCE has linked program provision to a need for women's labor (Willekens, Scheiwe, & Nawrotzki, 2015), evident in many historical examples including the Lanham Act wartime child care centers and in social policies emphasizing the economic benefits of early investment. Many policy analysts have argued that a market model of ECCE increases inequities (Lloyd & Penn, 2014; Moss, 2009), thereby entrenching rather than reducing social problems.

The provision of ECCE has often occurred with the assumption that it is in the interest of the wider public to make sure that the twig is bent "in the right direction" early on, whereas the arguments originated with diverse "stakeholders"—whether factory owners looking to ensure the stability of their female workforce via nineteenth century infant schools or twentieth century childcare centers, or policymakers seeking Americanization and crime prevention via early twentieth-century kindergartens or late twentieth-century Head Start preschools, or governments pursuing improved economic productivity and/or international competitiveness. In many of these episodes in the history the interests of children were an initial focus, even if not the only purpose, of the institutions and pedagogies as originated; however, children's interests have typically become subservient to the aforementioned interests of the wider public, even as ECCE professionals have nearly always staunchly defended the children's interests over others.

Indeed, it is important to recognize the limitations of this type of historical focus, given its emphasis on policy and public institutions and the ways in which the voices of ECCE professionals and of parents have typically been granted decreasing amounts of weight the more institutionalized a form of public ECCE provision becomes. The present summary has not, for example, included ECCE provision wholly outside of the public sector, including, for example, parent-run preschools and cooperative child care centers, as well as various other kinds of community-based initiatives. These, too, have shaped not only the ECCE landscape (Hewes, 1998) but also the society at large (Muncy, 2004). No doubt they will continue to do so in the future.

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