

Bethany Little
Associate Director
White House Domestic Policy Council

Archived by Joshua M. Beck
November 22, 2000

Box #8

- Universal Pre-School File
- Miscellaneous File
- Hispanic Education File
- Literacy File
- Office of Civil Rights Education Cases
- Hispanic Education File
- Adult Education File
- Charter School File
- Head Start and Early Childhood Learning File

ENCLOSURES FILED OVERSIZE ATTACHMENTS

18397

NARA 15617

DRAFT 12/12

National Neglect

Reconsidering the Case for Universal Preschool in the
United States

Theresa B. Sirois
December, 1999

CONTENTS	PAGE
I. Preface	4-5
II. Introduction	5-7
III. America's Need:	7-16
<i>The Benefits of Quality Early Childhood Education</i>	
A. Neurological, Psychological and Sociological Research	7-10
B. The Changing Role of Women in American Families	10-11
C. Leveling the Playing Field	11-13
D. The Current State of American Preschool	13-16
IV. The History of Early Childhood Education in the United States	16-31
A. Foundational Ideas and Experiments	17-19
B. The Beginnings of Early Education in the U.S. : 1900-50	19-22
C. A New Need for Working Women, A New Call from Science: 1950-70	22-24
D. Progressive Resistance: 1970 - Present	24-31
V. Early Childhood Education in France	31-36
A. Philosophical Foundations of French Education	31-33
B. French Preschool Today	33-34
C. The Preschool Debate in Recent French History	34-36
VI. Towards a National Commitment to Preschool:	36-45
<i>Key Policies for Developing an American System</i>	
A. Standards and Quality Assessment	37-39
B. Teacher Training	39-40
C. Curriculum	40-42
D. Family Involvement	42-43
E. Financing	43-45
VII. The Unrelenting Debate:	45-46
<i>American Ideologies that Inhibit Universal Preschool</i>	
A. Federal Overextension	46-47
B. Anti-Bureaucracy	48
C. Centralized Authority in France	48-49
D. Diffuse Authority in America: State and Local Control	49-51
E. Public Versus Private Economic Responsibility	51-52
F. Primacy and Privacy of the Family	52-54
G. Complacent American Feminists	54-56
VIII. Recommendations and Conclusions	56-
A. A Challenge for Advocates and Policymakers	56-60
B. A Beacon in the Night	60-61
C. A Call for Early Education in the United States	61-62

Plato- “The direction in which a man starts his life will determine his future life. The most important education is right training in the nursery.”

Napoleon Bonaparte- “L’instruction publique devait être l’objet principal du gouvernement.”

John Dewey- “Exorbitant desire for uniformity of procedure and for prompt external results are the chief foes which the open-minded attitude meets in school.”

Richard Nixon- “Child development programs...are overshadowed by the fiscal irresponsibility, administrative unworkability, and family-weakening implications of the system it envisions...a long leap into the dark for the United States government and the American people.”

Betty Friedan- “Where we are behind and a backward country is in our lack of national, high-standard, quality nursery school beginning at the age of two or even six months. People with money send their kids to good nursery school at two years old; they can afford it. It’s good for the child’s development. The idea that the child is somehow better off with its mother and nothing but its mother for two, three, four years, is wrong!”

I. Preface

Preschool does not strike the average American as an exceptionally important or controversial national issue. When asked “what is the right age for children to start school?... Americans quickly say 5 or 6,” while in many European countries, it is assumed that three and four-year-olds should attend class.¹ Americans complacently assume that it does not make a difference whether a child attends preschool or not; they are indifferent to the fact that there may or may not be quality programs in their towns and cities; and if not, there’s always baby-sitters. “No big deal,” they say. But the inconsistency of availability, affordability and quality of preschools in the United States is perhaps the *biggest deal*, the most expansive, destructive problem facing our nation. The issue has tremendous implications for society, families, mothers, and, of course, America’s youngest children. Furthermore, it is a problem that we have continuously overlooked and dismissed for our entire history.

In a meeting Attorney General Janet Reno held with Smith undergraduates this December, her comments repeatedly turned to the topic of early childhood programs. The Attorney General’s concerns about crime, drugs, weapons, racism, and other social issues facing the United States found their way back to the beginnings of life. Early attention and intervention, she believed, is the only way to truly get at the root of such vast concerns. This same connection was expressed again in an interview with Naomi Karp, the Director of the National Institute for Early Childhood Development and Education at the Department of Education. In response to a question about the financial concerns of opponents of national preschool, she explained this logic: “Again, I have to ask, do we want to pay up front or later in life? Do we want early childhood programs to be our growth industry or do we want prisons to be our growth industry?”² We know from research that early education affects the success of children in all higher levels of

¹ Wilgoren, Jodi. “Head Start, Everyone: Toddling Off to Preschool.” *The New York Times*, October 31, 1999.

² Interview: Naomi Karp, Director, National Institute for Early Childhood Development and Education, U.S. Department of Education; October 15, 1999.

education, in their future careers, and in their lives. But, perhaps more importantly, as the agreement between Naomi Karp and Janet Reno illustrates, it also has tremendous implications for almost every social problem facing America today.

II. Introduction

This analysis will illustrate the vital need for a national commitment to early childhood education in the United States and the factors that have limited its development. Section III highlights the different research and national trends that demonstrate the need for national preschool. I discuss the neurological, sociological and psychological research of the immediate and long-term effects of preschool for young children. Again and again, scientists have found that not only does quality preschool present tremendous hope for improving the futures of American children, but it is also an indispensable factor in proper child development. Child development experts argue that the necessity for early education cannot be ignored.

In addition to the needs of American children, in section III, I will also discuss the needs of working women and the American family. Increasingly, it is no longer an option for American families to choose to keep mothers home with young children. The majority of mothers are already in the workforce earning a second, or in some cases sole, income that their family depends on to provide a decent standard of living. The economic need for women to pursue careers outside the home and the feminist demands for equal opportunities are two additional vital issues for American society that demand access to quality preschools.

Section III also includes an examination of the research and statistics particularly regarding disadvantaged and at-risk children in the United States. I highlight the various scientific findings of the extreme benefits of quality preschool for disadvantaged children. These programs have been shown to bring these children to necessary levels of cognitive, social, and emotional development for success in future schooling. Despite the

opportunity quality early education presents for “leveling the playing field” for at-risk children, I will also discuss the extreme inequalities of access and quality for low-income and minority Americans.

Finally, in section III, I give a brief overview of the current state of American preschools. I review the various problems the United States has relative to other nations surrounding issues including privatization, standards and quality assessment, and funding. In addition, I also discuss the research regarding the emotional and intellectual damage low-quality programs can actually cause for young children as well as the statistics of quality and effectiveness in American preschools.

Section IV is a brief history of the philosophical, social, and political debates in the United States surrounding early education programs. This section is useful for the reader to understand the development of the issue in American popular opinion, as well as the development of the present preschool system. I also refer back to section IV later in my analysis in order to provide example for my arguments and observations about the condition of American preschool and future possibilities. The history of early education in the United States illustrates the particular sentiments, values, and trends that continually resurface with each social and political debate.

I have included section V, a parallel history of early education in France, in order to contrast the very different development and system characteristics of French preschool. The success of early education in France provides a valuable example from which American policymakers can glean ideas for issues such as standards, finance, and sponsorship. The history of the development of French preschool is also pertinent in this analysis because, it provides an illustration of the very different characteristics of the political debate surrounding these programs. In addition, analysis of the historical discussion of education and preschool in France allows the reader to contrast French and American values of children, education, women and the family. Although the United States and France were founded on similar democratic principles of freedom and equality,

their interpretation and implementation of such values over history have taken vastly different directions.

In section VI, I discuss the major policy areas that must be addressed in order to develop a successful American preschool system. These areas include standards and quality assessment, teacher training, curriculum, family involvement, and financing. Each area is vital and interdependent; policymakers will need to devote serious consideration and analysis to different strategies to accomplish these goals.

And finally, in section VII, I examine the different ideological barriers that have resurfaced in political debate and national sentiment, inhibiting the development of universally-available, quality programs. I assert that each time this subject has come to the fore of policy debates, there are a several reoccurring themes in national discourse that have impaired American progress toward a national preschool system. These themes stem from inherent conceptions of freedom, the role of government, and the family that are unique to American culture and based on our earliest social and political foundations.

My discussion of the different policy and ideological barriers to national preschool agendas is meant to allow readers to acknowledge these factors so that they may be overcome. In this analysis, my goal is to compel the reader that a national commitment to early childhood education in the United States is long overdue.

III. America's Need

The Benefits of Quality Early Childhood Education

“Children can’t wait! Children can’t wait!”

*—Rallying cry of 17,000 advocates at the National Conference of
The National Association for the Education of Young Children*

Atlanta, 1989

A. Neurological, Psychological and Sociological Research

In the 1960's, psychological and neurological research began to show that the first years of a child's life are formative.³ Physical contact, nurturance by, and social interaction with adults during these years makes a dramatic difference on how he or she will function later in life. Recent neurological research has shown that, not only is proper stimulation during these years important, it is the most vital of a person's entire life. Using new technologies such as PET scans and functional MRI, scientists have concluded that fifty percent of proper brain functioning throughout life depends on the physical and emotional environment to which a child is exposed.⁴ In addition, there are "windows of opportunity" for brain development during the beginning years that you cannot make up for later. Dr. Jill Stamm, a national lecturer on infant learning and cognition, explains that, "the brain doesn't grow like your feet: gradually, from year to year. It reaches ninety percent of its adult-size, capacity, and wiring by age three."⁵

The Carolina Abecedarian Study is the most recent longitudinal study of the results of quality early childhood education.⁶ With the support of the Department of Education, researchers followed the effects of full-time, high-quality preschool in the lives of children from low-income families from 1972 to 1999. The prescribed preschool curriculum gave each child individualized educational activities focused on cognitive, social and emotional development. Researchers surveyed these children through the age of twenty-one, with follow-up reports of their progress at ages twelve and fifteen. The control group were children of the same age who had not had quality preschool.

The Abecedarian project came to a number of conclusions about the benefits of early childhood education to which I will refer throughout my discussion in this essay. Most of the researchers' conclusions have been seen in previous studies. This project is

³ Auleta, Michael. *Foundations of Early Childhood Education*. (New York: Random House, 1969) pp. 55-85.

⁴ Snell, Marilyn. "Dr. Jill Stamm on the Importance of Early Brain Development." *Blueprint* (Fall 1999) pp.39.

⁵ Ibid. pp. 39.

⁶ The Carolina Abecedarian Project. Released November 1999. Conducted by the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

significant, however, because it is one of the first longitudinal analyses conducted and gives additional confirmation to the arguments of child development experts and early childhood education advocates. In accordance with previous psychological and neurological research, the Abecedarian study found that the cognitive stimulation of quality preschool gave children a broad intellectual advantage later in life. Throughout their education, participants had significantly higher mental test scores, language skills, and reading and mathematics achievement than those who were untreated.

The Abecedarian project found similar long-term benefits for poor and disadvantaged children: (1) Forty percent of those with preschool were still in school at age twenty-one, compared with twenty percent of the control group; (2) Thirty-five percent of the young adults who had preschool had either graduated from or attended a four-year college, compared with only twelve percent of the control group; (3) Compared to the control group, young adults who had preschool were, on average, two years older when their first child was born (nineteen years); and (4) Employment rates were higher among those who had attended preschool (sixty-five percent compared to fifty percent).

The “Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study,” conducted from 1993 to 1996, supported the findings of the Abecedarian Project about the benefits of preschool for cognitive development.⁷ Moreover, this study found a number of social and emotional benefits of quality early childhood education. Researchers observed that children with close relationships to preschool teachers had better thinking and attention skills, were more sociable, and had fewer behavior problems in elementary school.

