

Looking Back: Events That Have Shaped Our Current Child Care Delivery System

by Roger Neugebauer

As we approach the dawning of the 21st century (which a few of us still believe won't take place until January 1, 2001), it is a good time for early childhood professionals to reflect upon our heritage and look ahead at our prospects. We conducted an unscientific survey of people whose opinions we have come to respect on landmark events and significant trends.

In the January 2001 issue of *Exchange*, we will share these experts' opinions on the key trends that will shape the early childhood delivery system of 2010. In this article, we present their thoughts on the key events that have shaped our current delivery system.

In looking back, there were three happenings that were clearly viewed as the most influential . . .

World War II

Who would have expected a war to be viewed as most influential by kind-hearted early childhood advocates? But

that is exactly what the majority of survey respondents opined. And their reasons for selecting World War II were interestingly diverse.

James Strickland (executive director of Child Inc., Austin, Texas): *The most significant event to affect child care must have been World War II, during which it first became socially acceptable for mothers to work outside the home and leave their children in the care of professionals while doing so. So hats off to Rosie the Riveter and the Kaiser Centers!*

Dr. Blythe Hinitz (professor of elementary and early childhood education,

College of New Jersey, Ewing, New Jersey): *The World War II Kaiser Centers produced professional education materials for the rest of the country . . . some of which is still being used by centers today.*

Thomas Moore (president, Thomas Moore Enterprises, Charlotte, North Carolina): *The integration of the Army. With direct interactions with minorities, soldiers and elected officials were able to remove some of their negative feelings regarding the competence of minorities. Many elected officials learned of the many talents that exist in minority communities. It was no coincidence that many early childhood associations integrated their memberships and government officials sought out leaders in minority communities during the creation and implementation of Head Start.*

Karen Stephens (director, Illinois State University Child Care Center, Normal, Illinois): *World War II set the precedent that child care was only acceptable if there was only one parent in the home. Once the fellas came home in droves from foreign fighting sites, child care took on a taboo associated with those "failing families" on welfare.*

The Chicago Six (who came together to share their ideas for this survey) — **Rebekah Baker** (family literacy specialist, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio), **Isabel Baker** (president, Book Vine for Children), **Cynthia Raitt Hepner** (director of parent services, Day Care Action Council, Chicago, Illinois), **Lee Kreader** (senior policy analyst, National Center for Children in Poverty, New York, New York), **Richard Nitti** (executive director, Neighborhood House Inc., Portland, Oregon), and **Alice Rose** (Children and Youth Programs, McGuire Air Force Base, New Jersey): *In those countries*

which experienced enormous destruction and devastation from wars, the valuing of children and the importance of creating a world where children would not only survive but thrive resulted in universal child care systems. In the United States, war followed by prosperity led to the valuing of prosperity and wealth above all else, including our children. This has resulted in a patchwork of child care of enormously varying quality in the United States.

The Women's Movement

Less surprisingly, the changing role of women was viewed by many as a key influence on our child care system.

Mary Ann Anthony (director of child care division, Catholic Charities, Boston, Massachusetts): *The women's movement of the '60s and '70s produced another wave of women in the workforce, seeking equality with men and needing out-of-the-home care for their children. The big chains — Mini-Skooks, KinderCare, La Petite, etc. — all started in response to this social phenomenon.*

Edna Ranck (director of public policy and research, National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, Washington, DC): *The women's movement, at whatever point you want to cut in — I suggest 1920 and the right to vote and the 1963 publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* — said that education is valuable beyond any other wealth. Progress and change are always slow, but progress and change have occurred and children can grow up in a more favorable world because of it. Imagine telling your daughters they can't vote, but your sons can!*

Judith Chosy (director and owner, Smoky Row Children's Center, Powell, Ohio): *The women's liberation movement, when women began to call themselves feminists. Support of female suffrage — the 19th amendment giving women the right to vote*

— was an event which dramatically changed women's views of their role in society. The first birth-control clinics and Margaret Sanger's "Every child a wanted child" initiative had an enormous influence on the ultimate opportunities for women and children.

Gail Wilson (executive director, CORRA, Englewood, Colorado): *Women's worldwide emancipation and education, which in many ways has supported and allowed their participation in the workforce. This has created an enormous societal shift in the demand for early childhood services. Of course, following the Law of Disruption, technology shifts have taken hold much faster than most societies have adjusted to the new social structure/demand.*

Jim Greenman (vice president, Bright Horizons Family Solutions, Watertown, Massachusetts): *Birth control — reproductive freedom — led to women of all social classes working and moved child care into the mainstream.*

Head Start

The Head Start program is credited not only with positively impacting great numbers of families but also with changing the way people think about the importance of the early years.

