ABSTRACT
                Now is the time to "retrofit" policies and practices
and reach for the goal of a just system of early education and care
for all children and their families. The current social landscape of
early care and education is filled with individual programs that are
manifestations of disparate visions. While rich in variety, such a
social landscape lacks a comprehensive vision and an integrated
strategy. To construct an improved social reality, effective
strategies must emanate from thoughtful visions. Such visions cannot
emerge without a confrontation of pressing issues related to the
pedagogy, structure and philosophy of early care and education, or
without recognition of the legacy of the nation's historic approach
to child and family policy. This paper identifies issues that must be
confronted in the development of early care and education policy. In
its consideration of historical policy conflicts, the paper explores
the consequences of crafting services in the absence of a unified
vision. Also addressed are the prospects for development of a unified
social strategy in view of the evident current readiness to
conceptualize policy in a new and broader way. Concluding remarks
cover principles for conducting inquiry and developing strategies
that quash discontinuity, fragmentation, and inequity in early care
and education policy and programs. (RH)

THE CHANGING WORLD OF EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION: RETROFITTING PRACTICE AND POLICY

Sharon L. Kagan, Ed.D.

Yale University

Recently, a colleague from the for-profit child care sector questioned how schools would be "retrofitted" to accommodate the needs of three- and four-year-old children. Timely in content, the question was particularly intriguing because it applied the succinct, manageable concept "retrofit" to the unruly, complex process of institutional and policy change. Indeed, it may be said that those concerned about early care and education in America are engaged in retrofitting practice and policy to reflect the changing needs of children and families.

Offering an illuminating policy framework for consideration, Richmond and Kotelchuck (1984) suggest that in order to "really talk about the development and implementation of public policy," three factors must converge: 1) appropriate knowledge base; 2) political will; and 3) social strategy. Currently, a solid knowledge base in early care and education exists, and political will to affect change is growing. What seems to be most sorely lacking is a coherent and mutually agreed upon social strategy. In exploring how we retrofit practice and policy, this essay focuses on pedagogical, structural and philosophical challenges that must be addressed as the missing social strategy is crafted.

OUR ESCALATING KNOWLEDGE AND POLITICAL WILL

Thoughtful scholarly work over the past twenty years has dramatically altered our understandings of how children grow and learn. Building on the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), we now recognize that the development of young children can not be considered outside the context of family and community. The words "holistic" and "ecological," strangers but a few decades ago, fill the literature and characterize the orientation of many current programs. In a similarly pervasive change, we have moved from treatment to prevention, realizing that it is far less costly--socially, emotionally, and financially--to prevent the onset of problems than to treat them after they have become rooted. David Hamburg, in his Carnegie presidential essay (1987), summed up this sentiment well when he dubbed the first few years of life as the "great leverage point for the human future" (p.3).

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Evaluation research amassed over the last 20 years also contributes to our knowledge base, documenting the positive effects of high quality early intervention for low-income children (Berrueta-Clement, et al, 1984; Lazar & Darlington, 1978). Empirical knowledge of cognitive and developmental processes has been generated and applied to benefit the practice of early intervention. For example, developmentally appropriate practices for children from birth to age eight have been codified (Bredekamp, 1986) and NAEYC's National Academy of Early Childhood Programs has used quality specifications as the basis for a voluntary accreditation process.

In addition to the existence of increased knowledge, public and political attention to the needs of young children and their families is being aroused. That these issues have received front-page press and prime-time broadcast coverage both reflects and enhances mounting public interest. That over a hundred child and family related bills, many bipartisan, were introduced in the one hundredth Congress attests to growing concern among elected representatives in Washington. That the National Governors' Association reports, The First Sixty Months (1987a) and The First Sixty Months: The Next Steps (1987b) focused on children's issues suggests a further ripening of political awareness. That corporate America, through their individual programs and through the Committee for Economic Development's report Children in Need (1987), added its considerable stature and acumen to the cause is noteworthy. Such concern in economic and political circles is matched by countless professional organizations that have rendered thoughtful analyses and reports, including the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the Council of Chief State School Officers (1988, in draft), the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Warger, 1988), and the National Association of State Boards of Education (1988).

While this expanded knowledge base and increased political interest are important signals, closer investigation indicates that there is also reason for caution. Surely, there has been remarkable growth in the number of states providing early intervention programs, but many of these efforts remain small or targeted to specific populations (Marx & Seligson, 1988). Of the myriad of bills introduced in Congress, few have been converted into legislation. And importantly, in spite of this flurry of activity, we have reached no consensus regarding an appropriate social strategy that addresses the real needs of America's children and families. Paradoxically, increased knowledge and political interest have converged to create a national Zeitgeist, at once poised for action, but oddly paralyzed.