A survey of early childhood research by Rand Corporation also confirmed higher short-term intellectual abilities and higher long-term school achievement for children who had quality preschool.⁸ The multitude of studies over the past thirty years found that

⁷ Helburn, S., M. Culkin, J. Morris, N. Mocan, C. Howes, L. Phillipsen, D. Bryant, R. Clifford, D. Cryer, E. Peisner-Feinberg, M. Burchinal, S. Kagan, and J. Rustici. Study: “Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers”. (Denver, CO: University of Colorado, 1995) PS 023 512.

⁸ Karoly, Lynn; et al. A Rand Corporation Study: “Investing in Our Children: What We Know and Don’t Know About the Costs and Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions”. 1998.

children with quality preschool had less need for remedial and special education and were more likely to graduate high school and attend college. Later in life, the same individuals earned higher salaries, were more likely to save for retirement, less likely to be on welfare, commit crime or have a drug dependency.⁹ Overall, the study estimated that the most effective preschool programs create savings to the government of \$13,000 to \$19,000 per child above the estimated cost of the programs themselves (\$5000 per child).¹⁰ Quality early childhood education is an investment that would benefit children, parents and all of society.

B. The Changing Role of Women in American Families

Even when one does not consider the monumental benefits quality preschool offers, the increased necessity of dual-incomes and working moms has made early childhood programs imperative. Whether or not quality, educational programs are available and affordable, families will have to seek out-of-home care for young children. Beyond the feminist movement for the rights of women to work and pursue careers, the presence of women in the labor force has increasingly become a necessity rather than simply an option. A national study found that fifty-five percent of working women provide half or more of their household income.¹¹ In addition, one out of three American children with a working mother is poor *even though* his mother works, or *would* be poor if his mother did not work.¹²

Moreover, sixty-five percent of women with children under six-years-old and sixty percent of women with infants are in the labor force already. Sixty percent of

⁹ Gomby, D.S.; Lerner, M.B.; Stevenson, C.S. et al. "Long Term Outcomes of Early Childhood Programs: Analysis and Recommendations". The Future of Children, Vol.5 (Winter 1995) pp.6-24.

¹⁰ Karoly, Lynn; et al. "Investing in Our Children: What We Know and Don't Know About the Costs and Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions". pp. 73-81.

¹¹ Whirlpool Foundation Study by the Families and Work Institute. "Women: The New Providers" (New York: Families and Work Institute, May 1995).

¹² Calculations of Data for 1996 for the 1997 Current Population Survey by the Children's Defense Fund.

young children do not have stay-at-home mothers.¹³ Likewise, in 1996, about 2.7 million or one out of three preschool-age children whose mothers *were not* in the labor force were being cared for in non-parental care on a regular basis.¹⁴ The need for women to remain and continue to enter the work force is clear. It is a trend that cannot be prevented and should therefore be facilitated, in the interests of our children, by increased access to quality early childhood education.

C. Leveling the Playing Field

Preschool can also level the playing field for disadvantaged and at-risk children before they enter kindergarten, improving on current government programs. "Some children are subject to stressors during early childhood that impede normal development. These stressors include insufficient cognitive stimulation, nutritional deprivation, inadequate health care, and maladaptive social interaction. Early intervention to correct these impediments has the potential to promote healthy development in at-risk children."¹⁵ Studies have shown that disadvantaged children benefit from quality preschool.¹⁶ Based on trends like these, the majority of publicly funded early childhood programs and subsidies in the United States have been directed towards at-risk children and their parents, such as the federal government's Head Start. Although it has been successful relative to private sector programs, however, Head Start has had extreme difficulties serving its children and has been shown to be quite inferior to universal

¹³ U.S. Bureau of Census, "Who's minding our Preschoolers?" fall 1994.

¹⁴ National Center for Education Statistics. "Child Care and Early Childhood Program Participation opd Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers." (Washington, DC: NCES, October 1996).

¹⁵ Karoly, Lynn; et al. "Investing in Our Children: What We Know and Don't Know About the Costs and Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions". pp. 23.

¹⁶ Brooks-Gunn, J., et al. "Ethnic Differences in Children's Intelligence Test Scores: Role of Economic Deprivation, Home Environment, and Maternal Characteristics," *Child Development*, Vol.67(2), 1996, pp.396-408. AND Campbell, F.A. and Ramsey, C.T. "Effects of Early Intervention on Intellectual and Academic Achievement: A Follow-up Study of Children from Low-Income Families." *Child Development*, Vol. 65(2), 1994, pp.684-689.

European programs.¹⁷ The state level is not much better at providing universal access; forty-two states have preschool programs focused towards poor and disadvantaged children, while only one state, Georgia, provides universal preschool for all children.¹⁸

Race and income are the best predictors of enrollment in the United States. Among minorities, enrollment of African American children increased from forty-five percent in 1996 to fifty-five percent in 1997. Consistent with this trend, high school completion among blacks increased from seventy-three percent in 1980 to eighty-three percent in 1990. The trends have not been as positive for Hispanic children, though they are the fastest growing racial or ethnic group (nine percent of the population in 1980 to fifteen percent in 1998, about one in five children will be Hispanic in 2020). Nevertheless, preschool enrollment for this group has not increased and remains significantly lower than other children for the past twenty years (fifty-seven to sixty-seven percent).¹⁹

Income is also a strong predictor of early childhood education enrollment. Unfortunately, most poor children are not enrolled (forty percent of poor 4-year-olds and fewer than twenty percent of poor 3-year-olds).²⁰ Under the American privatized preschool system, quality early childhood education has been almost impossible for low-income families to afford. Full-day quality preschool costs an average of \$4,000 to \$10,000 per year, often as much as college tuition at a public university.²¹ However, one out of three families with young children earns less than \$25,000 a year.²² Some subsidies and public programs are available for low-income families; but even such

¹⁷ Cicirelli, V.G. *The Impact of Head Start: An Evaluation of the Effects of Head Start on Children's Cognitive and Affective Development*. (New York: Ohio University and Westinghouse Learning Corp., 1969). AND Zigler and Muenchow. *Head Start: The Inside Story of America's Most Successful Educational Experiment*. (New York: BasicBooks, 1992).

¹⁸ www.osr.state.ga.us/whatisprek.html.

¹⁹ "America's CHildren: National Indicators of Wel-Being 1999: Education Indicators" pp. 46-47.

²⁰ U.S. Dept. of Ed. Report: "The Condition of Education, 1995: Access to Preschool Education."

²¹ "Child Care Information Exchange" July 1996.

²² U.S. Bureau of Census, Current Population Reports: "Money and Income in the United States: 1996". (Washington, DC: USG Printing Office, 1997).

funding is usually inadequate. Currently, with funding from their state lottery, Georgia is the only state that has provided preschool for all families eligible for assistance under federal guidelines as well as for families above the poverty line. Nationally, only one in ten eligible children who need help are getting public assistance.²³ Aside from Georgia, the forty-two states that make some effort to fund early childhood programs focus only on low-income families. Despite such efforts, deep inequalities in access to quality preschool, or indeed to any programs at all, have left disadvantaged children even further behind their middle and higher income peers. Efforts to level the playing field for poor children will only be successful if access to preschool undergoes extensive expansion.

D. The Current State of American Preschool

Compared to many countries in Western Europe, the United States lags far behind in funding and commitment to early childhood education. A recent study compared American state funding to that of a number of European nations.²⁴ Researchers concluded that the United States system is significantly more inconsistent and lower in overall quality, due to its privatized system and extremely low state and federal commitment relative to most European nations. Children's experiences in American preschool vary widely with different settings, teacher expertise, curricula, and providers. Quality is often compromised for cost in the for-profit domination American system paradigm. "The private sector, financed almost exclusively by parent fees, has traditionally been the major supplier of early childhood education in the United States." The study determined that, "market forces constrain the cost of programs and at the same time depress quality...Most U.S. programs are mediocre in quality, sufficiently poor to interfere with children's emotional and intellectual development."

²³ Adams, Schulman, and Ebb. Locked Doors: States Struggling to Meet the Child Care Needs of Low-Income Working Families. (Washington, DC: Children's Defense Fund, March 1998).

²⁴ Helburn, S. et al. "Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care." (Denver: University of Colorado, 1995).

Not only does privatization make preschool too expensive for average American families; it also causes underregulation. As a result, quality is ignored, and resources, teacher training, effective and appropriate curricula and other such vital factors are severely neglected. The Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes study also found that, although a minority, “sites operated by public agencies, such as public schools, and sites receiving direct public funding generally provided higher quality.”²⁵ Nevertheless, these scarce programs and underfunded fail to provide for any significant portion of the nation’s child population; public programs usually have great difficulties just serving the at-risk and disadvantaged preschoolers they are meant for. Hence, although high-quality early childhood education can have tremendous benefits for children, parents and even society as a whole, poor quality presents a threat to American preschoolers. Seventy-six percent of 511 programs surveyed were rated “less than good” by child development experts. Without state or federal oversight or subsidy, the fifty-five percent of American children age three to five already enrolled in early childhood programs are in danger of stunted intellectual, social and emotional development.²⁶ American preschool programs serve thirteen million children for an average of forty hours a week, and yet three-fourths are judged to be below-average quality.

American children are being left behind academically by children of other nations. Quality preschool can prepare children intellectually and emotionally; however, according to a recent study, forty-eight percent of American children have moderate or serious transition problems entering kindergarten.²⁷ Teachers report that kids simply are not prepared for school and are set back as a result in their future education. Child experts define school readiness as, “for a period of several years, they have been exposed to consistent, stable adults who are emotionally invested in them; to a physical

²⁵ Helburn, et al. “Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care.”

²⁶ Testimony by Deborah Phillips, Children’s Defense Fund, before the Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources, March 1, 1995.

²⁷ National Center for Early Childhood Development and Learning. (1998) “Kindergarten Transitions.” and “Assessing Readiness.” based on the paper: “Kindergarten Teachers’ Practices Related to Transition to School: Results of a National Survey.”

environment that is safe and predictable; to regular routines and rhythms of activity; to competent peers, and to materials that stimulate their exploration and enjoyment of the object world and from which they derive a sense of mastery.”²⁸ The National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families suggests that preparedness requires, “confidence, curiosity, intentionally, self-control, relatedness, and communication and cooperation skills.” They also identify a basic pool of knowledge necessary for success in school: “the ability to read or recite the alphabet, familiarity with shapes, numbers, and colors, general physical skills such as skipping, jumping, running, or balancing.”²⁹

The majority of American children enter preschool with insufficient comprehension and abilities in these general predictors. Kindergarten teachers report that students entering their classrooms have the following difficulties: forty-six percent cannot follow directions, thirty-six percent lack academic skills, thirty-five percent lack a sound home environment, thirty-four percent cannot work independently, thirty percent cannot work with others, twenty percent are too immature and fourteen percent lack basic communication skills.³⁰ Quality preschool from age three can foster precisely such essential exposure and experience. Countries such as France, Spain, Luxembourg, the United Kingdom and Germany seem to recognize that quality preschool education is not just an option, but a necessary addition to supportive, caring parents in order for children to develop the characteristics and basic comprehensions needed to be successful in school.³¹

In conclusion, quality early childhood education offers three to five-year-olds, their parents, and society immense potential benefits. Benefits for young children

²⁸ Pianta, R.C. and Walsh, P.J. High-Risk Children in Schools: COConstructing Sustaining Relationships. (New York: Routeledge, 1996).

²⁹ The National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families. *Heart Start: The Emotional Foundations of School Readiness*. (Washington, DC: NCITF, 1992).

³⁰ NCEDL. Study: “Kindergarten Transitions.”

³¹ United States General Accounting Office. (1995) “Early Childhood Programs”. pp.14-15.

include: (1) advanced social and emotional child development through relationships and communication with teachers and peers; (2) enhanced cognitive and intellectual skills, as well as comprehension of basic academic concepts, both leading to increased success later in education and life; (3) life-long benefits, including fewer drop-outs, decreased need for remedial and special education, decreased delinquency, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, and crime, higher grades, rates of college attendance and completion, increased average salary levels, savings and all-around chances for future success. Access to quality preschool would also assist parents, particularly mothers, in entering and remaining in the work force. In turn, this leads to decreased poverty and welfare dependence, and increased opportunities for women. Universally-available preschool offers long-term benefits for society including: decreased crime levels, drug abuse, welfare dependency, homelessness, and other social woes, as well as increased opportunities for government savings and reallocation. Such research seems to conclusively show that investment in quality, universally available and affordable preschool would benefit the entire country, not only parents and young children.

