

A STUDY OF THE HISTORY
of
PRESCHOOL EDUCATION, INFLUENTIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, AND
MAJOR POLICIES WHICH AFFECTED PRESCHOOL CHILDREN SINCE 1830

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY
OF WESTERN CONNECTICUT STATE COLLEGE

by
Marilyn Garis Kellow

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF SCIENCE

AN ABSTRACT OF THE HISTORY OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION,
INFLUENTIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, AND MAJOR POLICIES WHICH
AFFECTED PRESCHOOL CHILDREN SINCE 1830

The purpose of this study is to record the history of preschool education and the influential circumstances which have affected preschool programs, and to relate the major policies which have been adopted. The historical method of research was the approach used in this study, and the information is presented chronologically from 1830 to the 1970s.

Attitudes toward care for the young child have fluctuated drastically throughout the years. Interest and concern in child care has been stimulated by various national emergencies, such as the Civil War, World War I, the Great Depression, and World War II. In recent years, our nation's economy has caused many mothers to return to the work force, thus, once again creating another situation which makes surrogate care for the preschool child a necessity. The young children and their families are directly affected by these circumstances. However, eventually our entire society feels the consequences.

Several sub-topics are discussed throughout this thesis study:

1. A description of the various preschool programs which have been tried, such as infant schools, day nurseries, the kindergarten movement, and more recently the Head Start program.
2. The issue of parental control and how much authority the federal, state, and local governments should have concerning this matter.
3. The problem of financial support for preschool programs and the debate as to whether or not private schools should receive public funding.
4. The part that welfare should play in regard to child care.
5. The three federal laws during the 1960s which were significant to preschool programs, including the Day Care Legislation of 1962 and the two Preschool Legislations of 1964 and 1965.
6. The Nixon Veto of 1971, a significant setback to the day care momentum.

It was realized in this study that the questions and problems which surround day care and the education of the preschool child are very complex and that there are no easy solutions or definite answers. Several conclusions and/or recommendations can be presented:

1. It was determined that day care is basically a political question.
2. The number of working mothers continues to rise. Therefore, day care can no longer be considered as a limited and marginal child welfare service. It has become a necessity and should not be linked to welfare and social deviance.
3. Parents must have a primary role in day care, and it should be committed to strengthening the family. Day care and the future of the family are related. It should be encouraged that child-rearing be shared between mothers and fathers.
4. Day care and preschool programs should expand gradually, so that workers are trained properly and programs are evaluated for their effectiveness according to the children and families that use the programs.
5. Programs must be developmental and educational, not merely custodial.
6. Day care need not be limited to centers. Family day care, informal care, and private care should be supported by the same financial sources which are available to centers.
7. A system on internships, apprenticeships, on-site evaluations, and in-service training should characterize the education of day care workers. The care of young children should not be confined to professionalized, institutionalized forms of child care, or to a long list of credentials. Rather, it should depend upon a demonstrated ability to provide good care for other people's children.