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THE MISSING SOCIAL STRATEGY

Developing a social strategy for early care and education can be likened to "retrofitting" a building. Before crafting a final blueprint, the architect retools the vision over and over. As questions of function and form are reconsidered, the plan evolves. So too, is a social strategy retrofitted: a new vision emerges, reshaped at times by conflict and uncertainty, at other times propelled forward with conviction and public support. Once decided, the blueprint and social strategy manifest what is trying to be achieved, what is striving to be retrofitted to current reality.

The social landscape of early care and education is filled with individual programs that, like individual buildings, are the manifestations of disparate visions and blueprints. At the federal level alone, at least 22 separate programs provide some form of child care assistance (Robins, 1988). While rich in variety, such a social landscape lacks a comprehensive vision and an integrated strategy. To construct an improved social reality, effective strategies must emanate from thoughtful visions. And neither can emerge until we: 1) confront pressing issues related to the pedagogy, structure and philosophy of early care and education; and 2) recognize the legacy of our nation's historic approach to child and family policy.

CONFRONTING THE PRESSING ISSUES

The Issue of Pedagogy. While the benefits of early intervention are acknowledged, we remain unclear as to what the legitimate expectations of early care and education should be. Do we want these programs to prepare youngsters for kindergarten and the demands of later academia or later life where motivation, curiosity, creativity are important skills? Developmentalists (Elkind, 1987; Katz, 1987) express concern that children are pushed down an academic track too early while others suggest that we can not minimize the joy and accomplishment afforded children by more formal learning. We are undecided not only about the purpose and content of the curriculum, but also about the content of the program. Should early intervention programs provide comprehensive services, including health, nutrition, and social services? How do these efforts fit with regular school programs and other community services? Such ambiguities of content and mission raise critical questions regarding who should be working with young children. What is the level of training and experience necessary to ensure quality in providers? What is the relationship between certification and competence? Are certified teachers trained in early childhood necessary or is there a

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continuum that incorporates individuals with differing levels of training and experience?

The Issue of Structure. We do not agree about HOW or WHERE services should be delivered. While most would advocate a mixed delivery system, we are unsure of what is an effective balance between the public and private sectors. Within the public sector, we are unsure whether schools or human services should be lead agencies for the pre-school aged services. Further, the focus on structure should not camouflage the real issue--control. It is clear that the agency receiving increased subsidized services will exert great control on the profession's destiny. If funds go into education, standards for certification are likely to be professionalized according to that system's requirements. Conversely, if funds are awarded to human services, credentialing may require different training and experience.

The Issue of Philosophy. Although the above issues pose difficult challenges, philosophical issues are the most perplexing. Currently, we have not agreed on what we want early care and education to do for society nor have we agreed on whom should be involved. What is the role of the changing family in nurturing its young children? Should children be in programs outside the home? If so, should programs socialize youngsters to existing social norms or should they be created as instruments of social reform? Should they be constructed to equalize opportunity and access? We are undecided whether early care and education is public right or a private responsibility. Who should pay for these services, taking other national priorities and the importance of children to the nation's future into consideration? Essentially, then, basic questions regarding rationale, nature and funding remain unanswered.

ADDRESSING HISTORICAL POLICY CONFLICTS

Why haven't these important issues been systematically addressed over the decades? And what are the consequences of crafting services in the absence of answers to these questions, in the absence of a unified vision?

Divide and Conquer: A Failed Strategy. The long history of American child and family policy can be likened to the play of very young children. Given their short attention spans, kinetic energy and innate curiosity, we expect young children to move from activity to activity, sometimes disregarding the activity that totally consumed them just moments before. Like young children's interests, our policies on their behalf have changed focus and locus frequently. As social needs change, new programs with different goals and regulations (e.g., Head Start, ECIA, SSBG, Tax Credits) are mounted. While we accept, and even

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expect, the lack of a long-term vision and integrated planning in young children's play, such a lack in children's policy has resulted in an idiosyncratic "tinkering at the edges" approach to policy.