However, as I have noted, a lack of national commitment to regulation, standards or funding, and the historic complacency toward privatized system all make preschool unattainable for most Americans. Disadvantaged children, who need such programs the most, are the least likely to have access. It is becoming increasingly impossible for average American families to maintain their standard of living without the incomes of two working parents, but quality programs are not available to meet this demand.

IV. The History of Early Childhood Education in the United States

In this section, I briefly outline the scant history and development of early childhood programs in the United States. The examination of public and legislative debates around this subject over the past century exposes the reoccurring sentiments that have inhibited the development of a national system like those of European nations.

A. Foundational Ideas and Experiments

Early childhood education as we understand it today had its formal beginnings during the first half of the 19th century in Europe. With inspiration from preceding theory on education reformers such as Martin Luther, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Amos Comenius, Swiss education reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi established schools in many parts of the world, including the United States, based on the emerging belief that all children, despite class or family, deserve to be educated. Rejecting the previous pedagogy based solely on memorization, Pestalozzi's schools promoted instead the development of sense perception and motivation through close observation of the individual child. His philosophy was the first to emphasize education as a science to facilitate and improve child development.³² In 1816, educational innovator Robert Owen introduced the first infant school for three-year-olds in England. With ideas borrowed from Pestalozzi and Rousseau, Owen based his school on the goal of enriching children as a natural human right and as a tool to combat socio-economic disparities.³³

Another disciple of Pestalozzi and teacher in a Pestalozzi school for some time, Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel established the first kindergarten in Germany in 1837. The school was wholly based on achieving sound child development through child observation and educational play. Froebel stressed that proper education of the youngest children must precede any future success in education and believed that the child is an innately social being, finding stimulation in meaningful relationships. He believed that education should focus on the whole person to enable them to "achieve their full purpose as rational beings."³⁴ Froebel's kindergartens were a great success and proved to be a strong impetus for early childhood education programs around the world, particularly in the

³² Auleta, Michael. *Foundations of Early Childhood Education*. (New York: Random House, 1969). pp 17-18.

³³ Ibid. pp.19.

³⁴ Bowen, James. *A History of Western Education*. vol. 3 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981). pp 337-341.

United States. However, after he established an institute to train young women to be early childhood educators, the German government banned kindergartens due to conservative objections to the employment of women.

Despite this setback, Froebel's followers propagated his cause, establishing the first kindergartens in the United States in 1855 in Wisconsin and in 1860 in Massachusetts. The first publicly-supported kindergarten program in the U.S. was established by Superintendent William T. Harris in the St. Louis schools system. The program followed Froebel's standards and curriculum until this school of educational thought was interrupted by the revolutionary ideas of philosopher and psychologist John Dewey. Dewey's ideas are universally considered to be the most influential in modern education, particularly for young children.³⁵

Dewey's "Laboratory School" at the University of Chicago, established in 1896, became the experimental precedent for decades of future progressive educational reform.⁶ The school taught children ages four to fourteen and was based on a democratic and scientific philosophy of education. Dewey promoted his notion that the contemporary education violated and constricted the child's individualism through indoctrination of preordained values and a fixed, ordered view of the world. He maintained that in a democratic society that is truly committed to individual freedom must ensure that the ways and social norms of society are kept open and subject to question and revision. Dewey thought that teachers should be cooperative learners in a child-centered curriculum of inquiry and experience of the world. He maintained that, particularly with impressionable young children, individuals develop sound judgment and morality by learning through the application of the scientific method. Dewey therefore believed that it was the responsibility of schools to guide the child in this process, rather to simply impart information and values to be automatically accepted and memorized.³⁶ A more

³⁵ Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education*. (New York: Free Press, 1966). Copyright 1916 by Macmillan Co., Renewed by Dewey in 1944.

³⁶ Ibid. pp. 100-110.

moderate value-free standard can still be seen in today's American public school system. Although it was not his intention, Dewey's revolutionary ideas about education have given fuel to opponents of early childhood education throughout the twentieth century.

Maria Montessori was another influential innovator in early childhood education. As opposed to Dewey's impact, Montessori's contribution has been one of the few to strengthen the argument for early education. She was the first to focus on the critical child development benefits of proper classroom strategy and curriculum. The first Italian woman to receive a medical degree, she observed that retarded children in the psychiatric ward where she was employed were mixed with the clinically insane. She concluded that this tragic situation was the result of the failure of the conventional Roman schools to intervene and cater to the atypical needs of these disabled children.³⁷ Using prescribed sequences of cognitive development-based play, Montessori devised a unique preschool teaching method that successfully allowed disabled children to keep up and even compete with normal children in annual public exams. She encouraged teachers to use only minimum guidance in order to ensure that children developed independence. The games Montessori used were primarily self-corrective instructional aids that she called "autoeducative." The role of early childhood educators was primarily observation. The influence of Maria Montessori's ideas can still be seen in much of American education, particularly for disabled and disadvantaged children, and even many modern children's toys.³⁸

B. The Beginnings of Early Education in the United States 1900-1950

The United States was a pioneer in education from the turn of the century, instituting eight-year elementary schools available to most white children in every state by 1900. Thirty-three states enacted legislation for compulsory school from 1900 to 1909,

³⁷ Auleta, Michael. *Foundations of Early Childhood Education*. pp 21-22.

³⁸ Montessori, Maria. *The Montessori Method*. (New York: Schocken, 1964.)

over the same period that the total population increased from 44 to 76 million. In 1900, the United States held the world record for total population educational enrollment: 22 percent.³⁹ The European examples of early childhood development theory and programs also continued to grow in popularity in America throughout the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century. Early childhood education, however, did not materialize except on the private level until the 1930's.

At this point, the basis for government support was support for families affected by the Great Depression. Preschool enrollments in available programs began to increase significantly during the first decades of the 20th century, particularly among middle-class American families. Most programs were available in a private, community level and were modeled after the theories of Froebel and Montessori. Federal attention finally was given to early childhood education and care in the late 1930's with the creation of a New Deal institution: the Work Progress Administration. The Administration facilitated unemployment during the Depression and World War II by creating the Emergency Nursery Schools (ENS), and later, the Lanham Act ChildCare Centers. By 1935, 1,900 preschool programs served over 75,000 American children.⁴⁰ The programs were housed primarily in the public schools and were on a half-day, year-round schedule. Although the Work Projects Administration was quite successful, it was phased out by the end of the decade due to a lack of funding and prioritization.⁴¹ The focus of the ENS on the alleviation of social crisis rather than on providing education signaled its transience from the start. Although proponents of preschool hoped that ENS would become permanent, the very name of the program served as a constant reminder of this prioritization common in most American early childhood program initiatives: welfare over education.

³⁹ Bowen, James. *A History of Western Education*. pp.443.

⁴⁰ Olmstead, P. and Weikart, D. *How Nations Serve Young Childhood: Profiles of Child Care and Education in 14 Countries*. (Ypsilantio, MI: High/Scope Press, 1989) pp.370.

⁴¹ Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/ Mother's Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) pp. 118-121.

Despite its destruction, the ENS is worthy of particular note in this analysis because it was the first comprehensive federal action to provide a national-level preschool. Although the primary function of ENS was work relief, educational goals and values-oriented goals were also a focus for children and their families.⁴² Many American parents used the schools as childcare for the most part; as the program developed, however, educational and child development experts began to take control. These professionals had come to the consensus that ENS presented an unprecedented opportunity for expansion of early childhood education in America. They also recognized, however, that if the quality of the preschools could not be controlled, the programs would be more harmful for children than beneficial, and the movement for early childhood education would face a major setback. One education specialist commented at the time that, “The ENS must be recognized as educational institutions. No one wanted them to be simply child-minding or baby-sitting centers.”⁴³ As I will return to later in my analysis, the distinction between care and education is still unclear today. Early childhood educators maintain that this is one of the main barriers to the promotion of American programs

At the onset of World War II, early childhood care and education was again brought to the fore of social policy priorities. Women and mothers whose husbands joined the armed forces went to work to replace the vacancies the absent men had left in the professional and labor work force. Working women were vital in providing military armaments and maintaining the vigor of the American economy during the Second World War. Women who were once mothers and homemakers were now in need of child care services to maintain personal and national livelihood. By 1945, between 105,00 and 130,000 American children were enrolled in Work Progress Administration programs

⁴² Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/ Mother's Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy*. pp.120.

⁴³ Heinig, Christine. “The Emergency Nursery Schools and the Wartime Child Care Centers: 1933-1946,” in *Early Childhood Education: Living History Interviews*, comp. Hymes, James, Jr., book 3, *Reaching Large Numbers of Children* (Carmel, CA: Hacienda Press, 1978) pp.13.

allowing millions of women to participate in the labor force. Although this was not a large percentage of the child population, this was the highest enrollment in a public early education program the United States had seen until Head Start. With the dismantling of the Lanham Act childcare centers and ENS nursery schools after the war, it was assumed that women would resume their traditional roles as homemakers and mothers. The women's movement gained new momentum, however, changing the American family and work force forever.

C. A New Need for Working Women, A New Call from Science

Until this point, government supported childcare and preschool with purely economic motivations. As women continued to enter the workplace throughout the 1950's and 60's, this trend and increases in the cost of living brought new demand for childcare and education programs for all families. Indeed, the beginnings of the "social welfare" movement were focused on the needs of all American families.⁴⁴ In addition to the force of the social welfare movement, interest in early childhood education was also stirred once again by new research and development theory. The ideas of such scientists as Piaget and Bruner⁴⁵ introduced renewed concern for the importance of child development at the earliest stages of life. It was recognized that cognitive development and future academic success were highly dependent on proper stimulation during this period. The Perry Preschool Project, conducted 1962 to 1967, demonstrated that while IQ score advantages for children in high-quality preschool did not usually last past the third grade, most children showed significant advantages in future success. This included

⁴⁴ Olmstead, P. and Weikart, D. *How Nations Serve Young Childhood: Profiles of Child Care and Education in 14 Countries*. pp371

⁴⁵ Piaget, Jean. *The Origin of Intelligence in Children*. (New York: International University Press, 1952). and *The Psychology of Intelligence*. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1947).; Bruner, J.S. *On Knowing*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962.); *The Process of Education*. Cambridge: Harvard U Press, 1966).

higher grades, less delinquency and drop-outs, higher high school and college graduation rates, and higher employment, incomes and savings as adults.⁴⁶

Despite the universal beginnings of the social welfare movement, by the mid-1960's President Johnson introduced his "War-on-Poverty" campaign that focused on social programs for disadvantaged Americans. The campaign included programs such as the extremely successful early childhood care and education program, Head Start, launched in 1964. This program is based on the notion that all children, not only those of affluent families, deserve access to early childhood education programs.⁴⁷ Head Start also provides support for mothers and fathers in single-parent households who need the freedom childcare grants in order to maintain a decent quality of life. Although many of Johnson's "Great Society" programs have been dissolved, Head Start remains today the largest federally-sponsored program for early childhood care and education.⁴⁸

By the late 1960's, as women continued to enter the work force at substantial rates, the concern for childcare and preschool simply as a benefit for the disadvantage began to recede. The Education Policy Commission of the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Association of School Administrators took an official position in favor of universal preschool similar to proposals like Vice President Gore's that are finally beginning to resurface today. "All children should have the opportunity to go to school beginning at the age of four...all levels of government must cooperate in seeking the funds. Early childhood education should be financed and administered as an integral part of public education."⁴⁹ The Commission supported its assertions by citing child development research, noting that, "it is in the early years that deprivations are most disastrous in their effects." With the continued success of Head

⁴⁶ Barnett, Steven. "Benefit-Cost Analysis of the Perry Preschool Project: long-term effects". Educational Evaluations and Policy Analysis. 7(Winter 1985):333-342.

