

## What's in Store for the 21st Century?

# Looking Ahead: Trends That Will Shape Early Care and Education

by Roger Neugebauer

**F**uturism is an inexact science. We invited a variety of respected early childhood professionals to identify “trends that will have the biggest impact in shaping early childhood education by 2010.” These experts cited no less than 50 trends to keep an eye on.

Fortunately, there was a high level of agreement that the following six trends will have the greatest impact. . . .

### Brain Research

**Susan Hopkins** (author of *Hearing Everyone's Voice: Educating Young Children for Peace and Democratic Community*): The recent emphasis on brain research in babies and young children is already playing a role as parents and teachers learn more about early development. Hopefully, the research on bonding will promote attention to social and emotional growth in ways we cannot yet imagine.

**Jackie Dudock** (executive director, KCAA Preschools of Hawaii, Honolulu):

*My favorite trend is current research on brain development and learning which confirms the indelible process of the early years and confirms the physiological impact to the brain of supportive nurturing relationships, thus erasing the meaningless debate on care vs. education and validating the early education experience and properly trained teachers.*

**Janet B. McCracken** (early childhood education consultant, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania): Brain research has just begun to document the scientific basis for the importance of the early years. The

*profession must capitalize upon everything we know to improve the quality of our work and our influence on families and the decision-making process to improve conditions for children world wide.*

**Richard Fiene** (director, Capital Area Early Childhood Training Institute, Pennsylvania State University): *Research on the brain has helped us refocus attention on the interface between early brain development research and practice. This will help remind us of the need to keep research and theory closely tied to practice. I think we will see even more emphasis on applied research in early childhood in future decades, especially in the public policy arena. There will be a coming together of practitioners, researchers, and public officials in the future as we craft the early childhood delivery system.*

### Public Financing

**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): *The current collaboration push in government-funded early education programs is bringing resources to home- and center-based early education programs for increasing quality. We hope the change from a federal budget deficit to budget surpluses will allow our nation to reassess our social priorities and make early childhood education universal.*

**Teresa Vast** (early childhood policy consultant, Kailua, Hawaii): *A currently hot*

trend, state-subsidized pre-k, will light the fire for changing the current non-system into a system. The increased public investment in pre-kindergarten programs that serve a broad range of families will spawn a new constituency of parents who have political clout. They will raise concerns about program quality and disparities between pre-k and kindergarten teacher compensation, drawing attention to a work force in crisis and the inadequate financing of all programs serving children ages 0-5. Addressing the problems will be the only way politicians will be able to stay in office, and they will turn to the early childhood community for guidance on developing a delivery system that ensures high quality programs and equitable staff compensation.

**Roberta Bergman** (senior vice president, The Child Care Group, Dallas, Texas): *The application of models of financing higher education (program funding, loans, scholarships, grants, etc.) to child care will create a more accessible, affordable system for all families.*

**Diane Adams** (child care and CCR&R consultant, Madison, Wisconsin): *Quality initiatives begun in the 1990s will continue — Child Care Aware, National Governors' Association efforts, the American Business Collaborative, and the state Quality Improvement Grants will jockey for prominence, with a result that "really lousy" care may be less acceptable in communities.*

**Joan Lombardi** (child and family policy specialist and first associate commissioner of the Child Care Bureau, Washington, DC): *In coming years, the reality will be recognized that market forces alone won't bring us quality care that families can afford, that there is a real need for the third party support reflected in the advent of the finance reform movement.*

**Joanne Lane** (Child Care Resource and Referral, Waterloo, Iowa): *The trend that I find most alarming is the movement of resources and decision making to the local level without safeguards. Fragile, underfunded early childhood service systems may*

*become even more fragmented or even be reinvented. The most critical issues we face are systemic. We need strong leadership.*

## Universal Pre-K

**Tamar Jacobson** (director, University of Buffalo Child Care Center, Buffalo, New York): *Universal pre-K initiatives encourage and support collaboration with school districts and early childhood programs. This, hopefully, will cause an upgrade of the early childhood professional with compensation and training. In addition, it will increase collaborative efforts making the idea of "it takes a village" more of a reality.*

**Sue Bredecamp** (Council for Professional Recognition, Washington, DC): *The trend toward "universal prekindergarten" will have the greatest effect on child care as we know it. Depending on how it is funded and implemented, public schools could take over a much larger portion of preschool education, leaving child care to serve infants and toddlers only.*

**Mary Ann Anthony** (director of child care division, Catholic Charities, Boston, Massachusetts): *Public schools in Massachusetts, and around the country, are taking on the job of "educating" first four-year-olds, and ultimately three-year-olds, often ignoring the early childhood programs already operating in their communities.*

## Technology

**Cecelia Alvarado** (Taking the Lead coordinator, Wheelock College, Boston, Massachusetts): *The widespread use of the Internet will lead to more distance learning — which will therefore alter how we conceive teacher education, how people hear about child care programs, how marketing of our programs will change, how child care professionals will look for jobs and let others know about their availability for work, and on and on.*

**Janet McCracken**: *The computer is reshaping both the work force (telecommuting, technology job opportunities) and professional preparation of teachers and children (distance education). This may well change the need/hours/direction for child care and may determine how, and how well, professionals gain their skills in working with children, families, and each other.*

## Diversity

**Tamar Jacobson**: *Let's never forget the idea that the concepts of majorities and minorities is becoming more and more complex. Anti-bias and tolerance of diversity must have an impact on how early childhood delivery systems will be shaped. Cultural, gender, family lifestyle, abilities/inclusion will affect the decisions that are made.*

**Jackie Dudock**: *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 the teachers that serve them.*

## Staffing

**Mary Ann Anthony**: *The booming economy, which has created virtually full employment, has created an extraordinary demand for more child care at the same time that the traditional child care labor pool is finding more lucrative employment elsewhere.*

**Bonnie Storm** (General Services Administration, Washington, DC): *The converging forces that shaped the so-called Generation X, such as a turning away from the dominance of unrelenting work pressures, will likely bring the plight of underpaid, undervalued child care workers into the consciousness of parents who will demand high quality care for their children. This may have a positive effect on the*

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dearth of qualified child caregivers in the marketplace.

