The role of preschool education
in relation to the
problems of the poor
by
Ann Short
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THE ROLE OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN RELATION TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE POOR

Ann Short, M.A.

Early Learning Resource Unit, Cape Town

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The views expressed in this paper are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the policy of the Early Learning Resource Unit nor its sponsor, the Bernard Van Leer Foundation, The Hague.
Introduction: Historical and international perspective

The Western nursery school movement began around the turn of the century in response to the poor living conditions of slum children (eg. Montessori in Italy, the Macmillan sisters in Britain). It is interesting to note that as a result of the first Carnegie enquiry into poverty in South Africa, the need to provide preschool education for the children of poor Whites was recognised. In October 1934 the National Conference on the Poor White Problem passed the following resolution at Kimberley:

"Provision should be made for a system of preschool education in the slum areas in our cities where children are, during the most critical period of their lives, exposed to influences which have fatal effects on their moral development and their health" (In Webber 1978, p. 14-15).

Nursery schools, however, developed an approach and programme which responded mainly to the needs of higher income city children. This was partly because only higher income families could afford to send their children to nursery schools; partly because educators are middle class themselves, and partly because of the influence of theorists such as Freud and Gesell. Thus, the traditional nursery school programme, as it is now called, stressed the emotional and social development of the child and creativity, but paid very little attention to the child's intellectual and language development. While nursery schools tended to become privileged middle class institutions, day care centres became welfare institutions serving mainly the children of working class mothers. Because parents could not afford the fees necessary to pay qualified teachers, the day care services were forced to offer custodial care only.

During the 1940s and 1950s, research evidence accumulated to show that the environment in which the child grows up has a critical effect on mental development. Thus, by the beginning of the 1960s, more and more people began to believe that intelligence is not fixed at birth by heredity, but that we inherit a potential for intellectual development, and whether the individual reaches his potential depends on the amount and quality of stimulation he receives from his environment as he grows up. The early
years were considered to be an especially important time for the development of intelligence (Hunt 1961, Bloom 1964 were particularly influential). Research studies, mainly in America, were also finding that minority group and working class children were not doing as well at school as middle class children (eg. Coleman et al 1966), and that even by the age of three it was found that working class children scored lower on IQ and other tests than middle class children (Bloom et al 1965).

At about the same time in the United States, there was a growing concern about poverty, which was largely the result of the civil rights movement. In 1964, President Johnson declared the American 'war on poverty', and the importance of preschool education was rediscovered. One of the social development programmes which was launched was Project Head Start. It had been argued by social scientists that poverty was a vicious circle which stemmed from the fact that children growing up in poverty did not receive enough stimulation in their early years to prepare them for school, and the concept of the 'culturally deprived child' became fashionable. Poor children, therefore, entered school at a disadvantage and could not catch up, which accounted for their generally low scholastic achievement. With the result, they could not get good jobs and earn a good income, so they remained living in poverty and the cycle was repeated. The answer was to provide education programmes for preschool children in order to compensate for the 'deficiencies' in their environment with the aim of preparing these children more adequately for school, and so breaking the cycle of poverty.

The early years were considered so important that it was felt that if minority group children could be given a head start, they would then be fine for the rest of their school and work careers. Millions of dollars were poured into early childhood education from 1965. Experimental research was done, and a whole range of different curricula was developed (see Parker 1972, Spodek 1973 for overviews). The programmes, called "compensatory education", tended to focus on the children's intellectual and language development with the aim of improving later scholastic achievement, in contrast with the traditional nursery school. The children, usually aged three to four years, attended preschool centres where the teacher-child ratios were sometimes as low as 1 teacher to 5 children. Other programmes were also developed which involved individual tutoring or work with mothers and children in the home.
The initial research results showed that these children progressed well and started school well, but their scholastic achievement gradually deteriorated over the years (Westinghouse 1969; Bronfenbrenner 1974). Towards the end of the 1960s, it was concluded that the Head Start programme had failed as a means of overcoming poverty, and thereby bringing about social change (eg. Jensen 1969). This was a very pessimistic conclusion, but it resulted in forcing people to look at the problems of poverty and social change in a much more realistic way.

Various explanations were offered for the apparent failure of compensatory early childhood education - that it didn't start early enough (which led to programmes being developed for infants); that the schools in working class areas were inadequate and were biased towards middle class experience and values, and so school curricula and teachers' attitudes needed to be changed*, and/or that parents should be more actively involved in their children's education. The concepts of 'compensatory education', 'cultural deprivation' and the 'poverty cycle' were re-examined (eg. Herzog & Lewis 1970; Ginsburg 1972; Tulkin 1972; Keddie 1973).

It became clear that the development of minority group children was not so much deficient as different from white middle-class expectations and standards, and that the problems were much more complex than 'first thought. Cultural or class difference does not necessarily imply deficiencies or inadequacies, and the theory of 'cultural deprivation' has been heavily criticised for being ethnocentric and discriminatory; that at root it is used to justify the imposition of the dominant culture on minority groups (eg. Baratz & Baratz 1970). The theory of the 'culture of poverty' has also been criticised (and rejected by many) on the grounds that it "blames the victims" and avoids the fact that poverty is the product of the socio-economic system (eg. Ryan 1971; Halsey 1972). Financial poverty in modern societies is sufficient cause of stress and restrictions on human development without even considering so-called 'cultural' factors.

* This thinking motivated much of the British experiment in educational and social change called the Educational Priority Areas (Halsey 1972) and resulted in the introduction of the primary school follow-through programme in the States.
The assumption that socio-economic problems (eg. poverty) can be solved primarily by educational intervention, especially when limited to the preschool years, has been rejected by most. As Bernstein (1970) noted, "education cannot compensate for society", but as one of the factors at work in shaping people's lives, it remains important in providing access to job opportunities and in developing skills needed to cope more effectively with social problems and living conditions. Scholastic achievement has been shown to be more closely associated with socio-economic background than with any other factor (Jencks 1972; Halsey 1972), and scholastic under-achievement in South African low-income communities is a very serious problem (HSRC 1981).