⁴⁷ Zigler, Edward; Muenchow, Susan. *Head Start: The Inside Story of America's Most Successful Educational Experiment*. (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

⁴⁸ Mills Kay. *Something Better for Our Children: The History and People of Head Start*. (New York: Penguin, 1998).

⁴⁹ Education Policies Commission, "Universal Opportunity for Early Childhood Education," *NEA Journal*, November 1966, pp. 8-10.

Start and growing public awareness of developmental benefits, proponents of early childhood programs saw that the climate was right for action. In 1969, Representative John Brademas sponsored the Comprehensive Preschool Education and Child Day-Care Act.⁵⁰ The Act proposed a program of preschool education for all American children. Although the legislation did not pass, it instigated the first open concern of the federal government in early childhood programs that was not predominantly motivated by economic and welfare interests.

D. Progressive Resistance: 1970 - Present

The debate over federal involvement in universal childcare and early education services was finally introduced during the 92nd Congress (1971-1972). The Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971 was proposed as an alternative to the original Brademas education-based legislation. The bill was the subject of intense debate between childcare advocates, Congress and the Administration. Sponsored by Senator Walter Mondale (D-MN), the Act proposed a national system of childcare services to all American families.⁵¹ This approach focused on the social service end of early childhood programs, although education was also a consideration. Low-income families would have access to free programs, whereas higher-income American families would pay on a sliding income scale. Feminists, labor leaders, civil rights activists, and early childhood educators all gave their strong support for the bill, citing child development benefits and potential for combating racism through early integration.⁵²

The controversy of debate over the legislation was not over whether to do it, but rather, how to do it: sponsorship. The Administration and many conservatives promoted a federalist system of federal to state funding. While alternatively, more liberal members

⁵⁰ Klein, Abbie. *The Debate Over Child Care: 1969-1990*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) pp. 33.

⁵¹ Olmstead, P. and Weikart, D. *How Nations Serve Young Childhood: Profiles of Child Care and Education in 14 Countries*. pp.372.

⁵² Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/ Mother's Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy*. pp. 248.

like Brademas supported the establishment of federal, administrative “prime-sponsors” in every state.⁵³ A compromise was finally reached in which sponsorship was given to state authorities with certain conditions and regulations from Washington. The issue of sponsorship remains today the most difficult challenge to comprehensive early childhood education legislation.

Despite its successful passage through both houses in Congress, the Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971 was ultimately vetoed in the White House. President Nixon defended his action arguing that the legislation, “would commit the vast moral authority of the National Government to the side of communal approaches of child-rearing over and against the family-centered approach.”⁵⁴ This argument shaped the debate over early childhood education for the next two decades. It caused severe blockage of any proactive movement for improving the American system. Nixon had let the cat out of the bag; that is to say, he voiced the ideological American concern over private versus public responsibility in family life. Nixon also noted that he had other plans in this area to extend the Family Assistance Plan in welfare provisions and Title XX in Social Security, both actions targeting disadvantaged families.⁵⁵ Policies after this devastating loss have followed a more conservative path, preserving Head Start and accomplishing very little outside welfare initiatives.

Unlike the women’s movement in France which I will discuss later, feminism in the United States failed to lend support to this issue. Although the women’s movement was fully underway by the mid-1970’s, women did not have a strong voice in this national discussion. Women would be one of the primary benefactors of universally-available preschool, a step toward the promotion of equal rights and opportunities. With the maintenance of the primacy of mother-care in American culture, equality in the

⁵³ Klein, Abbie. *The Debate Over Child Care: 1969-1990*. pp. 35.

⁵⁴ Norgren, Jill. 1981. “In Search of a National Child Care Policy: Background and Prospects.” *Western Political Quarterly* 34, no. 1: 127-142.

⁵⁵ Michel, Sonya. *Children’s Interests/ Mother’s Rights: The Shaping of America’s Child Care Policy*. pp.251.

workforce is essentially dependant upon early care and educatin programs. Nevertheless, American feminists have not seen this issue as significant in their efforts over the past forty years.⁵⁶

President Ford increased Title XX funding to allow states to improve quality in early childhood program facilities and services. Most of these allocations went only to impoverished areas. The Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements were established as quality requirements for centers that received federal funding. Congress failed to include a “maintenance of effort” clause in the grants, however, and so the standards did very little to improve the quality or supply of programs in the long-run.

The Ford Administration followed Nixon’s suit by vetoing the Child and Family Services Act of 1975. Also, sponsored by Mondale and Brademas, the Act was considered a “scaled-down” version of the former 1971 legislation. Despite the continued failure to accomplish progress in this area, however, the 1975 legislation introduced a new voice in the early childhood programs debate, one that should have been involved long ago: the organized educational community.⁵⁷

Albert Shanker, President of the AFL-CIO American Federation of Teachers, spoke out for public school sponsorship of early childhood programs. Shanker’s argument solidified educational considerations and proposed to eliminate the question of sponsorship with the answer in the long-established system of public schools. The education community has continued to vie for a more prominent position in early childhood programs. As the AFT and public school community voiced their stance, conservatives attacked the Child and Family Services Act, arguing that, “American children would be sovietized” as a result of the bill’s enactment.⁵⁸ It was at this point that competing interests of the public schools, child care, Head Start and a slew of other

⁵⁶ Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/ Mother's Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy*. pp. 293-295.

⁵⁷ Klein, Abbie. *The Debate Over Child Care: 1969-1990*. pp.36.

⁵⁸ Ibid. pp. 38-41.

communities spoke out, evoking a controversial deadlock that, for the most part, still persists today.⁵⁹

Although the Democrats took control of the White House at the end of the 1970's, the Carter Administration did very little to promote the cause of early childhood education.⁶⁰ Illustrating the conservative approach that Carter adopted on social and family policy, the President's Assistant Secretary for Human Development Services, Arabella Martinez, argued for parents' freedom of choice. Martinez contended that American parents preferred home-based care and that government should not overextend itself.⁶¹ She said that the federal government should support increased standards for quality, but should avoid creating a "fragmented system of services that relied on categorization and bureaucracy."⁶²

The Carter Administration gave very little support for the proposed Child Care Act of 1979 sponsored by Senator Alan Cranston (D-CA).⁶³ Martinez spoke out against the act again with the Administration's choice and anti-bureaucracy argument. Carter highlighted his goal of establishing universality in early childhood programs. He took the easy route, however, by emphasizing choice and pluralism rather than stirring up competing interests in the delivery question.⁶⁴ With this position, Carter also avoided the complicated question of family versus state control of child rearing. Although he was a champion of early childhood issues, Vice President Mondale was unable to exert his influence over the power struggles inflamed throughout the childcare community.⁶⁵ Thus, the question of federal involvement has since been approached with baby steps by

⁵⁹ Olmstead, P. and Weikart, D. *How Nations Serve Young Childhood: Profiles of Child Care and Education in 14 Countries*. pp.375.

⁶⁰ Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/ Mother's Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy*. pp. 295.

⁶¹ Zigler, Edward F. "Formal Schooling for Four-Year-Olds? No." In *Early Schooling*, ed. Sharon Kagan and Edward Zigler, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) pp. 32-39.

⁶² Ibid. pp. 34.

⁶³ Congressional Record 1-15-79, S 180.

⁶⁴ Boyer, Paul. *Promises to Keep: The United States Since World War II*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999) Second Edition.

⁶⁵ Klein, Abbie. *The Debate Over Child Care: 1969-1990*. pp. 37.

progressives. Open argument is generally focused on state versus local authority and delivery through different centers and organizations.

With the 1980's came Reaganomics; and with Reaganomics came the rapid breakdown of any coherency that might have been present in the American system of early childhood education and care. Under the Economic Reconciliation Act and Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, Title XX was transformed into a state block grant, eliminating conditional quality requirements. This was at a point when, according to government reports, most states were finally close to meeting these standards.⁶⁶ Total funding for all federal projects for child care was decreased by almost 20 percent, causing sudden vast reductions in the overall supply of early childhood programs. The bill caused complete devastation to the American system of public early childhood programs, as well as to lower-income families who depended on such services.

The Administration's primary aims with American early childhood programs were "decentralization, privatization and deregulation."⁶⁷ Decentralization was accomplished through federal funding cutbacks and the elimination of matching fund requirements for states. With the shift of Title XX to the Social Services Block Grant, states were given the freedom to prioritize early childhood programs or not, many of which did not. States were also granted authority over regulation of early childhood programs, as well as the authority to perform minimal quality assurance.

With Reagan's stress on choice for middle-income American families, privatization was achieved with promotion of a diverse childcare market through employer incentives and tax benefits.⁶⁸ In addition, the Administration's goal of deregulation was advanced through their refusal to enact the Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements. These requirements were developed by child development experts to

⁶⁶ Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/ Mother's Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy*. pp. 254.

⁶⁷ Olmstead, P. and Weikart, D. *How Nations Serve Young Childhood: Profiles of Child Care and Education in 14 Countries*. pp.375.

⁶⁸ Kahn, Alfred, and Shelia Kamerman. *Child Care: Facing the Hard Choices*. (Dover: Auburn House Publishing, 1987) pp. 21-25.

establish minimum standards for early childhood services that received federal funding and provide guidelines for other childcare programs.⁶⁹ Without a basic framework for quality and effectiveness, American early childhood programs are still subject only to standards set by individual states education authorities.

By the late 1980's, the demand in the United States for quality and availability in child care and education services could no longer be ignored. By 1987, the average American child spent only seventeen hours per week with a parent compared to thirty hours in 1965.⁷⁰ In the same year, almost seventy-five percent of women were in the labor force at least part-time.⁷¹ President Bush and Congress had a chance to rectify this situation when the Early Childhood Education and Development Act was introduced by Representative Gus Hawkins (D-) in January 1989. The debate over this bill highlighted, once again, the controversial issue of public school sponsorship. The bill proposed to expand Head Start to a full-day program, grant funding to states to establish and operate early childhood programs, educator training, and quality assurance. It would also provide free preschool to families under the poverty line and create a sliding income scale for fees for low-income families. During the first hearings, the bill enjoyed broad, bipartisan support in the House.⁷²

Meanwhile a Senate bill sponsored by Democratic Senator Dodd and Republican Senator Chafee, the Act for Better ChildCare Services, focused on providing national childcare. After much debate and compromise between the House and Senate bills and White House budget initiatives, Hawkins' school-based component was weeded out of the final approved legislation.⁷³ Issues such as the role of religious providers and

⁶⁹Olmstead, P. and Weikart, D. *How Nations Serve Young Childhood: Profiles of Child Care and Education in 14 Countries*. pp.378.

⁷⁰ Kamerman, Sheila; Kahn, Alfred. *Starting Right: How America Neglects its Youngest Children and What We Can Do About It*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) pp. 128.

⁷¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. November, 1987.

⁷² House Committee on Education and Labor Hearings: February 9, 1989; March 6, 1989; and April 5, 1989.

⁷³ *Congressional Record* 10-26-90, "Statement of Managers," HR12691

authority of the public schools continued to be items of controversy. Despite neglect of education initiatives, the final childcare legislation was seen as a great success and victory for the child-advocacy community. The National Association for the Education of Young Children hailed the action “Success at Last”⁷⁴ and the Children’s Defense Fund said it was “a historic step for children to get off on the right foot in the new decade.”⁷⁵

The compromise had quite a different reception in the education community. For example, *Education Week* noted that, “While hailed by child-advocacy groups... to overcome White House resistance, Senate leaders watered down components of their bills that would have set aside funds for school-based programs.”⁷⁶ Representative Hawkins also issued a press statement about the agreement saying that it, “pales in comparison to the agreement reached by the Education and Labor and Human Resources subconference on H.R. 3 (Early Childhood Education and Development Act) for...under the agreement there is no meaningful role for the schools.”⁷⁷ The goal of national early childhood education has since been underscored.