Roberta Bergman (senior vice president, the Child Care Group, Dallas, Texas): *LBJ's Great Society/War on Poverty launched Head Start, expanded public funding for child care, and introduced the idea that early intervention programs could make a difference in children's later lives.*

Janet B. McCracken (early childhood education consultant, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania): *Head Start revolutionized early childhood because of its national presence, strong focus on family involvement, and emphasis on inservice staff development. It gave policymakers and the public a recog-*

nizable name that demonstrates the possibilities and benefits of early childhood education. Its national standards paved the way for NAEYC to develop a national accreditation system. In many ways, Head Start legitimized the VALUE of early learning.

The Chicago Six: Head Start was the beginning of vastly increased public funding including Title XX, the Child Development Block Grant, the Title IVA child care programs, and state investments in pre-kindergarten programs. These all produced a new wave of research and training that has changed our field. Head Start spurred the development of child development programs in colleges and universities. It has pushed a standard (the Child Development Associate) which other programs have followed with regard to teacher training.

Four other events were cited by a significant minority of respondents . . .

Rising Cost of Living

Colleen B. Mendel (executive director, Training & Technical Assistance Services, Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky): *High inflation of the late '70s and early '80s made two incomes for a family nearly mandatory.*

Betty Jones (director of distance learning, Pacific Oaks College, Pasadena, California): *The rise in the cost of living, especially housing, and in people's expectations for quality of material life style — it wasn't until the demand for full-day care for the majority of children, including the children of the affluent, became pervasive that child care became politically viable.*

Bob Benson (board member, Bright Horizons Family Solutions): *During the 1970s, an increasingly pervasive entitlement mentality emerged. Home and car ownership were no longer goals; they became part of the assumed foundation. Stereo equipment, eating out, expensive vacations, and other extras became first part*

of the American dream and then what a majority of families grew to expect they were entitled to. For families to be able to afford this expansive lifestyle, wives participating in the labor force became less an election and more a necessity.

The Nixon Veto

Dorothy Hewes (author of *“It’s the Camaraderie” — A History of Parent Cooperative Preschools*): In 1971, President Nixon vetoed the Comprehensive Child Development Act (popularly known as the Mondale Bill). This legislation had passed both houses of Congress with comfortable margins. Literally hundreds of early childhood educators and other concerned individuals had met to draft standards for federally subsidized preschools using a sliding scale to establish fees that would be affordable for all parents. Support for the Mondale Bill occurred only after “average families” and “good parents” recognized that they, too, needed all-day care. The ultra-conservative John Birch Society and some religious denominations were adamantly opposed. Their massive last-minute campaign was reflected in Nixon’s veto announcement, with its rationale that “if the federal government were to plunge headlong financially into supporting child development, it would commit the vast morale authority of the national government to the side of communal approaches to childrearing over against the family-centered approach.”

Sue Bredecamp (Council for Professional Recognition, Washington, DC): Nixon’s veto of the Mondale-Brademas comprehensive child development bill was the event that had the greatest negative effect for child care. It’s hard to imagine what good could have happened for children and families in this country in the last 30 years if that hadn’t happened.

Joan Lombardi (child and family policy specialist and first associate commissioner of the Child Care Bureau,

Washington, DC): *The Nixon veto of the Comprehensive Child Development Act in 1971 which would have established a network of programs and brought all the pieces together. I don’t think child care ever recovered from this.*

Welfare Reform

Diane Adams (Child Care and CCR&R consultant, Madison, Wisconsin): *The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Act (“Welfare Reform”) effectively eliminated a mother’s allowance for low-income mothers and put them into the labor force. Advocates worked closely with congressional leaders and the Clinton administration to argue for greater increases in child care subsidies which did occur. The “missed opportunity” was evident in some states which took a long time to set up subsidy programs while other states were able to use the increased subsidy dollars and quality dollars to good advantage.*

Elizabeth Bonbright Thompson (executive director, Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Tacoma, Washington): *Welfare reform reversed the longstanding practice of supporting poor moms to stay home with their children and forced them into the workforce and their children into the care of others.*