Over time, such an approach creates a variety of problems. There are grave inequities in service levels, with overlaps in some areas and gaps in other areas (Kahn & Kamerman, 1986). Competition between programs for staff accelerates already high turnover rates, signaling discontinuity and diminished quality for children. Low-income children, those who need services most, have fewest opportunities to participate. Parents of all incomes have little choice, and there is little continuity of service. Uneven regulation forces programs, sometimes in the same building serving the same children, to adhere to different program standards. Some suggest that regulation adds costs to child care and consequently diminishes supply. In sum, the absence of a coordinated approach to policy has left a system riddled with discontinuity, fragmentation and inequity, a system characterized by acrimony and tension.

Discontinuity: An Issue of Pedagogy. Although developmentalists reiterate the importance of maintaining bonds between the home and the program, discontinuities of values, expectations and goals exist. Without a specific emphasis on continuity, manifest in ongoing outreach efforts, opportunities for parent involvement or special staff, such problems are likely to continue. Recognizing the importance of continuity, many programs throughout the nation are seeking innovative ways of creating links with parents. Always the sine qua non of quality in early care and education, parent involvement must be accorded resources so that the reality of parent participation reflects the rhetoric that surrounds it.

A second dimension of the discontinuity dilemma focuses on the curricular discontinuity among pre-school programs, kindergartens and elementary schools (Grubb, 1987). Essentially, the pedagogical question of what to expect from child care and early education has not been answered. Without operational consensus, without dialogue between pre-school and kindergarten teachers, and among teacher preparation institutions, curricular discontinuity prevails. Eased by the advent of specific criteria like Developmentally Appropriate Practices, early childhood educators now have a helpful common guide for quality. In spite of this, implementing quality remains a problem. Ratios of adults to children and mandated curricula and instructional modalities prevent developmental early childhood pedagogy from taking root in many classrooms (Hatch & Freeman, 1988). Further, teachers realize that children differ on every measurable characteristic, so, in spite of ideal curriculum and ratios, individualizing activities and programs to meet each child's

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needs and to make each child's experience continuous remains a paramount challenge.

A third dimension of the continuity issue relates to how we facilitate continuous experiences for youngsters. In countless communities, children are tested or placed in transition programs until they are "ready" for the next grade. Currently, developmental testing and screening is being used to help guide parents and teachers as they make decisions regarding the entry and placement of young children. In some cases, such testing results in children being denied access to programs and being held back without sound evidence that such strategies are productive (Smith & Shepard, 1987). Because of the potential to misdiagnose based on one test, the difficulty of testing young children, the questionable validity of many of the tests being used, and the detrimental effects of testing on young children, some caution against the use of tests (National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, 1987).

Fragmentation: An Issue of Structure. Partially because of different historical roots and different social missions, and partly because of our nation's historic piecemeal approach to policy, the tableaux of child care and early education is a mixed array of various program types. In certain instances such an assemblage works well, but in many cases the resultant picture is one of confusion and chaos.

The debate about auspices for new programs is a clear and current example of the lack of agreement that characterizes the field. Advocates of an expanded role for the schools recognize the advantage of the schools' universality and accessibility (Ambach, 1986; Shanker, 1976; Zigler, 1987) while advocates for a more mixed child care and early education system recognize community variability and suggest that local option should be considered (Morgan, 1987; Mitchell, Marx & Seligson, in press). Still others are concerned that schools may not be sufficiently flexible to meet the comprehensive needs of young children or that they may not be sufficiently sensitive to accommodate the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse populations (National Black Child Development Institute, 1987).

Complex and inter-meshed, these concerns warrant considered attention. So, too, do the very real (and often unpublished) tensions that hallmark much of the practice of early care and education in our nation. Boldly pointing out what providers have long recognized, a recent report chronicled the intensity of competition between Head Start and state-funded pre-school programs. Of the programs surveyed, 44% reported competition for children, 59% for staff, 52% for space and 37% for all three (Goodman & Brady, 1988). While this survey documented Head Start's relationship to state-funded pre-school initiatives, such

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competition pervades many communities, particularly those that are experiencing program expansion and personnel shortages simultaneously. Training across sectors that could be done cooperatively remains disjointed and costly. Joint buying of equipment and materials is negated. Joint planning for expansion is minimized.

Beyond inefficiencies in service delivery, such competition and fragmentation has serious consequences for how we envision the future of the profession. Given intense program loyalties, it has been difficult to generate an advocacy constituency that transcends specific program auspices. The Head Start community is well-mobilized, for-profits have coalesced, and day care advocates remain staunch supporters for expanded services in their domain. Such divided loyalties, while necessary to maintain program longevity, have prevented the natural evolution of alliances that develop among professional colleagues and help bind a profession.