The need for early childhood education

There are two basic schools of thought in current thinking about early childhood education. One has its roots in the compensatory education philosophy of the 1960s and sees the main purpose of preschool programmes as preparation for primary school. It is future-orientated in that its aim, though more modest than before, is to improve scholastic achievement in the short-term (cf. De Lange report recommendations, HSRC 1981). Its content is derived from an analysis of first grade requirements and its methods are teacher-directed and group-orientated.

The second school of thought has been gaining greater acceptance since the early 1970s. It is concerned firstly with the young child as a whole - with fostering all aspects of human development during the preschool years in order build a sound foundation for life-long learning and the development of human potential. Its content is derived from child development theory and research, and its methods are non-directive and respect individual and cultural differences. School readiness is viewed as a by-product of healthy early childhood development and not as an end in itself. There is also increasing emphasis on the importance of designing programmes which are relevant to the actual needs and experiential background of the children they serve. The broader developmental view derives in part from research which has shown conclusively that the care and opportunities provided for the young child influence all aspects of his development from birth onwards, and adverse environmental circumstances can cause maladjustment and mild mental retardation which can be detected before the age of two years (see Rutter 1972 for overview). Development can even be affected before birth by malnutrition and illness.
Research findings elsewhere (Bayley 1965; Golden & Birns 1968) were confirmed here in a small study undertaken in 1972 in which 27 infants aged 14 to 28 months were assessed on the Bayley Scales of Infant Development (Biersteker & Short 1975). Even though they were all from low-income homes, their scores on the Mental Development Index and the Psycho-Motor Development Index correlated significantly ($p > .01$) with scores on a Socio-Economic Index. This relationship is clearly revealed by dividing the babies into three groups based on socio-economic background and calculating the average Bayley scores for each group (see Table 1 in the Appendix). Note that the scores of the higher socio-economic group hardly overlap with the lower group at all. The differences do not appear to be related to age which suggests that development is affected by 15 months of age.

It is clear that many families living in poverty are unable to provide adequately for the optimal development of their young children. Since the disadvantaged child's opportunities for learning and development are restricted, special early childhood education programmes are required to enrich or extend his learning opportunities from an early age in order to help prevent possible loss of potential and later under-achievement. Although environmental influences on development during the first six or seven years of life affect the realisation of human potential as much as (if not more than) environmental factors during later years, it is unrealistic to expect preschool intervention alone to solve later problems associated with poverty, such as scholastic under-achievement, because too little is known about 'critical stages' in human development and too many factors continue to influence the growing child's opportunities and living circumstances. But without a solid foundation, later development will almost certainly be impaired.

Preschool programmes of various types have been found effective in promoting early development and preparing disadvantaged children for school in many countries although the most extensive research has been conducted in the United States. Here in Cape Town, research has been conducted at the...
Athlone Early Learning Centre which serves a particularly impoverished Coloured community* and which has adopted the broad developmental approach to early childhood education.

Between 1972 and 1975, the ELC children were individually assessed on school readiness measures, the Caldwell Preschool Inventory and a battery of short Concept Inventories, during their last year before school entry. There were three groups of ELC children who had spent different lengths of time in the programme - approximately six months (E1), eighteen months (E2) and two and a half years (E3) when tested. Their performance was compared with a group of children from the same community who did not attend preschool (C1), a group of children from low-income homes attending a regular nursery school (C2), and with a more middle class group attending the demonstration schools at the Athlone Training Centre (C3). The results are shown graphically in Fig. 1 in the Appendix. Differences between the groups did not reach statistical significance, but there is a clear trend favouring the ELC children. The majority of the E3 and C3 groups obtained very high scores on the two tests (Short & Biersteker 1977). Furthermore, we found that the ELC children's performance on these school readiness measures and on behaviour rating scales did not correlate with the socio-economic index (cf. assessment of infants before intervention) which gives further evidence of the effectiveness of the ELC programme.

After a term in primary school, the teachers were asked to rate the behaviour of ELC children and those from the local comparison group which had not gone to preschool (Short & Biersteker 1977). The ELC children obtained higher scores on sub-scales designed to measure 'creative inquisitiveness', academic motivation, socio-emotional adjustment, adjustment to primary school and language ability. These findings are important, even though group comparisons did not reach statistical significance (small samples), because these subscales reflect ELC educational objectives. It is interesting to note that the ELC children's scores on these rating scales

* The Athlone ELC serves the children of Kew Town, one of the oldest Council housing estates for Coloured families in Cape Town. A survey in 1973 (when the research studies were conducted) showed that majority of household heads in Kew Town were employed as unskilled labourers (36%) or semi-skilled manual workers (41%) with 14% unemployed. Of the families served by the ELC, 58% were living below the Poverty Datum Line with a total of 83% below the Minimum Effective Level.
did correlate significantly with the socio-economic index. This finding is difficult to interpret, but it may reflect teacher bias.

Research in the United States has shown that disadvantaged children who had participated in special preschool programmes started well at school and continued to do better scholastically than comparison children without preschool until the fourth grade (Bronfenbrenner 1974). This 'fade-out', however, has been found to have less serious implications regarding the effectiveness of preschool education than was first thought (Consortium 1983). At least one long-term study (Schweinhart & Weikart 1983) has produced data showing positive effects in high school in both scholastic achievement and social development and in the vocational sphere. The preschool programme in this study was of a particularly high standard using the developmental approach and included active parent involvement.