The early education of variable quality and availability that American parents and children now face is a result of thirty years of failed proposals and harmful conservative policies, including a particularly detrimental period during the Nixon and Reagan Administrations. As I will discuss in more depth later in my analysis, American philosophical and systemic barriers have caused a stalemate that has defeated almost two hundred proposals for early childhood program legislation in the House and Senate over the past fifty years.⁷⁸ The Clinton Administration has wrestled with the same inconsistent and unregulated programs. Clinton has pursued primarily welfare-related initiatives in

⁷⁴ National Association for the Education of Young Children. 1990. “Child Care Success as Last!” *Young Children* (November): 61.

⁷⁵ Children’s Defense Fund. 1990. Alert (The Hawkins/Dodd/Hatch Agreement and the Downey Alternative) January 10.

⁷⁶ Cohen, Deborah. 1990. “Child Care Accord Improves Chances for Bills Passage.” *Education Week* (October 24):1.

⁷⁷ Hawkins, Augustus. 1990. Press Release (October 16).

⁷⁸ Weis, Lois; Altbach, Philip; Kelly, Gail; Petrie, Hugh. *Critical Perspectives on Early Childhood Education*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) pp. 5.

early childhood programs, however, rather than focusing on needed comprehensive educational reform. Early childhood programs have become a big business in the United States. Providers of all kinds responded to market demand with competition including publicly-funded centers, non and for-profit centers, religious and home-based centers, and corporate centers. Like businessmen with products for sale, most for-profit centers have employed cost-cutting strategies reducing quality of resources and curricula without consideration for the needs or rights of the children affected.⁷⁹

V. Early Childhood Education in France

The following section provides a contrast for scrutiny of the American preschool system. In the history of early childhood education in France and in the current system, we can observe the extreme differences between the system and societal attitudes in the United States. In France, there truly is a *system*, a coherently organized national program of preschool for which there is much public support. The attitudes of French society regarding children, maternity and government involvement also provides a useful of contrast to those in the United States. The quality and equality education of every child has long been a traditional value in France. Particular focus on early childhood education in France over the past fifty years has been propelled by combined feminist and economic interests, by the realization essential benefits for child development and future success, and by traditional focus on education as a tool to promote social equality.

A. Philosophical Foundations of French Education

The basic underlying values of French society and politics provide strong support for their national early childhood education program. Through a historic struggle against the limitations to freedom caused by the control of the Catholic Church and severe class divisions, the French people have developed a national will for the preservation of

⁷⁹ Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/ Mother's Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy*. pp. 259.

equality and secularism like none other.⁸⁰ In addition, because of their foundations in authoritarian and religious authority, the national democratic and secular government is viewed as the accomplishment and upholder of equality and freedom. While the American public resists strong government action, the French view government as the instrument of the people; public policy and strong central government are supported as an extension of the democratic ideals achieved with the Revolution and with elimination of Church control. In combination with national economic interests, the French preschool system, like all French education and social welfare initiatives, is seen as the fulfillment of the responsibility of the national government to preserve equality of opportunity for all citizens. As W.D. Halls notes, “The view of education as individual and collective investment for the production of wealth and as an agent for the reshaping of society is the predominant ethic in modern French society.”⁸¹

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the quintessential philosophers influencing educational theory in France and around the world. “Rousseau conceived of learning as a democratic right rather than a privilege reserved for the few and proposed broad curriculum beginning with early childhood.”⁸² The primary goal of education under Rousseau’s philosophy was to develop the natural human rights of liberty, equality and fraternity throughout society, allowing individuals to realize these ideals at the earliest stage of life. Rousseau wrote that, “the natural, progressive, and harmonious development of all the child’s powers and facilities,” is the process by which education must reach out to embrace all members of society. Equality begins with our youngest children.⁸³

The first French preschools were opened in 1771 by Pastor Oberlin. These later continued to expand throughout French communes and came under the jurisdiction of the

⁸⁰ David, Myriam and Lézine, Irène. *Early Child Care in France*. (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1975) pp. 12.

⁸¹ Halls, W.D. *Education, Culture and Politics in Modern France*. (New York: Pergamon Press, 1976) pp.31.

⁸² Auleta, Michael. *Foundations in Early Education*. pp.23.

⁸³ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Émile*.

Ministry of Public Instruction in 1836.⁸⁴ Ultimately, these preschools, already serving over 600,000 children, were formally adopted in Jules Ferry's creation of the new French education system in 1870.

Ferry was the father of the hierarchical, standardized and secularized system still functioning today in modern France. Like Rousseau, he stressed the primacy of education above all policy, believing that it provided a tool to eliminate social and economic inequalities. He upheld the dreams of the Revolutionaries that education should be "compulsory for all, secular in character, and free."⁸⁵ Ferry's implementation of these ideals was met with considerable opposition from Royalists and Church affiliates. In 1881, all fees were abolished in State schools. In 1882, schooling was made compulsory for all children between ages 7 and 13. Also in 1882, all State schools were forbidden from teaching religion and their curriculum was secularized.⁸⁶ Education in France has long been a symbol of conflict and struggle for secularism and the elimination of social divisions.

B. French Preschool Today

The "écoles maternelles" of France operate on a municipal level with an assigned curriculum and pedagogy, supervision and financial support from the National Ministry of Education and the Secretary of State for Preschool Education. From the age of 3 years, every French child is entitled to enroll in the public preschool program.⁸⁷ Each community over 2000 people must establish preschool and recruit certified teachers for their programs. Early childhood educators are trained along with primary teachers under the national training program and are later assisted in the classroom by early childhood specialists. School hours of the "écoles maternelles" are significantly longer than the

⁸⁴ Halls, W.D. *Education, Culture and Politics in Modern France*. pp. 77-85.

⁸⁵ Ibid. pp. 89.

⁸⁶ David, Myriam and Lézine, Irène. *Early Child Care in France*. (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1975) pp.24-25.

⁸⁷ Le Système éducatif français: www.education.gouv.fr/syst/orgs2b.htm, 11/4/99

majority of American preschool programs, fixed at twenty-six hours per week. Today, practically every child from age 3 attends school (99.6 percent in 1995).⁸⁸ The French take great pride in their early childhood education as a program that has brought economic, social and individual development benefits of innumerable citizens and their young children.

In the tradition of Ferry, the movement for the French preschool system was motivated, in part, by increased awareness of the vital need for quality education at this stage in life. The French Ministry of Education now maintains specific curriculum material to be taught in State preschools. The curriculum strives to provide high-quality education and child development as a comprehensive individual and to prepare him or her for successful transition into elementary school. It includes instruction in basic concepts in such areas as communication and manners, scientific elements and phenomena of nature, the life cycle, measurement and civilization.⁸⁹

C. The Preschool Debate in Recent French History

By contrast with that of the United States, family policy in France has been successful in early education due to the government's ability to combine and mobilize the forces of a number of different social and political movements in recent history. Nationalist tendencies have long instilled pressure in France to encourage maternity. This trend coupled with the persistent increases of women in the work force and growing feminist argument for equality policy lead to the national support for French women as "mother-worker-citizens".⁹⁰

After World War II, conservative Catholic political forces pressed for "familist" policies designed to keep mothers out of the labor force. Nevertheless, as the service

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ www.education.gouv.fr/syst/orgs2b.htm

⁹⁰ Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/ Mother's Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy*. pp 286-289.

sector continued to expand in the 1950's, demand for women workers to perpetuate economic growth was strong.⁵⁸ With center-right Gaullists in power, economic interests lead to a massive campaign of state building in which child care and preschool were primary beneficiaries. Hundreds of new childcare centers and preschools were built across the country with the explicit intention of social and cognitive development and preparation for elementary school and an implicit intention of facilitating an increased French labor force.

During the 1970's and 1980's, pronatalist sentiments in France were the main protection of national childcare and preschool against attacks from the Socialist party. While opposition to the programs had come primarily from conservative familist argument in the past, cost was the main concern of neo-liberals during the 1970's. They advocated economic restructuring and government reduction, an opposition we have yet to overcome with any social policy in the United States.⁹¹ The development of childcare and preschool in France was slowed during this period, but remained persistent.

The French pronatalist argument was again evoked in the 1980's, opposing another neo-liberal movement, one that the United States is also quite familiar with: privatization and choice. Socialists implemented a new system in which parents receive allowances with which to provide public or private preschool or childcare for their children. The allowances had very little requirements and did not rule out such choices as in-home care. As Republicans in the United States often assert in debates for public support of social programs, French Socialists took on a neo-liberalist argument that parental "choice" and "individualized" rather than collective care were freedoms that were owed to the public. Underlying these assertions, however, and in line once again with American conservatives, was a goal to encourage mothers to stay home and maintain their traditional family roles.⁹²

⁹¹ Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/ Mother's Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy*. pp. 287.

⁹² David, Myriam and Lézine, Irène. *Early Child Care in France*. pp. 29.

Despite the Socialists' new conservative policies that limited support for early childhood education in France, expenditures were justified by persistent pronatalist arguments. It was apparent after the program was instituted, however, that economic interests were a stronger motivation. The proposed allowances were insufficient to support preschool or childcare for working mothers who earn lower wages. With low-wage working women pushed to move back to the home, Socialists attempted to decrease competition in the labor force and the pressure of unemployment.⁹³ Although it was not done in pretense, the policy completely ignored the problem of gender inequity in the work force in favor of lower public expense. The "privatized care" encouraged by Socialists was truly care by mothers.

In contemporary history, French support for universal preschool has wavered with the political climate. This climate cannot necessarily be defined by left and right tendencies; policy shifts consisted of a center-right movement for increased public expenditure for collective programs and the Socialist pursuit of neo-liberal policies for economic restructuring and government reduction. Regardless, unlike the United States, France has considered government support for motherhood an entitlement of all women and education an entitlement and necessity of all children from the age of 3.

VI. Towards a National Commitment to Preschool:

Key Policies for Developing an American System

In this section, I will explain the five essential policy areas in which American preschool must develop. These include: standards and quality assessment, teacher training, curriculum, family involvement, and financing. The French system provides significant insight into how successful national preschool can be established. However, the United States should not look to the French *écoles maternelles* simply as an example to replicate; they should rather examine the policy framework under which their system

⁹³ Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/ Mother's Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy*. pp.288-9.

operates and incorporate the same ideas into the development of our own. I have discussed each of these policy areas in enough depth to highlight their necessity. To fully address these complex and far-reaching issues, however, would be far beyond the scope of this analysis.

A. Establishing Standards and Quality Assessment

The decentralization, privatization, and deregulation during the Reagan years solidified the inconsistencies of American early education. Currently, a multitude of different providers work within different states, most of which are subject to very little quality control or standards by state or local education authorities. The federal government has maintained an essentially free market policy in which child experts consider about three-fourths of American programs to be low-quality.⁹⁴ Parents are forced to be wary consumers with products that can have severe effects in the lives of their children. As with all American education programs, affluent areas have the resources to ensure higher quality and availability. Statistics clearly show, however, that most American children are enrolled in programs with inadequate resources and uneducated staff.

To achieve progress in improving quality and access to early childhood education in the United States, we must first lay a foundation of standards on which to base our plans and evaluations. The first, most basic step is defining an American conception of what constitutes “preschool”. Uneducational programs that are virtually child warehousing must be eliminated from our definition. Only programs that accomplish clear beneficial, educational goals for young children should be considered part of any universal preschool funding that are allocated. Working with child development experts, the U.S. Department of Education has laid out a set of quality guidelines for American

⁹⁴ Helburn, S. et al. Study: “Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care”. (1995).

preschools called “Developmentally Appropriate Practices.”⁹⁵ They have yet to be strongly enforced in states, however, and have rather been given as “suggested” guidelines. The federal and states governments must work together as partners toward this effort, with a framework at the national level, and expansion and enforcement at the state and local level.