Inequity: An Issue of Philosophy. Current systemic inequities affect children directly and indirectly. Directly, there are vast inequities regarding who is eligible and who attends programs. First, there is simply not enough service to meet the need. Head Start now reaches about 16% of the children who need its services (Children's Defense Fund, 1988). Middle- and upper-income families also have difficulty locating services, particularly for infants and toddlers. Second, ubiquitously characterized by "two-tiers," the (non)system dramatically segregates children, with low-income children attending subsidized centers and middle- and upper-income youngsters attending fee-for-service programs. Often, this economic segregation leads to de facto racial segregation, reflecting neither the law nor the spirit of our nation (Hawley, 1981). Further, the lack of subsidized programs creates an "opportunity gap" for poor children even before they enter kindergarten. Finally, questions persist regarding how to most equitably meet the needs of linguistically and culturally diverse, as well as handicapped, populations.

Indirectly, children are affected by the lack of equity that exists for their providers and teachers. Young children need the care and expertise of high-quality and consistent providers. When staff turnover is so frequent that inconsistency jeopardizes quality, youngsters suffer. Motivated by higher salaries, better benefits and superior working conditions offered in other professions, people are leaving early childhood at unprecedented rates. But an internal dilemma exists as well. Because significant differences exist between the salaries and status accorded those in child care and those in education, even if they are performing comparable work, within field shifts are also frequent. While career advancement is encouraged, the lack of

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within-system equity exacerbates turnover and stability rates and severely compromises quality.

A third issue in the equity debate centers around inconsistent regulation. Though debated for years, currently there are no federal regulations governing child care or early education. States license centers according to vastly different regulations (Morgan, 1986). More problematic than the disparity between different states' regulations is the lack of consistent standards across programs within a state or community. For example, in some states, pre-school programs in churches and/or schools may be exempt from basic health and safety licensure while programs around the corner serving the same population must meet lengthy licensure requirements. Such regulatory differences significantly impact start-up rates and costs, festering acrimony among programs and providers.

These equity issues raise difficult practical and philosophical questions which must be addressed in a systematic way. Not the problem of any single administrative agency, such dilemmas hallmark the entire ecology of early care and education.

THE PROSPECTS FOR DEVELOPING A SOCIAL STRATEGY

A CAUTIOUS NOTE

For decades, scholars have debated the possibility and advisability of creating comprehensive child and family policies. Acknowledging the difficulties inherent in establishing comprehensive policies, Steiner (1981) explains, "Organizing on behalf of family policy is not feasible, because it is more like peace, justice, equality and freedom than it is like higher welfare benefits or school busing or medical care for the aged." Although writing about family policy, Steiner's comments may be equally applicable to the development of comprehensive children's policy. Interestingly, in the few cases in our history (the Comprehensive Child Development Act, and the Act for Better Child Care) when there have been comprehensive attempts to alter the early care and education landscape, serious and legitimate concerns regarding the legislation have been raised, evoking speculation that the complexity of the issues may preclude the passage of any comprehensive piece of federal legislation.

EVIDENCE OF CHANGE

A review of the bills related to children and families introduced during the one hundredth congress indicates that no unanimity of opinion or single social strategy emerged. Yet,

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such a review also indicates that there is a clear and pervasive realization that grave injustices exist, and that structural changes in our ways of doing business have never been more necessary. Recognizing the severity of the fragmentation among systems, nearly every bill, ranging from large federal to small municipal initiatives, including those that foster single sector delivery systems (e.g., the schools), calls for the establishment of inter-agency and or multi-disciplinary committees to facilitate cross-sector planning and program implementation. Recognizing the number of centers forced to close because of a lack of insurance, some bills propose assisting states in establishing liability insurance pools in order to promote the stability of centers and the continuity of services for children. Other bills encourage full-day and full-year services for children, thereby maximizing continuity, as well. Tax credit proposals, though they vary widely in detail, increase parent choice in acknowledgment of the variety of family needs. Other bills foster the establishment of minimum quality standards. Though not complete solutions to the early care and education challenge, each of these bills indicates that there is a new willingness to look beyond a "more-slots-only" approach to policy and to address systemic challenges.