Great Thinkers

Richard Fiene (director, Capital Area Early Childhood Training Institute, Pennsylvania State University): *Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson . . . have had a major impact in how we think about early childhood and how programs are designed. Both from an applied and basic research basis, these two individuals have had an impact on how we think about cognition and social-emotional development.*

Alice Honig (early childhood professor, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York): *Psychologically, the impact of our knowledge base on what ways are better for*

children to flourish have powerfully affected training and preparation for early childhood educators. These came from Piaget (as to how important social and physical interactions are for knowledge to grow); from Erikson (the dialectical nature of emotional tasks and achievements throughout development); from Vygotsky (the teaching person is critical in helping guide a child’s learning); and, above all, from the attachment theorists, who have illuminated the crucial importance of early intimate, responsive, loving interactions in order for children to grow up to be prosocial, responsible, affectionate persons, eager to learn and to contribute to families and to society.

The following events were cited by several respondents . . .

Increasing Diversity

Jackie Dudock (executive director, KCAA Preschools of Hawaii, Honolulu): *Increasingly diverse family populations, both economically and culturally, require that we honor multicultural values and diversity in significant ways on a daily basis with each interaction and decision and challenge us to continue to explore and define what inclusion sounds, looks, and feels like for families and teachers that serve them.*

Business Interest in Child Care

Richard Goldman (managing director, Imind Education Systems, Pembroke Pines, Florida): *Articles in newspapers about child care moved from the “lifestyle” section to the “business” section as business started to take a serious interest in child care. This business interest is twofold: employers increasingly see child care as a key benefit for attracting and retaining educated workers, and venture capitalists are more and more seeing child care as a significant investment opportunity.*

NAEYC

Tamar Jacobson (director, University

of Buffalo Child Care Center, Buffalo, New York): *The NAEYC accreditation process has enhanced awareness about quality care and increased knowledge about the importance of developmentally appropriate practice.*

Brain Research

David Weikart (president, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, Ypsilanti, Michigan): *The end of the 20th century saw an expansion of information on the neurological foundations for child growth and development. While overused and now overcommercialized, the data nevertheless set a framework for understanding the biological basis for growth. When combined with the public attention provided by the vast investment in early childhood and the research findings of positive outcomes and personal behavior over a long duration from high quality care, it created a solid foundation for programs.*

Social Security

Roslyn Duffy (author, educator, and counselor, Seattle, Washington): *Social Security has made it possible for families to live away from their older family members. This means that other family members are no longer nearby to provide child care. Mobility has weakened family connectedness.*

And, finally, I am going to exercise my literary license and conclude with two choices of my own . . .

High/Scope's Perry Preschool Study

In 1962, David Weikart and several other staff members from the Ypsilanti,

Michigan, public school district began a small, carefully designed research and curriculum development project to help preschool children. Little did Weikart know at the time that this effort, the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project, would become one of the most influential studies in early childhood education history. As decades have passed, this long-term study has demonstrated the extraordinary effect that high-quality early childhood education can have on children's success in school and economic and social status in adulthood. The well-known results of this research have been used to successfully bolster support for Head Start funding as well to promote various other state and federal child care initiatives.

The Teacher Shortage

The development of child care in the United States has met with many challenges — political and religious opposition, scarcities of funds, lack of appropriate facilities — but none so daunting as the shortage of qualified teaching candidates. At two times (today and in the late 1980s) when the demand for child care was soaring, our field has been limited in its ability to respond by a lack of teachers to staff new classrooms. The teacher shortage has many causes — the shrinking 16- to 23-year-old age cohort in our population, the sex abuse scandals of the 1980s which falsely led to a nervousness about employing men in child care (thus cutting our worker pool by 50%), the dramatic growth of the service sector offering greater competition for job candidates, and, of course, the low

wages in our field. This problem not only limited our ability to respond to opportunities at the end of the 20th century but also threatens our capacity to improve and extend the child care delivery system in the 21st century.

Which leads to looking ahead. Stay tuned for the November issue of *Child Care Information Exchange* when our panel of experts will evaluate trends impacting our field moving forward.

Exchange Is Looking for a Few Good Consultants!

When we launch our new expanded web site this fall, one of the new features will be a consultant directory. For a fee, early childhood consultants will be able to place targeted listings in this directory. The directory will cover the full gamut of consulting needs of early childhood programs — from center management to curriculum development, from staff training to work/life balance, from center sales to parent relations.

To receive complete details about this directory — and about our charter participants offer — contact us today at ccie@ccie.com.