In European countries that have established universal preschool, continuity in standards is maintained through a government-mandated framework, as well as by frequent supervision and evaluation by authorities. As a result of the United States’ privatized and unregulated system, the public’s definition of preschool is unclear, resulting in an abundance of criticism and concern among American parents and child development experts. Even though most programs conveniently label themselves “educational,” each is not evaluated by standardized criteria before they are supported. The “Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes” study suggests expanding accreditation programs to cover early childhood education.⁹⁶

The concerns of parents and child development experts about child warehousing and lack of standards are valid. It is estimated that over three-fourths of early childhood care and education centers in the US are of below-average quality. This includes programs from all over the education and care spectrum including public, non-profit, for-profit, Head Start and religious centers. Parents fear that advertisements for centers are not reliable, and they are usually correct. Child development experts argue that the majority of centers do not provide the positive cognitive and social stimulation necessary for good or even normal child development. A recent article in the Industry Standard commented that to accomplish universal early childhood education, efforts to attain the highest quality in every center must be unyielding.⁹⁷ Otherwise, as I have noted in section III, programs that lack knowledge and resources will do more harm than good.

⁹⁵ U.S. Department of Education: www.ed.gov/

⁹⁶ Helburn, S. et al. Study: “Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care”. (1995).

⁹⁷ Sawhill, Isabel. “Kids Need an Early Start.” The Industry Standard. (Fall 1999). pp.40.

The establishment of universal standards is necessary for all aspects of early childhood education: research-based educator training and curricula, environment safety, parental involvement, and classroom resources. These goals can be accomplished in many ways, such as conditional funding, accreditation programs, and licensing requirements. However, this step must be the first and primary goal of any federal action in the direction of universally-available preschool for American children. Strict standards will be the key to achieving any of the goals discussed below.

In addition, because aspects of preschool such as teacher training, curriculum, and environment are all extremely interdependent, standards for all areas must be set and maintained for any one area to realize its full potential. For example, if educators lack knowledge in child development research and classroom methods that encourage social and cognitive benefits, even the best curricula will be undermined.

B. Professional Development & Teacher Training

All persons certified to teach in preschool centers should have a research-based understanding of early child development, theories of effective classroom strategies, and curricula that are beneficial for the education and care of young children. In order to enhance social and emotional child development, early childhood educators should also have thorough knowledge of how to develop strong, positive relationships with young children and their parents.

Preschool staff should have a wide array of knowledge concerning mental and physical disabilities in order to facilitate early identification and intervention. Realizing and addressing such problems before children enter mainstream schools can mean the difference between a future of academic success and one of struggle and failures. Finally, it is essential in America's diverse society for educators to be trained in relating to children, parents, and families of diverse backgrounds and beliefs.

All of these elements must be incorporated into training and certification programs and requirements. Moreover, proper professional development and teacher training should be a key condition to any funding that is allocated for expansion of state preschool programs. Again, this factor will render any other positive qualities in a program useless and even potentially harmful. In many states, certification is only a matter of a few days or even hours of lecture time and a brief examination. This is unacceptable when we are talking about placing these unqualified people (however well-intentioned) in a room with our very youngest and most impressionable children. Everyone expects pediatricians to undergo years of extensive education to step into the room with young children for five minutes, and yet, in the United States, persons with practically no relevant knowledge are allowed to spend five or six hours everyday influencing children.⁹⁸ Research has shown that preschool educators have more influence on children's lives and social and academic success than any other teacher throughout education.

In a program of universal, voluntary preschool, the decision of standards in teacher training is a particular concern. Within an established national framework, state and local education authorities would likely be responsible for organizing specifics about curricula. Nevertheless, it is necessary to allow less freedom in teacher training. States should not have leave to dismiss or impart such essential knowledge without full commitment.

C. Curriculum

As mentioned above, it is likely that in an American universal preschool program states would have at least partial freedom in forming their own curricula. Nevertheless, it is still imperative that the federal government provides mandatory guidelines in which states can work. At the very minimum, these guidelines should include a number of basic

⁹⁸ Interview: Naomi Karp, Director, National Institute for Early Childhood Development and Education, U.S. Department of Education. October 15, 1999.

requisites. First, all curricula should be based on the findings of scientific child development research on best classroom practices what to stimulate cognitive, social and emotional development in young children. In order to facilitate the development goals of early education, curricula must be focuses toward intellectual, emotional and social stimulation.

Secondly, motor skills are also an important element that every preschool curriculum should address. This is the most easily addressed curriculum area. Young children are naturally active, and physical activity should be an addition (not a replacement) to psychological and neurological development. In addition, since literacy and language acquisition has been shown to be the key indicator of educational success, this should be a primary academic priority fostered by every program.⁹⁹ In line with the development focus, linguistics should be of speical concern to early educators as well as a strong focus of teacher training programs. An early start on reading skills can advance almost every aspect of a child's later academic work. The encouragement of relationship development should be a key aspect in all classroom activity. As the Kindergarten Transitions study noted, social and emotional development are the areas in which children entering kindergarten are most lacking. This deficiency can set a child back their entire academic career.

Finally, morals, values, character education in early childhood education should also be a main concern. In this area, it is important to ensure that there is strong family and parental involvement in the program and in all decision-making. No school should reduce education to a simple cognition-based curriculum. Schools owe it to children to address their needs as "whole" people. It certainly possible, particularly if the federal government provides guidelines to states, to focus moral and character education in such a way that it does not infringe upon the diverse family, religious, and cultural backgrounds of the students. The National Institute for Early Childhood Development

⁹⁹ U.S. Department of Education, Reading Summit Workshop, September 18-19, 1998: "Literacy Development During the Preschool Years".

and Education has found a possible focus in its "3 R's": "loving Relationships with parents and other adults build Resilient children who are Ready to succeed in school." Role modeling and relationships are a great focus for teaching children basic values such as respect and honesty. Character education is also the curriculum area where the benefits of reduced crime, delinquency, and other such social difficulties can be maximized. For example, one can think of what early intervention with the students who committed the Columbine murders might have achieved.

In addition, it is important that every program be given the freedom to work with its individual students. Policymakers and educational authorities need to remember that one size does not fit all in education. Different children learn in different ways and one teaching method might be successful with one child and not another. Teaching must be child-focused in order to provide quality preschool for every child involved.

D. Encouraging Family Involvement

Successful early childhood education should act as a family support-system, as an extended family that, with full parental consent and participation, cares for and helps to enhance child development in every area. Programs should support not only working parents who need the freedom preschools can provide to put food on the table, but also interact with each child with concern for his or her family context. Preschools should educate and encourage young children with consideration and respect for individual family child-rearing values, particularly because the programs are working with young and impressionable children.

For this reason, it is essential that early childhood educators create and maintain a close working relationship with the parents and families of their students. These relationships must be based on mutual trust. In addition, every effort must be made to facilitate parental participation. This may include extending or shifting school hours or possibilities for parent-teacher conferences. A major concern of many parents is that

these children are simply too young to be taken out of the home; programs need to reassure them that their children will be given the same care, with respect for the parents' child-rearing values, in addition to quality educational experiences.

E. Funding

I have noted that low-quality programs can be harmful for young children, often stunting proper intellectual and emotional development. Therefore, this is not a program that should be instituted unless it is fully-funded. Young children not only deserve but require full financial support. As one author notes, "Politics will always argue for serving more children at a lower cost per child. But, in the end, this politically-satisfying strategy is likely to be self-defeating because inexpensive programs are ineffective as well."¹⁰⁰

In France, universal preschool is financed only partially by the national government. Educator training and salaries are funded by the Ministry of Education, while, within a national framework, local authorities finance and establish centers to serve their young children. Such a system could also work in the United States, particularly in our decentralized system of governance. National preschool could be financed, established and administered with a joint effort by federal, state and local authorities. However, at this crucial stage of development, programs will require increased federal standards, quality assessment and funding than current public schools. Nevertheless, as long as everyone the same goals of high-quality and universal access are maintained, all educational authorities should participate.

Isabel Sawhill suggests three alternatives for financing early education in the United States.¹⁰¹ The first, in line with the French system, would be to provide federal funding while allowing states and local communities flexibility to use the money in diverse ways on the condition that they provide access to all eligible children in their

¹⁰⁰ Sawhill, Isabel. "Kids Need an Early Start." pp.40.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. pp.38-39.

state, develop and implement strict quality assessment programs, and use federal dollars to supplement, not supplant, state spending. Increasing the early education block grant with additional conditions would be an option.

The second alternative Sawhill discusses is providing a more generous (and refundable) tax credit or voucher to all families on a sliding income scale. The vouchers or tax credits should require that parents spend funds only on accredited programs. This more conservative option maintains the privatized system. This would still be problematic along the lines of standards unless a strict accreditation system were implemented for every program covered, including requirements for educator training, curriculum, safety, and center resources.

The third option Sawhill suggests is simply to build on the existing federal program of Head Start, extending it to serve all preschoolers rather than only the disadvantaged. However, she notes that the program would have to be much improved to justify such an expansion. Over the past years, she explains the educational components in Head Start programs have degenerated. Again, a renewed commitment to quality would have to be the first objective. In addition, because Head Start was developed as a program of President Johnson's "War on Poverty", it is still housed in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services rather than the Department of Education. This factor introduces even further difficulties; a program that is not controlled by educational authorities has obvious limitations for effectiveness. HHS has focused more on providing relief to low-income parents than on education and child development of preschoolers. Without question, this focus would have to change, and the program would have to be transferred to an educational office or agency.

Unlike other nations, the United States has invested the majority of its concern and educational spending on high school and higher education.¹⁰² American leaders have disregarded scientific research and continued to fund programs that assist children later in

¹⁰² Dunn, Lorraine; Kontos, Susan. "Financing Preschool for All Children". Educational Resources Information Ccenter Digest. (New York, New York: 1995).

life, rather than funding the programs that help them early and prevent future difficulties. Other nations acknowledge the logic that quality and access in preschool should be a top educational priority. State and federal spending in the United States is limited, for the most part, to programs that target poor and disabled children as well as block grant money given to states without necessary conditions for quality standards. Currently, state-to-state funding varies widely, ranging from universal preschool in Georgia, to the majority of states that fund programs only for the disadvantaged. The Washington Monthly estimated that for every \$25,000 spent on inmates in America's prisons, only \$4,000 is spent on American students. This does not even take into account the minuscule proportion of that \$4000 that is devoted to early childhood education. "Recent budget debates have emphasized the importance of using the \$2.6 trillion in projected budget surpluses to 'save' Social Security. But an investment in people, especially in young children, has a larger payoff than investing in tangible capital...Making today's children more productive and successful can create a much stronger economy than investing all of our resources in financial capital."¹⁰³ As I have noted in section II, investment in quality early childhood education could save the country between \$13,000 and \$19,000 per child above the estimated cost of the programs themselves (\$5000 per child). Children need to be stimulated so that they can grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally and be prepared to succeed in elementary school and later in life. This is not just social policy; it 's wise economics as well.

VII. The Unrelenting Debate:

American Ideologies that Inhibit Universal Preschool

In the following section, I identify philosophical and systemic barriers that have limited the development of a national agenda for preschool education in the United States in spite of the research and statistics that have demanded such programs. Despite the

¹⁰³ Sawhill, Isabel. "Kids Need an Early Start." pp.40.

benefits and the essential need for such quality programs discussed in section II, there are certain inherent sentiments about the family and the proper role of government that have caused disunion and disenchantment over the past century in early childhood policies. I will draw on analyses of educational policy, philosophy, recent examples of American public opinion, as well as the comparative histories of early childhood policy in the United States and France addressed above.

In the previous section, I discussed the different vital policy areas that must be developed in establishing an American preschool system. Incorporating each these initiatives, the framework will have to be fashioned to meet the specific demands of our decentralized system of governance and our society of diverse cultures and values. The unique political and cultural sentiments of the United States that have presented barriers to proposals for national preschool in the past will have to be overcome or addressed. Each of these ideologies are highly interrelated; and each has wide-ranging implications for all social policy, especially involving the family.