The move to conceptualize problems and solutions more broadly is not only manifest in the policy arena but in important work being launched by foundations, by scholars and analysts, by professional organizations and in the corporate sector. Foundations, recognizing the severity of the fragmentation challenges, are supporting the development of interdisciplinary community-based planning teams (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1987). Scholars and analysts are tackling one of the most difficult issues--inequity. Data on who is teaching, with what credentials and at what salaries across early care an education systems are being analyzed and publicized (Granger & Marx, 1988); inventive approaches to recruit teachers are being discussed and implemented (Bennett, 1988); and effective strategies to raise caregiver and teacher salaries and benefits are being chronicled (Whitebook, et. al., 1986). These efforts are fortified by the work of a major committee of the National Association for the Education of Young Children on Quality, Compensation and Affordability and by the work of The Child Care Employee Project. Countless business/early care partnerships providing resource and referral services, direct supports to programs, and training scholarships have emerged. Business and industry is also providing supports to employees directly by altering personnel policies and employee benefits, by providing Flexible Spending Accounts (FSAs) and by offering direct services (e.g., on-site child care, child care vouchers, information and referral services, and parenting education and support).

Perhaps most significantly, efforts to examine the issues from various perspectives are taking root. Those concerned that

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federal policy discriminates against traditional families where the mother is not employed call for tax relief or financial support for all families with young children (Rector, 1988). Others suggest modifications on both the supply and demand sides (Robins, 1988). New social strategies that reflect a reconstruction of conventional approaches to children's policy are being considered. Jule Sugarman (1988), in advancing the Children's Trust, has embraced new approaches to financing children's services. In a shift from a categorical to an entitlement approach, the Council of Chief State School Officers in the document, "Elements of a Model State Statute to Provide Educational Equity for At-Risk Students" (1987) suggest that each school district make available to all its pre-school children who are at-risk of school failure the opportunity to participate in a child development program. While districts have offered pre-school programs in the past, typically they have been without mandate to serve all or all at-risk youngsters. The Giant Step Program in New York City with its goal to serve all four-year-old children is one exception (Cohen, 1986).

While no single social strategy has been developed, it appears that across political aisles and programmatic divides, those concerned about America's young children and their families are ready to conceptualize policy in a new and broader way. Extant beliefs and values are being debated. Emerging from different rationales and from different sectors, a consensus is building to reconsider the way we think about and deliver services to young children.

PRINCIPLES FOR INQUIRY AND STRATEGY

As we substitute new approaches for our time-honored strategies, new standards for inquiry are set. Rather than being content solely with an increase of slots, we need to consider capacity-building strategies within the system and a holistic policy approach where discontinuity, fragmentation and inequity are quashed. When new policies are created, they should aspire to address the loftiest hopes we have for our children, and simultaneously should be grounded in the best and the most solid information we have. To that end, the following principles are offered for review as we consider crafting strategies and policies that will ensure quality for children, staff, families, communities and the care and early education profession.

From Discontinuity to Continuity. Because young children influence and are influenced by a broad social network that includes parents, teachers, family and community, and because discontinuity among these individuals and settings hampers development, every effort must be made to ensure that young children experience continuity in their daily lives, as they make transitions from year to year and from setting to setting. To

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that end, quality early care and education programs should: 1) fortify links with children's families and communities, and find meaningful and appropriate ways to support parents as they nurture their childre¬'s development; 2) maintain developmentally appropriate and continuous curriculum pedagogy and strategy as youngsters move from program to program, group to group and grade to grade; and 3) ensure continuity of high-quality, well-trained staff.

From Fragmentation to Collaboration. Because early care and education programs co-exist in an ecology of community service, because they have much to gain from one another, and because inter-agency cooperation is essential to cost-effective program development and implementation, efforts must be made to foster collaboration among the providers of services to young children and their families. To that end, policies should: 1) recognize that the current range of programs and services can be a strength upon which to build; 2) underscore that collaboration across sectors and programs is essential to optimize the nation's system of early care and education; and 3) maintain options so that families and communities can make choices among services and policies that best meet their early care and education needs.

From Inequity to Equity. Because this nation is firmly committed to the principle of equity for children and adults, new policies must guarantee that: 1) children of all economic strata have equal access to racially and economically integrated programs; 2) the home language and culture of children and families is respected; 3) all parents--regardless of family income or structure--have options regarding if, when, and which programs their young children will attend; 4) equity of compensation and benefits for workers providing comparable services with comparable experience and training exists; and 5) programs providing comparable services for children, irrespective of auspices and source of funding, should be subject to comparable regulations and monitoring.

Whether or not an effective social strategy that adheres to these principles will emerge is uncertain. What is certain is that the sentiment for change has never been more ripe and that such change will need to address seemingly intractable challenges. It is time to retrofit policies and practices and to reach for the goal of a just system where all children and families thrive.

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