**Jim Greenman** (vice president, Bright Horizons Family Solutions, Watertown, Massachusetts): *Increasingly, child care teachers, nannies, and home providers will be low-income minorities if immigration continues and is encouraged. Otherwise, the child care teacher shortage will worsen.*

**A significant minority of experts identified the following as key trends moving forward. . . .**

## Employer Involvement

**Karen Woodford** (Summa Associates, Tempe, Arizona): *Employers will become more involved in providing care and will "push the envelope" toward greater quality. They will do this out of struggles related to recruiting and retaining employees.*

**Betty Jones** (director of distance learning, Pacific Oaks College, Pasadena, California): *Employer investment both in child care and in staff training is having an increasing impact. Many students working in ECE leadership roles now get reimbursed by their employers for college tuition — graduate as well as undergraduate. This was unheard of not long ago.*

**Gail Wilson** (executive director, CORRA, Englewood, Colorado): *Public dollars will only increase at the rate the employer community can successfully transfer its productive employee frustration to public (read government) acceptance of the funding deficit.*

## Outcomes

**David Weikart** (president and founder, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, Ypsilanti, Michigan): *There is a current trend to demand more outcome performance on the part of young children before school entry. This trend is a serious*

*one because it is easy to set up children to accomplish certain behavioral goals before they are relevant to them. For example, Head Start now requires a recognition of 10 letters before the child enters kindergarten. Why 10 and not 26? The danger here is the acceptance by teachers and parents of these outcomes themselves as important rather than understanding the conditions that create outcomes are key. Children who have been taught to recognize 10 letters or words do not have the same intellectual foundation as the child who has learned 10 letters or words as a natural consequence of opportunities. This issue is serious and will have to be resolved.*

## Aging Populations

**Charles Larson** (executive director, Seagull Schools, Kailua, Hawaii): *I believe that the aging population of the world will have a significant impact on the child care delivery system. Getting old isn't what it used to be. Older people will want to stay active and will provide the labor and energy for our early education systems. Social concerns for the welfare of seniors and children will be combined to minimize competition and maximize available community and government resources.*

## Peace Education

**Blythe Hinitz** (professor of elementary and early childhood education, College of New Jersey, Ewing, New Jersey): *Parents who want their children to value peace and ecology start them young. Child care centers have been teaching peace education and conflict resolution skills, and I believe this will increase as a result of things like the Colorado massacre.*

## Science

**James Strickland** (executive director of Child Inc., Austin, Texas): *My*

*money is on the work of "Hanna the Hydrologist" and "Bob the Biochemist" having the most impact on us. Living patterns are going to be much more controlled by the lack of water and by how we tinker with a genetic structure, human reproduction and similar biological issues.*

## Coop Preschools

**Dorothy Hewes** (author of *It's the Camaraderie — A History of Parent Cooperative Preschools*): *Because parents increasingly want to remain involved with their children's lives and in control of their out-of-home environment, and because those at-home parents yearn for the camaraderie of like-minded adults, cooperative preschools will regain the popularity they enjoyed in the 1950s and 1960s.*

## Blended Families

**Edna Ranck** (director of public policy and research, National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies): *Changes in family structure are multiplying rapidly. People who are not your parents or even your birth family are rearing you, legally! Stepparents are ubiquitous and the early care and education field has to adapt to reality. I haven't seen too much about how that's being done in programs. And this has to include diversity aspects of family: race, ethnicity, and gender issues. But watch "Clueless" for how families can change and blur and work.*

## Multicultural Families

**Roger Neugebauer**: *One of the least recognized revolutions in society is the rise of multicultural families. Not only is our society becoming more diverse, the diversity is becoming a part of our family lives. Our early childhood programs have a long way to go to meet the unique needs of these families.*

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## Education Reform

### **Elizabeth Bonbright Thompson**

(executive director, Washington State Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Tacoma, Washington): *Because the focus is on readiness to learn and periodic competency tests, the light will inevitably shine on the early, preschool years.*

## Family Size

### **Judith Chosy** (director and owner,

Smoky Row Children's Center, Powell, Ohio): *As people marry later, family size will be smaller. These older, educated parents will demand high quality child care and will be willing to pay higher fees for improved service.*

## Child Care's Microsoft

### **Diane Adams** (Child Care and

CCR&R consultant, Madison, Wisconsin): *Perhaps one or more major service provider will expand to become a "Microsoft" version of child care (with Bright Horizons operating all the Kinder Care centers or La Petite Academy operating all the Head Start programs).*

## New Perspectives

**The Chicago Six:** *We will finally begin to benefit from the perspective of adults who were in early care and education arrangements when they were children.*