Here in Cape Town, the Athlone ELC children's scholastic progress has been monitored, but the high attrition rate makes it difficult to draw any definite conclusions. Unfortunately, the school records do not indicate whether the 'lost' children have moved school or dropped out. We do know, however, that many families have moved out of Kew Town over the past ten years, probably the upwardly mobile families, but it is impossible to keep track of them with limited research manpower. A preliminary analysis of available data shows that 77.9% progressed from Sub A to Std. 2 (Grade 1 to Grade 4) without repeating a standard, in contrast with 52.3% in Coloured schools throughout the country as shown graphically in Fig. 2 (HSRC Report 1981).*

In South Africa, there is a severe lack of preschool facilities available for young children in the communities where poverty is most serious: estimates for 1980 show that only 4% of Coloured children, 0.6% of Black children and 3% of Indian children in the 0-6 year-old age bracket attended some kind of preschool (See Table 2 and Fig. 3 in appendix). Even in Greater Cape Town where provision is greatest, only about 6% of Coloured and Black children are involved. Furthermore, relatively few of these facilities are able to provide the kind of educational programme which disadvantaged children really need: centres are overcrowded; there are very few trained

* There is a possibility that the ELC figures may be slightly inflated because of missing data due to attrition, but a more extensive analysis of the data is in progress, which will also include long-term results (through to high school).
teachers; the adult-child ratios are poor, and many are poorly equipped. Most of the children who attend preschool centres are aged between 3 and 6 years. Where babies are accommodated, there tends to be little or no awareness of their developmental needs with the result that custodial care only is provided. Therefore infants who are already at risk, spend most of their waking hours in unstimulating environments.

Health and nutritional needs

The incidence of malnutrition in the rural areas is a serious problem, but even in the large cities, the health status of young children growing up in conditions of poverty is still a matter of deep concern. Research at the Athlone ELC on physical growth (height and mass) indicates that the majority of children maintain a normal growth rate only until about the age of one year or eighteen months and then there is a marked slowing down.* Under-nourishment not only makes the child more vulnerable to disease, but reduces his energy level. Children who are suffering from chronic ailments, constant hunger or lack of sleep are not able to learn and develop their abilities to the full. The most widespread health problems at the Athlone ELC are respiratory ailments, gastro-enteritis, scabies, worms, anaemia and ear infection, while dental decay is chronic among Coloured preschool children from low-income families. Of course, malnutrition during pregnancy and the first year of life can cause permanent mental retardation.

Preschool services can provide much needed supplementary nutrition, preventative health care and health education for parents. Although a large proportion of existing centres do give the children meals, few are able to provide an adequate preventative health service. In general, clinics deal with the infant up to two years, but there are no preventative health services for preschool children aged 2 to 6 years.

The need for day care

The most basic need of the young child is for shelter and a safe environment. Many poor mothers who must work have nowhere to leave their young children: they are either left to their own devices; or placed in the care of an

* A report on a longitudinal study of the effects of supplementary nutrition and preventative health care provided at the ELC is in preparation.
elderly childminder who may not even provide enough food, and where conditions may be unhygienic and overcrowded; or an older child is kept out of school to look after younger siblings. This does create a vicious circle of stress and hardship for the poor.

The need to provide day care services derives not from the basic developmental or health needs of the child, but from the mother’s need to work. This is largely a product of industrialisation, where on the one hand, many mothers must work because of poverty or because they are the sole bread winners, while on the other hand, the economy requires a large female labour force. In both instances, it is the socio-economic system which has produced the working mother and therefore, the provision of day care services for her children becomes a social responsibility, and is of critical importance in alleviating the burdens of the poor family with young children.

The number of preschool children requiring day care services is difficult to estimate because of the lack of statistics on the number of working mothers with preschool children, and many children are looked after by grandparents. A survey in Kew Town in 1973 found that 30% of the families with preschool children required day care services, but Kew Town is an old township with many grandmothers who cared for children in an additional 24% of the families. Therefore, the overall figure is likely to be higher for Coloured urban families, and even higher in the Black townships.

Approximately 66% of preschool centres in South Africa serving Coloured children and 85% serving Black children provide full day care. (See Table 3 and Fig. 4 in appendix), but this is hopelessly inadequate. Because of the immense shortage of day care centres, however, almost any preschool facility tends to serve a day care function with older school children taking responsibility for the preschoolers in the afternoons.

The provision of day care services is complicated by the fact that the majority of children requiring day care are already at risk educationally. It is unfortunate that the provision of day care services is seen as a welfare responsibility, with the result that the developmental needs of the children are often inadequately catered for. As regards preschool children, the division between health, education and welfare services creates many problems. Day care services must provide adequately for the young child’s health, nutritional and educational/developmental needs.
not sufficient to provide custodial care only on the assumption that by enabling the mother to work, the economic circumstances of the family will be improved. Inadequate stimulation of the young child's development for five days a week, 48 weeks a year, cannot be compensated for by a better family income.*

The need for parent involvement

Research evidence is accumulating to show that the home is the most important educational agent in the child's life, providing continuity and support from one stage to the next throughout the years of immaturity (Jencks et al. 1972; Halsey 1972). It is widely accepted that during the very early years up to the age of three, children are generally better off at home rather than in group care centres. In Hungary where extensive day care facilities were provided to allow mothers to work, policy has now changed because of the observed adverse effects of group care on very young children. The State is now providing extensive child care benefits to encourage mothers to stay home with their babies (Kamerman & Khan 1979). This does not mean to say that group care in creches is always detrimental, but the standards of care required to ensure healthy development make creche services very costly.

Even for older children (3-6), research, particularly in the United States, suggests that if parents are actively involved in their children's education, the benefits of attending preschool programmes are likely to be more lasting (Bronfenbrenner 1974; Consortium 1983). Parents need to understand the requirements of the school and be helped to provide support and encouragement in the home. Without parental back-up, children find it more difficult to make use of the educational opportunities offered by the school.