A. Federal Overextension

The basic American value of a weak central government can be problematic when working toward early childhood programs that have long been successful in Europe. It has limited the scope of government action towards the public good, particularly in the area of education. But this is not a new obstacle for American policymakers. Indeed, American forefathers such as Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine voiced their aversion to strong government long before the early childhood issue surfaced around the turn of the century. In *Common Sense*, published in 1776, Thomas Paine describes the fundamental American perception of government, “Society in every state is a blessing, but government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil.” The American perception that government is unable to accomplish positive change for society is based on our political foundations in protection of individual freedom against authoritarianism. These

sentiments have therefore presented a deep-rooted barrier to effective action of the national government, labeling any proposal for national early childhood education support for a “large, intrusive, federal education bureaucracy.”¹⁰⁴

Accordingly, as I have illustrated, centralization and public control have been strongly contested and diverted throughout the history of United States policy and political debate of early childhood programs. As I will emphasize later in my analysis, the few national programs that have been pursued were primarily for disadvantaged children or were instituted as measures of crisis management. The Emergency Nursery Schools during the 1930’s and 40’s were not founded on the notion that every child needs and has a right to quality early education; rather, they were administered to provide relief to families dealing with the Great Depression and World War I and II. These crises gave unprecedented support for immense government programs for the public good.

The continuing sponsorship argument that has hindered national preschool legislation over the past thirty years also illustrates, as well as other factors I will discuss, our foundational aversion to “big government.” The assertions for public preschool sponsorship in 1971 by Congressman Brademas, in 1975 by Albert Shanker, and in 1988 by Congressman Hawkins were each met with arguments for private control and the “choice” the free market provides parents. Once again, I will return to the “choice” argument again in my analysis for it has further implications for the hindrance of national early education. However, the simple argument for privatization is based on the idea expressed by Richard Nixon after his veto in 1971: proposals for public sponsorship and federal regulation of preschool, “are overshadowed by fiscal responsibility (and) administrative unworkability.”¹⁰⁵ Advocates of privatization believe that the federal government is inefficient and ineffective; furthermore, government is overextending its proper jurisdiction when it proposes to “interfere” in early childhood education.

¹⁰⁴ “Preschool Bill Flunks Reason”. Chicago Sun Times, March 17, 1999.

¹⁰⁵ Klein, Abbie. *The Debate Over Child Care*. pp. 34. (Nixon, 1971).

B. Anti-Bureaucracy

Parallel to American aversion to perceived federal overextension is the negative perception of government bureaucracy. In order to ensure just and effective decisions, democracy fundamentally requires a multi-stage process with the consideration of a many different interests, otherwise known as bureaucracy. Despite the fact that we uphold the Constitutional virtues of justice and equal opportunity, however, the American public views this process as ineffective waste.¹⁰⁶ Even the democratic Administration of President Carter argued that quality would be compromised in early childhood education by creating a “fragmented system of services that rely on categorization and bureaucracy.”¹⁰⁷ Counter to basic economic theory and the examples of France and other European nations with universal preschool, opponents of national preschool have managed to propagate the perception that standards and quality are easier to achieve in an unregulated, free market system. They argue that bureaucratic regulation, used to some degree in all nations with universally-available preschool, will have an alternative effect in the United States.

The development and implementation of national early education has been prevented time and time again by these perceptions. Without a coherent, manageable structure maintained by, or at least guided by, national regulation and support, the United States will continue to have a low-quality system with severe inequalities of access. The conception of government regulation is the reverse among the French public.

C. Centralized Authority in France

As I have illustrated in my discussion of the French program, regulation, centralization and public sponsorship are key elements to the maintenance of quality and

¹⁰⁶ Barnard, Ellsworth. *In Defense of Government*. pp.8.

¹⁰⁷ Klein, Abbie. *The Debate Over Child Care: 1969-1990*. pp.36-37.

availability of early childhood programs. The differences in the French views of government action play a large role in public support for their system. Rather than representing the limitation and infringement on freedom as in the United States, providing universal preschool is viewed in France as the proper functioning of national government. Unlike in the United States, the obligation of government to provide education for its citizens is explicit in the French constitution. Having overcome class divisions and religious authority, the central government in France is seen as the executor of the will of the people, with a responsibility to preserve equality and justice for all citizens. As Ferry and Rousseau believed, education in France is considered a fundamental institution through which social equality can be enforced through equality of opportunity and development.

The French education system, including the *écoles maternelles*, is a system of central authority and bureaucracy predating even the Revolution into the monarchy of Louis XIV.¹⁰⁸ The contention of French politics is that, “in a democracy the locus of power must be the central government, because this alone is the true expression of the entire electorate.”¹⁰⁹ While the French contention is valid in all electoral democracies, American anti-“big government” arguments overshadow such ideals, leading to extreme lack of regulation in areas of social policy such as early childhood education.

D. Diffuse Authority in America: State and Local Control

The argument for state and local control over federal control in social policy is the alternative promoted by those who oppose “big” federal government. Theorist Ellsworth Barnard explains that Americans believe Washington cannot implement effective social policy, because they are unfamiliar with local conditions, are more prone to “special interests” and are wasteful with taxpayer money.¹¹⁰ Barnard then argues, however, that

¹⁰⁸ Halls, W.D. *Education, Culture and Politics in Modern France*. pp. 38-39.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 38.

¹¹⁰ Barnard, Ellsworth. *In Defense of Government*. pp.7-8.

the reality is quite the contrary of this perception; local politicians are actually “more limited in their outlook and more easily swayed by powerful ‘special interests’...Their very closeness to those who elect them, finance their campaigns, makes it harder to judge and issue objectively and act dispassionately for the public good.”

George Lakoff call this distorted perception “the Principle of Local Knowledge.”¹¹¹ He explains that this notion is so intrinsic in American culture that it has become popular “common sense” that federal government is distant and therefore ineffective and wasteful, and of course, corrupt. Lakoff asserts that this is, “of course, not common sense...A hundred local governments acting separately cannot design water projects that benefit them all, or perform overall ecosystem protection that requires coordinated action, or plan and carry out a highway system.” Lakoff points out that such large-scale initiatives are better done at the federal level. The regulation of a program as vital as early education is such an initiative. As we see in the successes of other nations, it requires a broad, overarching framework for standards and quality control.

The weak and decentralized authority structure is the most clear and fundamental barrier to consistency and quality in American preschools, and in all American education. In addition to the philosophical enforcement of a weak central government, simple geography requires such a system in the United States. Due to their size, France and many other European nations are afforded an inherent facilitation of centralized regulation and authority over social and family policy. Whereas with state and local control in the United States, it has been nearly impossible to achieve uniform results from one area to the next in any area of educational reform. Our sheer size is an immense limitation to such initiatives.

Nevertheless, child development research proves that there is no education reform more essential than early childhood education; it influences success or failure in every later stage of education and life. It is not practical or necessary to institute an educational

¹¹¹ Lakoff, George. *Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know that Liberals Don't*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) pp. 272-273.

program completely through the federal government, and it has never been an American policy to do so. Nevertheless, anti-federalist sentiments in America have overshadowed the priority of early education. Universal standards and consistent regulation, whether it be through conditional funding to states or preschool in the public schools, must be a national priority.

E. Public Versus Private Economic Responsibility

Another component of American aversion to government involvement is the “rugged” American value of personal economic responsibility. The Puritan work ethic and the traditional responsibility of the father to provide for the family are both intrinsic beliefs of American culture. Despite the economic trends over the past fifty years that have necessitated dual family incomes and the feminist assertions of the rights of women to pursue careers, these sentiments are far too deep-rooted to be dispelled.

As a result, unlike in most European nations, the American public does not see early childhood programs, as the responsibility of the national government or even state and local government. Rather, they value welfare-based programs for the disadvantaged; those who cannot provide for themselves because of unfortunate circumstances are allowed safety-net measures like Head Start and state programs for low-income families. These sentiments also explain why, throughout American history, we have only supported universal national programs in times of crisis such as those established by the Lanham Act. As Lakoff notes that, “the stereotypic assumption that America is truly a land of opportunity where anyone with self-discipline and talent can, through hard work, climb the ladder of success...mature citizens need to sink or swim by themselves... protect themselves and their families...a good government does not meddle or interfere in their lives.”¹¹² As we have seen thus far with most beliefs about the family and government, values of public versus private responsibility are quite different in French culture.

¹¹² Lakoff, George. *Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know that Liberals Don't*. pp.272-273.

The French believe that quality and equality of opportunity in education is a fundamental human right. This value has been enforced by such influential figures as Ferry, Rousseau and Napoleon who said that, “the instruction of the public is the primary responsibility of government.”¹¹³ The French believe that quality early childhood education is what society *owes* every child and every working parent.

The American perception of personal responsibility for the family flies in the face of child development research on the benefits of quality preschool and the increasing impossibility for average American mothers to stay home with children. Yet, once again, Americans assert that “big government” does not need to get involved unless there is a dire need. Early childhood education is what society owes to disadvantaged, at-risk children and should provide for parents who must have out-of-home care in order to make enough money to maintain a decent standard of living.

F. Primacy and Privacy of the Family

In democracy, individual worth and freedom are considered the highest priorities. In the United States, because of our cultural diverse and multitude of value-systems, we see family as the primary institution to impart and preserve this individualism for children. The values and culture conferred by the family are considered a private matter not to be interfered with. And in yet another area, the American public believes that, above all, the federal government should not interfere. As the federal government is believed to inhibit individual freedom, family policy always meets great criticism from those who make the same connection when federal government proposes involvement in family policy.

This is particularly true when it comes to policy involving young children. They are the future of every nation, and the pride of every parent and family. Although their intention is to provide essential child development benefits, proposals for universal

¹¹³ David, Myriam and Lézine, Irène. *Early Child Care in France*. pp. 106.

preschool are criticized as usurpation of the family role of child-rearing and an attempt to impose external values on the youngest, most impressionable children. Although replacing parents is not and has never been the intention of proponents of universal preschool, these fears and distorted perception have been maintained.

As opposed to the need for consistency that I have discussed, these arguments support the assertion of diversity and parental freedom of “choice” in schools: the rights of parents to choose *which* program their child will attend and *whether* they will attend preschool at all. Proposals of the past and recent proposals for American early education have never suggested compulsory attendance. In France, parents are not required to enroll their young children in the *écoles maternelles*; however, almost every French child does attend because parents realize the opportunity their children would miss if they did not.

More importantly, what we need to ask proponents of school choice is: “what kind of *choices* are we left with, with minimal regulation and an estimated three-fourths low-quality programs?” Just as with elementary, high school and college education, both public and private programs should be offered with the intention that these programs must be universally-available for all; whether a wealthy families chooses to send their children to a private school is still their choice. There is no excuse for using the argument of “choice” to justify leaving middle-class and low-income children behind while only the wealthy have the opportunity to attend quality preschool.

In addition to justifying the inequalities of access, it is also the “choice” argument that has consistently weeded out the educational element from early childhood proposals in congress. Both with Brademas’s proposal in 1969 and with Hawkins’ proposal in 1989, the educational component was eliminated in order to quell concerns of government overextension into the lives of young children. Government regulated education can easily be spun for fearful American parents as “indoctrination” by external, alien group.

These fears go back to the philosophies of such influential writers as Illich¹¹⁴ and Dewey.

John Dewey expresses his concern that, “children are taught by a preordained curriculum to see the world as fixed, finished, and ordered,” and advocated the, “rejection of external value-systems imposed from above.”¹¹⁵ As I have highlighted in previous sections, Dewey advocated the free development of the individual. However, he did not have the same intentions as proponents of “choice” today. Dewey believed that quality education is invaluable as long as the teacher acts as a guide, facilitating learning rather than simply imparting information. “Choice” arguments have misconstrued the philosophies of Dewey and other positivist theorists, turning their statements into support for minimalist government regulation and resulting low-quality and unequal access.

G. Complacent American Feminists

The value of family primacy has also always come along with another implication: the value of the “traditional” family, meaning that women should not work rather than stay home with their children. Although social trends of women pursuing careers and entering the labor force have made such assertions antiquated, they persist nonetheless. The value of the father as the wage-earner and provider and the mother as the child-rearer is even further out-dated by the economic trends since the 1960’s that have made it economically unfeasible for families to maintain such a structure and also their standard of living.