There is a growing body of opinion which recognises parents as the chief educators of their young children, and favours the provision of educational and other services which support the family's educational role by assisting

* Papoušek (1970) studied children in day care centres in the USSR, England, Sweden and Czechoslovakia during the 1960s. He reports that in comparison with children brought up at home, day care children "usually show delays in the development of speech, oculomotor (eye-hand) co-ordination and social behaviour, although in somatic (physical) and motor development they are equal or slightly better than children in families" (p. 57-58).
parents to fulfill this role more effectively, rather than by providing directly for the children's needs only*. These programmes work directly with the mother or the child's main caretaker (who may be a grandmother) in helping her to understand more fully the educational and developmental needs of her young children and to provide a more stimulating environment in the home itself.

American research to date indicates that mother and child home-visiting programmes, when started early (before the age of three) and lasting for two years, are as effective in the short- and long-term for disadvantaged children as intensive centre-based preschool programmes (Bronfenbrenner 1974; Consortium 1983). Furthermore, by learning to become a more effective educator in her own family, the mother's self-confidence is increased and she learns to cope more adequately with some of the restrictions and difficulties imposed by poverty. Successful programmes have not only helped participants to become better home-makers, but some have also become actively involved in community affairs.

There is a variety of ways of securing real parent involvement in early childhood education, which are listed below and described more fully in Appendix 2. Another important development is the recognition that adolescents and young adults require preparation for their future roles as parents to provide greater understanding of the developmental needs and care of young children. A number of programmes have been developed aimed at high school pupils or pregnant mothers (many of whom may be adolescents).

Community involvement in early childhood services

Preschool programmes can involve parents and other community members in roles of educational responsibility, either in their own homes or in preschool centres and playgroups, in voluntary capacities or as paid community helpers or on management committees. There is increasing recognition of the value of using community members either as parent

* For example, see "The Role of the Family in Child Development: Implications for State Policies and Programs" by the Education Commission of the States, Denver, 1975. See also Arango & Nimmicht (1982).
educators or as teaching assistants in preschool centres. They should receive inservice training which increases skills in the community and job opportunities are provided.

Programmes have also been developed to train childminders, community women who care for children in their own homes for a fee. Motivation is a problem and the very important parent education element is lost, but a great number of children are in the care of childminders. Until such time as sufficient day care centres are provided, it is important to improve the quality of care received by disadvantaged children whose development may be placed at considerable risk in the home-based day care situation. In some communities where older children care for the young ones, programmes are directed at the older children (child-to-child programmes).

Community workers have found that concern about young children often provides a starting point for community co-operation and organisation. Where early childhood care and education services and programmes involve adult education and co-operation, they can become an important instrument for social change - not only by providing young children with a better start to life but also in developing adult skills and providing a focus for community development.

Types of Services

Preschool care and educational services may be divided into three main categories:

1) The more conventional child-orientated services include all centre-based programmes attended by children, usually in groups, in which the 'teacher' is seen as the main educational agent, eg. nursery schools or classes, kindergartens, preprimary schools or classes, playcentres or playschools, and day care centres, creches, infant and toddler centres.

2) The more recent parent-orientated programmes see the parent as the main educational agent, and may be divided into three major types:
   a) Mother and child home-visiting programmes which provide individualised attention.
b) Parent training programmes which involve groups of parents, usually without the children. The Preparation for Parenthood Programme could be included in this category.

c) Mother and child playgroup programmes which involve one to three sessions per week. These may be conducted in a community facility or in homes.

3) a) Combination programmes which usually involve children attending a regular preschool programme at least twice a week for 2-3 hour sessions (and sometimes everyday). In addition to this, the mother and child may be visited at home once a week; or mothers may come into the centre once a week for a training session; and/or mothers may assist with the preschool programme on a rota basis.

b) Programmes aimed at childminders (home-based day care) which are concerned with improving the quality of care received by the children (child-centred), but use methods developed for parent-orientated programmes. The child-to-child programmes are also included here.

Quality and cost

An issue which is very important concerns the quality and cost of preschool programmes. Quality seems to be related to four main factors:

1) the adult-child ratio which determines the amount of individual attention the children receive - parent-orientated programmes have the great advantage of very favourable adult-child ratios because mothers are the teachers;

2) the training of the teachers;

3) the amount of time devoted to constructive play activities, and

4) order and variety in the physical environment.

The first two factors are closely related to cost. From an educational or developmental perspective, anything is not necessarily better than nothing. For instance, in France where child-orientated programmes have been
available for almost all 3-6 year-olds for some time, there is concern about the high level of scholastic under-achievement at primary school level (Austin 1976). This is almost certainly due to the poor teacher-child ratio (1:35 or 40), inappropriate training of teachers (same as for primary school) and lack of parent involvement.

Good quality child-orientated preschool programmes are expensive, and become increasingly costly the younger the children (because ratios should decrease). Estimated costs of centre-based day care range from R575-00 to R1000-00 per child per year depending on age of children, hours, range of services and standard of education provided. The lowest figure is for 2-6 year-olds receiving 8 hour basic developmental care with no frills (See Table 4 in Appendix).

The conventional nursery school or preprimary school for children aged 3 to 6 years, staffed with qualified teachers at a good ratio by South African standards (1:15), costs between R400-00 (4 hours, no midday meal) and R700-00 (6 hours, meal, etc.) per child per annum. Some American preschool programmes have shorter sessions (2-3 hours) and double shifts (cost per child reduced to about R320-00).

Parent-orientated programmes tend to cost much less, ranging from R180-00 per child per annum for home-visiting to mothers with children under three years of age to as little as an estimated R45-00 per child for a parent training programme.

The combination parent-centre programme with children attending the preschool programme twice a week and a mothers training session once a week would cost about R220-00 per child per annum.

When considering cost-effectiveness, however, a great many factors have to be taken into account, and research has not yet answered questions regarding the relative effectiveness of programmes differing in quality (in terms of staffing). For instance, no research has been done on the effects of children attending good community-run playcentres using existing facilities (such as church halls) and supervised by a qualified teacher with trained
assistants. This is a common alternative to preprimary/nursery schools because of the shortage of teachers and its lower cost (R200-R300 per child per annum). There is no research either on whether the least costly parent training programmes are effective in the long-term.

An important issue relating to cost is whose cost? Home-based day care (childminding) is sometimes regarded as a low cost alternative to day care centres, but it has been found in America that the real cost of home-based day care with adequate quality control is about the same as centre-based services. In the so-called low cost childminding programmes, the community (parents and minders) is paying the balance. With regard to parent-orientated programmes, one needs to be aware of the cost to families of having mothers remain at home to care for their young children.

Experience in America and Britain has shown that there is no single programme which effectively meets all needs in the preschool field. Families also have preferences and the tendency now is to provide a variety of services. At present in South African black communities, inadequate State subsidies are available only for preprimary (nursery) schools and day care centres (creches), and the vast majority of existing preschool services are of this type. An increasing interest is being shown in alternative programmes involving parents and home-based childminders, but there is no financial assistance available for setting up such services. A more flexible State funding policy is required which encourages the development of a range of services so that programmes can be matched to needs in the most effective and economical way possible.

Matching programmes to needs

Some of the issues involved in matching programmes to needs are:

1) The role of the family and its responsibility for the care and education of its young children: The needs of families vary considerably depending on whether mothers can find employment; whether grandmothers are at home; whether they live in crowded urban conditions or in rural villages; whether the climate is harsh or mild; whether health services are available, etc. As a general principle, programmes should not provide
more assistance than the family needs, and the assistance given should be in a form which strengthens the family's educational caring role rather than weakens it. This could mean subsidising poor mothers to stay at home with their very young children.

2) Child-orientated versus parent-orientated education: For children under the age of three, there seems to be little question that parent-orientated methods are preferable to centre-based group care, provided that mothers or grannies are at home. It has even been argued that this is the best time to provide educational input to the child and the home. In very depressed communities, the home-visiting method seems to be the most effective. A group programme has been used successfully with mothers and infants at the St. Mary's ELC in Harare, but this depends upon maternal motivation and the ease with which mothers can get to the centre with small babies. Training programmes for mothers only create baby-sitting problems, and low-income mothers may have to be paid to secure regular attendance.

For children aged three to six, home-visiting programmes have been found to have a less dramatic short-term impact than centre-based programmes, and they are generally less effective in preparing children for school. The major weakness in home-visiting methods is that they do not provide the child with group experiences which are needed from the age of about three years. This problem can be overcome with mother-child group programmes held either in a community facility or in homes if there is sufficient space. Nevertheless, this type of programme makes considerable demands upon the mother, and it is doubtful whether many mothers would stay the course unless there were no other options available. For instance, most mothers would prefer to send their older children to the playcentre down the road. In such circumstances, combination programmes might be more effective in meeting both the needs of mothers and children.

After the age of three, child-orientated (centre-based) programmes can greatly enhance the quality of life for poor children, particularly those from very unstable homes. By age five, one year of participation in a systematic supplementary education programme before school entry is
likely to have a considerable impact on preparing disadvantaged children for school, especially if there is good parent-teacher communication. The need for such a 'bridging programme' has been recognised by the State (recommended by the De Lange report, HSRC 1981), but it is generally accepted that earlier intervention is also necessary.

3) **Day care:** If mothers have to work in order to survive, it is obviously supportive of the family to provide adequate day care services. However, the longer the child spends in day care, the better the quality must be to off-set the disadvantages of group care, and the more difficult it becomes to involve mothers in early education. There is a strong movement now advocating more part-time employment for mothers of young children, and that employers of women should take more responsibility for providing day care services.

Some mothers prefer home-based day care for their children, and this is regarded as a valid alternative to centre-based day care in America and Britain. Childminders in low-income communities are entitled to subsidies, and various programmes have been developed to improve the quality of home-based care.

4) **Health and nutrition:** In very low-income communities, young children need medical screening and supplementary nutrition. These kinds of services can be provided most effectively in centre-based programmes, particularly day care. Parent-orientated approaches have to rely mainly on health education, although medical screening can be arranged and various food aid programmes are available to welfare mothers in the States.

**Systems of provision**

Many people are advocating that preschool services should remain essentially community-based (non-formal and informal) with the State's role being to encourage and support community and private sector initiative in setting up and running a variety of programmes and services for preschool children and their parents.
An essential element in this concept of community-based education, however, is the provision of adequate supports and resources. The concept of community 'self-help' has become fashionable in recent years, but it is often a justification for avoiding responsibility. Self-help requires expertise and financial resources: in the early childhood education field, considerable resources of both are needed. In poor communities, both are lacking, but certain programmes enable people to gain expertise which can be used either for the benefit of their own families (e.g. parent education/training programmes) or for their communities when job training is provided (for para-professionals). The use of para-professionals in preschool programmes opens up a range of employment opportunities (often part-time) and allows an improvement in occupational status. Preschool programmes can also be used as a catalyst for community development because people are concerned about the welfare of young children, and parents can gain management skills if they are involved in school committees and PTAs.

With regard to financial self-help, it is accepted that each community should contribute according to its means (through fees, fund-raising and assistance in kind), but it is unreasonable to expect low-income families to give much voluntary time or to contribute much in cash. Funding policies which provide just sufficient financial assistance to encourage a low-income community to accept responsibility for setting up a playcentre or day care centre are failing to take these factors into account. The net result is a centre which is ill-equipped and under-staffed with untrained people earning very low salaries, providing a service which is of little or no value to the children and which is an added financial burden on the community.