These lasting conservative assertions have persisted and have influenced the feminist movement in the United States to wholly disregard the issue of childcare and preschool until recently.¹¹⁶ But, these issues are at the very heart of the difficulties of women trying to pursue new goals in life. Feminist advocacy for early childhood programs has been held back by strong American assertions for the traditional family.

¹¹⁴ Illich, J. *The Hidden Curriculum*. (196*).

¹¹⁵ Dewey, John. *Education and Democracy*. pp.21.

¹¹⁶ Michel, Sonya. *Children’s Interests/ Mother’s Rights*. pp. 293-295.

The responsibility of child-rearing still falls to women despite their career paths; this is perhaps a factor of American society that will take decades to dissipate. However, with all of the fundamental ideological barriers to national preschool women in the United States have failed to mobilize behind this issue of utmost importance to their movement.

As Sonya Michel notes, “Although the American women’s movement was also at its height during these years (1970’s and 1870’s when the issues were at the fore of policy debates), feminists never made early childhood programs a national priority and would have found little receptivity in Washington had they done so. Nor were they interested in forming a coalition with early educators...Thus, the conjuncture of a hospitable left-liberal government and a strong feminist child care movement, such as occurred in...France, never materialized in the United States.”¹¹⁷

Yet again, the history of national preschool in France saw quite a different role for feminists. The women’s movement in France was and continues to be one of the main forces in politics behind the support for national childcare and preschool programs.¹¹⁸ Because of nationalist and economic interests, modern French advocates of preschool and childcare have stood behind “pronatalist” arguments, promoting government support for the multiple roles of women. Once again, in France, quality, accessible childcare and preschool are considered an entitlement of women to allow them equal opportunity in the work force.

Only recently have feminists begun to advocate this vital issue in their cause. During a recent visit to Smith College for a women’s forum, Betty Freidan, one of the mothers of the American women’s movement told a reporter, “Where we are behind and a backward country is in our lack of a national, high-standard, quality nursery school beginning at the age of two or even six months. People with money send their kids to good nursery school at two years old; they can afford it. It’s good for the child’s

¹¹⁷ Michel, Sonya. *Children's Interests/Mother's Rights*. pp.295-296.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. pp.286-289.

development. The idea that the child is somehow better off with its mother and nothing but its mother for two, three, four years, is wrong!”¹¹⁹ We can perhaps hope that women in America will finally take up this issue as they have in other nations, and fight to establish what could be one of the most important and beneficial educational programs in our history.

VII. Recommendations and Conclusions

A. A Challenge for Advocates and Policymakers

In order to work progressively for the cause of early childhood education, advocates and policymakers must consider each of the barriers I have discussed. If the United States is to reach the goals of universal quality standards, improved teacher training, expanded access, ample funding, a research-based curriculum framework and positive family involvement, proponents will have to overcome the arguments against so-called overextension of the federal government, interference in the family, and fiscal irresponsibility. As I have illustrated, these sentiments stem from American cultural and political foundations; they are not ideas that are easily dismissed and will therefore require education and compromise.

In a recent report commissioned by the Benton Foundation, George Lakoff identifies a way for Americans to achieve consensus on early education.¹²⁰ There are two facts on which both sides can agree, regardless of ideology. The first, already widely acknowledged and addressed with national and state day care initiatives, is the need for affordable, dependable childcare for working mothers. The second, less widely-discussed issue, is early development. Science has shown that a child’s social, emotional, and intellectual development depends upon his environment and experiences between the

¹¹⁹ Interview with Betty Freidan, The Smith College Sophian. October 1999, pp.2

¹²⁰ Lakoff, George. “Why Early Education Benefits All of Us: Communications Strategies for Advocates of Early Childhood Education”. Report for the Benton Foundation, 1999, pp. 6.

ages of zero and six. It is this second issue that distinguishes simple day care or “child storage” from early education and baby-sitters from early educators. Lakoff stresses that early development should be the primary argument of early education advocates; once the public acknowledges and understands this fact, the setting will be right for significant change.

Lakoff provides in his analysis a number of different examples of language for advocates to use when framing proposals in supportive rhetoric.¹²¹ I have applied his suggestions to the arguments I discussed previously.

Government Overextension and Bureaucracy

When the proper role of government in early education comes into question, Lakoff suggests that advocates avoid using ideas such as “regulation, inspection, protection and accountability,” all of which imply potential problems with the system. Instead, the government’s role should be described as one of “standards and accreditation.” Because we know from research that a wide variety of factors can influence child development, requisite quality standards must be met and maintained by centers. The government has the knowledge and resources to see that this is accomplished. When opponents ask, “Doesn’t the government already have too much influence in our daily lives and the lives of our kids?” Lakoff suggests that preschool advocates respond by saying that, “just as we need government to set standards for water safety, food and drugs, so we need uniform standards for child care and development. Our children’s minds are every bit as vital to us as our water and food, and standards for their development should be no lower, nor should they be subject to the whims of local special interests.”¹²²

¹²¹ Lakoff, George. “Why Early Education Benefits All of Us: Communications Strategies for Advocates of Early Childhood Education”. pp. 7-16.

¹²² Ibid. pp. 14.

When opponents argue that early education would just mean “more inefficient government bureaucracy,” advocates should answer that, “you don’t get rid of the police, public transportation, or schools just because they’re expensive. Like these institutions, early education is essential for communities.” In addition, preschool would “be implemented locally.” The government will set standards, and communities will make decisions and “provide structures and the people to make the programs happen.”¹²³

Parental Responsibility

Lakoff also provides arguments for responding to opponents defending parents’ responsibility to take care of and provide for their children unless they are unable. Access to high-quality preschool will allow parents to meet their full potential in their career, increasing their ability to earn wages and provide for their families. “Parents are and will always be responsible for their own kids. But, our economy has changed and not all parents can stay home with their kids, even if they want to.”¹²⁴

This is an issue not just for poor and disadvantaged families, but for families at all levels of society. Families from the highest and middle income brackets face the same challenge of trying to find quality preschool for their young children. “Just as all families are concerned about what foods are nutritious for their children,” they all share the same concerns about child development. As Lakoff says, “this is an issue for everyone.”

“Choice” and the Primacy of the Family in Child-Rearing

Lakoff introduces several different responses to the arguments for parental “choice” and against government meddling in child-rearing. First, advocates should stress that the expansion of preschool access and quality would not eliminate private providers. Just as in the American college and university system, parents would have

¹²³ Lakoff, George. “Why Early Education Benefits Us All: Communications Strategies for Advocates of Early Childhood Education”. pp. 14-15.

¹²⁴ Ibid. pp. 15.

many different options, from public to private, religious to secular, and so forth. Parents would not be forced to use public programs, but all families would at least have the option of these affordable, high-quality programs.

Concerns about parental choice and primacy in child-rearing and values can also be addressed. Preschool proponents should point out that early education programs are not meant to replace parents, but would rather act as partners and advisors in child development, much like a pediatrician assists parents with their children's health.¹²⁵ "Early Education is a valuable partner for parents, working toward the common goal of raising children as well as possible...A trained early educator isn't a substitute for a mother, but may know some things about child development that many mothers don't."¹²⁶

In addition, advocates can also reassure parents concerned that placing young children in preschool will teach them unwanted values. This worry can be addressed by explaining that, with parental involvement, "parents will still be the primary source of their children's values." As in American public schools, what children learn in preschool would be "compatible with any parent's values": a sense of responsibility, respect for others, confidence, and cooperation. As I discussed in section III, the Kindergarten Transitions study found that these emotional and social strengths are the heart of success in later schooling.

Early Education Versus Day Care

As I have pointed out, a distinction between preschool and childcare is central to the goals of preschool advocates. Lakoff explains that although satisfying parental needs is *also* a goal of early education, "it's not just a matter of leaving your kids with someone."¹²⁷ Early education programs are not just child storage; they focus on the

¹²⁵ Interview: Naomi Karp. October 15, 1999.

¹²⁶ Lakoff, George. "Why Early Education Benefits Us All: Communications Strategies for Advocates of Early Childhood Education". pp. 7.

¹²⁷ Ibid. pp. 6.

child's cognitive, social and emotional development needs and on the fact that the provider, having major influence in the lives of impressionable children, requires extensive training and expertise. "Education" must be the key word in "early education", and "school" must be the word people notice in "preschool." Otherwise, parents are correct in fearing "child storage," which, as I have discussed, can actually do more harm than good for young children.

B. A Beacon in the Night

In April 2000, the National Institute for Early Childhood Development and Education will be holding a conference of state education authorities to discuss the issue of early childhood education.¹²⁸ Participants will formulate best practices and develop plans to implement these practices in their own states. Georgia, the only state that has managed to offer quality public preschool for all eligible four-year-olds in their state, will no doubt be a leader in the efforts at this conference.

The Georgia Pre-Kindergarten Program was established in 1993 and continues to be funded by the Georgia Lottery for Education.¹²⁹ The program serves about 62,500 children of Georgia residents, a higher proportion of four-year-old children than covered by any other state in the nation. Georgia preschools focus on language acquisition, math skills, physical development, and social competence, all with a central goal of preparedness for elementary school. The program also emphasizes parental and community involvement. An evaluation by Georgia State University found that children who attended preschool had higher academic and social ratings by their kindergarten teachers and better kindergarten attendance than children who did not attend preschool.

Georgia's revolutionary strides in early education are not perfect, however. Accessibility is still a goal for Georgia. Because participation in the program is voluntary

¹²⁸ Interview: Naomi Karp. October 15, 1999.

¹²⁹ Georgia Department of Education Office of School Readiness website: www.osr.ed.ga/

for public schools and private centers, at times there may not be enough spaces in every community for all who wish to participate. In addition, Georgia's teacher training program is still quite inadequate. As I have discussed, teacher training is the area in which educational authorities must be most demanding. Educators seeking certification to work with impressionable preschoolers should be required to undergo a much more rigorous and extensive training. Georgia, however, provides courses for early educator certification in two five-day sessions for a total of only ten days of training. Only lead teachers must attend this training. Despite these problems, the direction Georgia has taken should be emulated by all American states.

With states now beginning to act on preschool initiatives, national leaders should seize the momentum with legislation to fund and facilitate state efforts. Vice President Al Gore has made preschool an issue in his campaign for the presidency in 2000. This December, he will take the first step, laying out his proposal to provide universally-available, high-quality preschool for every American child. As I have discussed, only two Congressmen, Brademas in 1969 and Hawkins in 1989, offered such proposals in the past. If elected, the Vice President will be only the third federal elected official, and the only American President, ever to take this stand. Although the United States has a long way to go in early childhood education, state leadership and Washington leadership may finally be beginning to move in the right direction.

C. A Call for A Call for Early Education in the United States

Upon consideration of the abundant research highlighting the benefits of quality preschool for child development and academic and life-long success, most parents would agree that every child needs and deserves such a program.

Women must speak out as mothers and as the most influential individuals in the lives of every person. They must mobilize to defend their citizen rights to set unlimited personal goals and to meet and surpass the career successes of men. With the issue of

early education, women should take this last stand against arguments for the “traditional” family.

Quality universal preschool offers a tremendous panacea for societal concerns such as crime, teen pregnancy, drop-outs, delinquency, drug abuse, homelessness, economic productivity, retirement security, and government savings. When national leaders examine these statistics, nothing short of a determined and immutable drive to fight for these programs should be the focus of their educational agendas.

A national effort to improve the state of early education in the United States will require a collective effort of parents, women, and national leaders at every level. Quality can only be achieved by the development and acceptance of a universal framework of standards based on child development research. The United States needs to focus on its foundations: the foundations of child development, the foundations of academic and life success, the foundations of societal problems ofThe arguments that have persisted throughout history to inhibit access and quality in American preschools have injured and limited child development and future success. This is an essential initiative in the life of every human, and it is the responsibility of national leaders to finally stop neglecting this commitment.