A flexible support system is required which is responsive to community needs and fulfills the following functions:

1. **Financial support** - funds should be available from the State, the private sector (especially for day care services, and tax concessions or levies might be considered) and other philanthropic organisations. The State needs to ensure that its limited funds go to those who need it most (the United States uses parental income criteria while Britain has experimented with the concept of "educational priority areas"*).

* The EPA system is based on residential area, but it has run into problems, e.g. a school may be situated in a disadvantaged area, but for various reasons draws children from more affluent homes in the next suburb.
(2) **Expertise and training programmes:** Community groups need guidance and training in programme management and in early childhood education. Professionals are in short supply, particularly in the Black, Coloured and Indian communities. There is, however, a great deal of unused potential in these communities and considerable merit in employing community members as para-professional educators. Training needs to be provided, especially of the non-formal inservice variety. Professionals need to be used as advisors and trainers, which means that they require a broader range of skills than those provided by conventional teacher training.

(3) **Material resources:** Educational supplies and equipment need to be made more readily available and at the lowest possible cost through non-profit supply centres.

(4) **Health services and nutrition programmes** also need to be made available.

(5) **Co-ordination:** There needs to be a degree of co-ordination to ensure that limited resources are used efficiently and that there is adequate communication between the various parties involved in the provision of services.

(6) **Quality control:** Standards are required and these are usually made requirements for funding. In a system of community-based education, however, it is important to work with people towards a common goal of improving quality. "Inspectors" should be trusted advisors and not controllers.

A support system is already beginning to develop for early childhood education in disadvantaged communities. Private organisations have been set up in different parts of the country to provide support services of various kinds in response to community needs, and efforts are already being made to co-ordinate these activities at local levels and on a national basis. The Early Learning Resource Unit is a privately funded national resource centre which has developed a variety of non-formal training programmes to meet existing needs of preschool staff and others. People from all over the country are participating in these courses, but there is a need to set up locally-based training programmes in each major urban centre.
We would like to see the development of a network of resource centres providing support and training services throughout the country, but the problem is that such centres have to rely entirely on private sector funding which is seldom a secure base on which to operate. State subsidies for this type of activity are urgently required to stimulate development.

The field of early childhood and parent education is one in which there can be a productive partnership between the State, the private sector and the community. The State should not take over the provision of services in this field (except possibly for the proposed bridging programme for all five-year-olds) because this stifles private initiative and community development. The State's role should be to help the community and the various private resource/support organisations to do a better job, mainly by providing subsidies on a flexible basis and by encouraging an innovative approach to stimulate development. There are no simple solutions to the problems of providing services to support and strengthen families living in poverty.

Conclusion

What we do know is that parent involvement in early education is important at all ages, and this can be achieved in a variety of ways. From the age of three, children benefit from contact with other children, but this does not necessarily mean that they need to participate in a group programme every day of the week - even once a week, provided their mothers are also involved educationally, can be extremely beneficial. We also know that the adverse effects of environmental handicap begin to manifest themselves very early and that mothers, given the necessary education, can improve their child-rearing skills and make the home environment much more stimulating (Bronfenbrenner 1974). The care and stimulation of babies is just as important as that of older children and requires as much skill and knowledge. The quality of care provided for all young children in creches and day care centres is a matter of increasing concern and should not be overlooked. The preparation of young adults for parenthood while still at school is an exciting concept worth careful consideration.

Finally, I wish to return to the question of early childhood education and social change. While education is one of the forces at work in shaping people's lives, it is often used by the powers-that-be, supported by those in
advantaged social positions, to maintain the status quo, sometimes in subtle ways. It is, therefore, important to examine critically not only the aims, but also the methods used in educational programmes, to determine whether social change is promoted or hindered, even at the preschool level.

Early childhood education is but the first stage in the educational process. Its importance should not be underestimated because it lays the foundation for human development, but children still have to proceed through State systems of primary, secondary and perhaps tertiary education.

As we have seen there are many different ways of providing early childhood education, but there are two main approaches: the conventional one focusses directly on the child where the educational agent tends to be the teacher. The other focusses on the parent who is seen as the chief educational agent. Both approaches have been found to be effective in promoting the development of young children, but programmes that actively involve parents and community in roles of educational responsibility have the additional advantage of becoming an important instrument of social change because such programmes focus on adult education and co-operation. Once again, however, goals can be narrow and methods used can help to maintain the status quo. On the other hand, goals can be broad and methods can be growth enhancing.
References:


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"Continuity in the Educational Process from Babyhood to Adulthood: Programmes developed by the Athlone Early Learning Centre and the Early Learning Resource Unit". Athlone, Early Learning Resource Unit, 1982.


TULKIN, S.R.  

WEBBER, V.K.  


SPODEK, B. (Ed.)  
APPENDIX 1: TABLE 1

Mean scores and range in brackets on the Mental Development Index (MDI) and Psychomotor Development Index (PDI) of the Bayley Scales of Infant Development for three groups of disadvantaged coloured infants divided according to scores obtained on a Socio-Economic Index (SEI).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>SEI</th>
<th>MDI</th>
<th>PDI</th>
<th>Age (Months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher SES</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>118.6</td>
<td>128.9</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4 boys, 4 girls)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(58-88)</td>
<td>(105-150)</td>
<td>(118-150)</td>
<td>(15-29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle SES</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>104.1</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5 boys, 5 girls)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(45-56)</td>
<td>(78-111)</td>
<td>(90-141)</td>
<td>(15-27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower SES</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>98.7</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5 boys, 4 girls)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(33-40)</td>
<td>(69-112)</td>
<td>(80-117)</td>
<td>(19-25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Correlation co-efficients between SEI and MDI = .564 (p < .01)
SEI and PDI = .561 (p < .01)

The Socio-Economic Index (SEI) was constructed by the Athlone Early Learning Centre in order to differentiate SES within a low income community. It includes the following:

occupation of head of family
educational level of father
educational level of mother
gross family income divided by number of family members
person to room ratio in family dwelling (overcrowding index)

Bayley, N. Manual for the Bayley Scales of Infant Development
Caldwell Preschool Inventory
Mean Scores

Concept Inventories
Mean Scores

Figure 1
FIGURE 2

COMPARISON OF ELC SCHOLASTIC PROGRESS WITH NATIONAL FIGURES FOR EACH POPULATION GROUP (1974 - 1977)

Percentage of pupils who progressed from Sub A (Grade 1) to Std. 2 without repeating a year.
### TABLE 2
PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION IN SOUTH AFRICA (1980)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASIANS</th>
<th>COLOURED</th>
<th>WHITES</th>
<th>BLACKS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of S.A population (1970)</td>
<td>2,9 per cent</td>
<td>9,4 per cent</td>
<td>17,5 per cent</td>
<td>70,2 per cent</td>
<td>100 per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of pre-school facilities</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>1 557</td>
<td>240+38</td>
<td>2 108+38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>4 509</td>
<td>17 520</td>
<td>90 423</td>
<td>24 000+</td>
<td>136 452+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage distribution children</td>
<td>3,3 per cent</td>
<td>12,8 per cent</td>
<td>66,3 per cent</td>
<td>17,6 per cent</td>
<td>100 per cent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig 3**

PERCENTAGE OF PRE-SCHOOL POPULATION (0-6 YEARS) PROVIDED FOR (ESTIMATES)

![Bar chart showing percentage distribution of pre-school population by race]

- **WHITE**: 16 per cent
- **COLOURED**: 4 per cent
- **ASIAn**: 3 per cent
- **BLACK**: 0,6 per cent

Source: Short (1981)
### Types of Pre-School Provision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Asians (2)</th>
<th>Coloureds</th>
<th>Whites (3)</th>
<th>Blacks (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary classes</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>777</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>2,019</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3,504</td>
<td>1,330 (E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>421</td>
<td>4,223</td>
<td>40,079</td>
<td>1,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-primary cum-creche</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>94</td>
<td>5,938</td>
<td>19,958</td>
<td>2,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creches</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2,648</td>
<td>8,836</td>
<td>16,317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creche and after-school care</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,946</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclassified centres</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>1,975</td>
<td>4,711</td>
<td>16,100</td>
<td>2,691+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Classification according to Dept of Statistics, 1980 (Tredoux 1981)

*HSRC (1981)

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**Fig 4**

Proportion of Places (Children) for Full Day Care (Estimates)

- Asian: 2 per cent
- White: 34 per cent
- Coloured: 65 per cent
- Black: 85 per cent

Source: Short (1981)
(vi)

TABLE 4

COSTS OF PRE-SCHOOL PROGRAMMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COST PER CHILD PER ANNUM</th>
<th>0-6 yrs</th>
<th>0-3 yrs</th>
<th>3-6 yrs</th>
<th>5-6 yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3 yrs</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6 yrs</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6 yrs</td>
<td>220</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. Child-orientated programs

1. Day Care Centres
   developmental care
   comprehensive service
   600
   1000

2. Pre-primary schools/classes
   4 hrs without lunch
   6 hrs with lunch, etc.
   double sessions (3 hrs x 2)
   400
   700
   320

3. Playcentres (daily)
   3 hrs without lunch
   5 hrs with basic lunch
   200
   300

B. Parent-orientated programs

1. Home visiting
   180

2. Mother-Child groups
   120
   90

3. Parent training groups
   45
   45
   45

C. Combination programs

Children 2 sessions per week
Mothers 1 training per week
APPENDIX 2:

Types of parent-orientated education programmes

1. Parent awareness programmes:
   Parents need to become more aware of their educational role before they are likely to respond to parent-orientated methods of early childhood education. In some programmes, the awareness component is built in, but there is room also for programmes designed to heighten awareness only.

   a) Clinic waiting rooms: The Early Learning Resource Unit in Cape Town has developed a 12 session programme of brief talks-demonstrations which are accompanied by simple leaflets on different topics. The talks are given once a week to mothers in clinic waiting rooms, and there has been a good response from Black and Coloured mothers at various clinics. A similar programme has been used at a textile factory during lunch hour, and it can be used in any situation where mothers congregate. ELRU also has a set of 10 posters which may be displayed in clinics, community centres, etc.

   b) Mass media: Television, newspapers and magazines could also be used to increase parents' awareness of their children's developmental needs and their educational role.

2. Mother and child home visiting programmes:
   The home visiting approach has been developed mainly in the United States, but also in Britain, Australia, Israel, South Africa (Athlone ELC) and in other parts of the world. Usually, one trained home visitor works with a particular group of mothers; she visits each mother-child pair at home once a week for about an hour, during which she demonstrates activities and games with the child and talks with the mother. Mothers are required to be present and encouraged to participate in the play session. Research programmes have been conducted with children between the ages of three months and six years, while Project Head Start launched an experimental Home Start programme for 3- to 5-year-olds in 1970. Programmes have either lasted one or two years. A number of projects have used para-professional home visitors.
Programme variations include:
(a) In the two-year Verbal Interaction Project (USA) for children aged 2 to 4 years, the emphasis was on altering the pattern of mother-child verbal communication. Two home visits of ½ hour each per week were made; age-appropriate play materials and books were left in the home, and social workers were replaced by para-professionals as Toy Demonstrators.

(b) In the Parent Education Program (USA) weekly visits began at the age of 3 months, but the two-year-olds were also exposed to group activities (about 5 or 6 children) in 'home learning centres' for two hours twice per week (in addition to regular home visits).

(c) In the Perinatal Home Visit Program (USA) weekly visits began when the mother was six months pregnant and emphasised the mother's nutritional needs, infant feeding once the baby was born, and then introduced infant stimulation activities.

3. Parent training programmes
Two rather different programmes have been developed in America designed to improve the mother's child rearing and teaching skills without involving the children directly at all.

(a) Mother's Training Program: Mothers of infants aged 12-24 months attended two-hourly weekly group sessions for a period of about 15 months. The training sessions included demonstrations of how mothers could use educational play materials with their children to stimulate intellectual and language development, as well as discussions of matters concerning the mothers. Participants were paid to attend the training sessions.

(b) Parent/Child Toy Lending Library Program: The toy library consisted of eight basic educational toys or play materials and a supplementary set of eight toys suitable for children aged two to five years. Mothers attended an eight-week training course involving one two-hour group session (without children) per week and thereafter were allowed to borrow toys on a weekly basis. At each training session, a series of games for a particular basic toy were demonstrated and other aspects of child development were discussed. Training methods also included the use of film strips, and mothers were issued with written guides for each game.
(c) Preparation for Parenthood: In the United States, increasing attention is being given to preparing adolescents for their future role as parents. A model curriculum called 'Exploring Childhood' has been developed for use in secondary schools, and voluntary youth organisations are encouraged to promote parenthood education programmes. Such courses consist of theoretical study, group discussions and practical experience with young children. The latter is provided by establishing links with pre-school centres in the community - some high schools have even set up and operated pre-school facilities within their own buildings. Other programmes allow students to work part-time in pre-school centres, while others have combined education for parenthood with career preparation (as teacher-aides).

4. Playgroup programmes:
The British Pre-school Playgroup Association (PPA) aims to involve mothers in the education of their pre-school children (3 to 4 years old) by encouraging them to run playgroups on a co-operative voluntary basis either at home or in local community halls. Various training courses are offered and the Open University has developed in conjunction with the PPA a parent education course on the pre-school child. The playgroups are usually held two or three times per week for two or three hours a session. However, many playgroups are now run on a semi-professional basis with paid staff, and active parental involvement is often limited, even in middle-class communities where it has been most successful.

In Zimbabwe, the PPA approach is being promoted by several organisations with African women, both urban and rural, by working through the extensive network of women's clubs. One organisation runs one-week practical training courses and has now developed a series of 10 such courses. Another organisation has trained 'playgroup advisors' to work with mothers in the rural areas. The playgroup concept has been used in at least two innovative parent education programmes:

(a) Aborigine Family Education Centres (AFECs): This innovative project, started in New South Wales, Australia in 1969, had three basic objectives in low-income Aborigine communities: (i) to foster community development and action; (ii) to provide an educational
service for pre-school children, and (iii) to offer women skill training and a career development ladder in pre-school education. These objectives were achieved by offering resources mainly in the form of training programmes and written teaching guides for mothers and professional guidance, and by making the needs of the pre-school child the focus of community interest.

The community had to take the initiative, in the first place, by inviting the resource team to meet with them. Once the community decided to set up an AFEc, the resource team returned as consultants, but the community took full responsibility for running the centre. After three years, 11 AFEcs had been established, some in homes and some in community facilities; groups met once or twice a week with parents, grandparents and young children (0 to 6 years) learning together; professionals only acted as advisors, and mothers could go through a series of 'correspondence' training programmes. Adults were expected to spend a third of their time at the centre working with the children, a third in group discussion on early education, and a third devoted to their own interests or AFEc affairs.

(b) Mother-Child Group Programme: The Athlone ELC developed a group programme for mothers and children aged 3 to 6 years. Mothers (and other caretakers) brought their children to the centre once a week for a two-hour session involving a playgroup for the children run by the mothers, a short training session for the mothers and a toy- and book-lending library. Major responsibility for the child's education remained with the mother in the home, but the children were given an opportunity to participate in group activities which are important for social development and school readiness. Similar programmes have been developed elsewhere, some of which serve mothers and babies and/or toddlers.

(c) Related services: In Britain, Mother and Toddler Clubs have been started, usually in playgroup facilities on one or two afternoons per week and lasting about two hours. These clubs are very informal, the main aim being to relieve the isolation of mothers confined to their homes with small children, but they could be used as a vehicle for a structured parent education programme. The playbus concept could be used as a mobile venue for a mother-child group programme in areas where there are no suitable premises. In our climate, the adventure playground concept could also be used as a focus for a similar programme.
5. Combination programmes:

There is a great variety of possible combination programmes. The following examples indicate some of the alternatives:

(a) Perry Pre-school Project (USA) for low I.Q. three- and four-year-olds consisted of a two year programme involving daily classes lasting 2½ hours with an adult-child ratio of 1:6, plus weekly home visits by the teacher, which were closely related to the school programme.

(b) Early Training Project (USA) involved a sequential strategy with children participating in a 10 week summer school programme, followed by 9 months of weekly home visits for a period of two or three years. In the last year of home visits, the children were in First Grade. The summer school consisted of four hours daily in classes of 20 with a head teacher and three or four assistants (ratio = 1:5).

(c) Parent-centre program (Colombia) provides a preschool (centre-based) programme two mornings a week for the children, and mothers attend a group meeting one afternoon per week to learn how to use educational toys and games and carry out other educational activities in the home.

(d) Parent-Child Centres (federally-funded USA) provide a range of services and programmes for mothers with children under three years of age. Services must include health care, parent and child education, social services and training opportunities. Programmes, however, vary according to local community needs, eg. playgroups, home visiting, mother and child groups, home-based day care services.

(e) Child and Family Resource Program (federally-funded USA) was designed for families with children from birth to eight years. Its aim was to assist families to make better use of existing services and to fill in gaps in service provision.