

History and Framework of Early Education and the Assessment of Young Children



There is no other outward offence that in the sight of God so heavily burdens the world, and deserves such heavy chastisement, as the neglect to educate children.

—Martin Luther

Introduction and Themes

Long lost, the concept of childhood was reborn during the Renaissance; however, it was not until the 19th century that contemporary ideas about the education of children under the age of 5 years were developed in Germany. In America, early childhood education and education for children with disabilities was marginalized until the 20th century.

Principles of social science were used by American researchers to establish a measurement-based understanding of child development and learning. This approach was built on a belief that genetics is the primary factor determining each child's lot in life. Racism and discrimination against children with disabilities were by-products of this concept of human development.

The collection of child development data at university-based clinics led to developmental assessments and screening tools. However, the application of the principles of educational measurement for the evaluation of early childhood programs, and for the assessment of the special needs of young children with disabilities, was not mandated until after 1965.

Federal and state laws and regulations now require children be screened for potential learning or developmental problems. Children found to potentially be at risk for problems must be provided a thorough assessment. An assessment includes a number of approaches used to collect information about the performance abilities and limitations of a child. These can include test data, performance data, and observational records.

The model for program accreditation of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), first developed in 1929, was updated in 2008, but only one early childhood program in seven seeks that accreditation. Since the 1990s, state education departments have been providing leadership in developing early childhood program evaluations and licensing standards.



Learning Objectives

By reading and studying this chapter, you should acquire the competency to:

- Describe the first modern early childhood education programs.
- Discuss problems involved in assessing bilingual prekindergarten children.
- Explain educational rights of children with disabilities.
- Present arguments for and against the work by Lewis M. Terman with mentally gifted children.
- Describe research findings from early childhood education impact studies.
- Discuss reasons behind the growth of state-sponsored child care and preschool programs.
- Explain reasons behind the rapid growth of private tutoring companies focused on cramming for preschool children.



First Early Childhood Programs

Europe in the 19th century gave birth to a modern approach to early childhood education. Educators had always assumed that before the age of 7 children were too immature to focus on academic learning. The notion of education with children as young as age 3 was unheard of. This 19th century development resulted in an early childhood program that would be familiar to today's teachers. Early childhood education was first proposed by a Swiss educator, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and later by his student Friedrich Froebel (or Fröbel) from Thuringia, Germany (Froebel, 1948; Pestalozzi, 1973/1894).

Pestalozzi's program was built around the concept that children learn first through the senses and experience, then through language-dominated cognitive channels. His teaching methods were aligned with the natural needs and instincts of children. Pestalozzi used the word “*anschauung*” from Emanuel Kant to describe how children reach this level of knowing. *Anschauung* can only occur through actively exploring the environment and through play. Pestalozzi believed the child needed to actually use objects before he/she could learn the words describing them and their uses.

Froebel, an architect turned schoolmaster, came to realize that children needed a school experience prior to age 6. The child's garden or **kindergarten** was introduced by Froebel as a necessary step in the educational ladder prior to first grade. In kindergarten, children find the balance between learning new skills and behaviors expected by society. It is a safe place where young children have the freedom to grow following natural (inborn) patterns. Froebel posited that play should be central in the kindergarten day.

Froebel's Kindergarten

Central to Froebel's kindergarten curricula was an emphasis on the child learning from nature. Young children were taught to observe patterns and the natural geometry and symmetry of nature. The creative use of play, supported by a series of “gifts” (educational toys) and “occupations” (material for practice in skill development) were central in the curriculum. The gifts were designed to teach: colors, shapes, numbers, extent, symmetry, lines, rings, points, and proportion. Occupations included teaching materials for helping children learn: solids, surfaces, lines (weaving, embroidery, etc.), points (stringing beads), and reconstruction. Froebel's kindergarten curriculum developed analytical thinking through teaching the child to observe patterns and geometric forms of individual aspects of nature but equally to evaluate them as “a whole both in its organic unity and in its component parts” (Froebel, 1948, p. 553). Toy blocks made of maple were used to construct and reconstruct the world of things. Froebel's goal was to have children learn through their own actions, and arrive at the concept that there is an inner coherence to all things (McCarter, 1999).

Today, the use of **standardized tests** in American kindergartens has been described as a violation of the original rubric for a “child’s garden” given to education by Froebel (Jeynes, 2006). Froebel’s curriculum was highly symbolic, providing children with materials (gifts) that helped youngsters cope with their world through play. The imposition of tests and **high-stakes assessments** into this idealistic children’s garden can metaphorically be compared to the serpent in Eden. The impact of Froebel’s “gifts” to children far exceeds that produced by standardized educational tests. See Case in Point 1.1 for an example.

Case in Point 1.1

Impact of Froebel’s Gift of Wooden Blocks

In 1876, a New England teacher and her 9-year-old son traveled to Philadelphia to visit the Centennial Exposition of the United States. That young mother, Anna Lloyd Wright, with her young son, Frank, paid their \$.50 admission fee and visited all 37 of the national exposition halls during their week in Philadelphia.¹ Froebel’s followers had a booth in the German Hall where his kindergarten materials and program were demonstrated alongside other German exhibitions including chemicals and firearms.

Anna and young Frank were totally taken by Froebel’s materials. She purchased a set of the smooth maple blocks for Frank. These were to have a profound influence throughout the life of her son, America’s great architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. Anna Wright went to the new toy store in Boston, Milton Bradley Inc., and told them about the wonderful educational toys from Germany. In 1943, an adult Frank Lloyd Wright wrote in his autobiography attesting to the influence of the Froebel blocks on his work (see Photo 1.1).

The smooth shapely maple blocks with which to build, the sense of which never afterward leaves the fingers: *form* becoming *feeling*. The box had a mast to set up on it, on which to hang the maple cubes and spheres and triangles, revolving them to discover subordinate forms. (F. Wright, 1943, p. 13)



Photo 1.1 The influence of the building blocks from Froebel’s kindergarten is apparent in Frank Lloyd Wright’s architecture (McCarter, 1999)

Child Study in Europe

For most of the 20th century in America, the approach to the study of children was empirical using a philosophically **positivistic and true scientific model**. This approach required **evaluation** of large numbers of children. Individuals were compared to the mass of data collected from large groups. Such comparisons were made to determine if the individual child was growing and developing appropriately. This approach is central to tenants of the scientific approach, and provides much that is useful. It provides means for doing diagnostic **assessments** and getting children the help they need.

An entirely different worldview regarding children developed concurrently in Europe. That approach was more **qualitative** and focused on the individual nature of each child. One aspect of this approach was the use of careful observation of how infants and young children interacted with their environments. Another involved asking children to explain phenomenon they had seen or experienced. The key to this approach involved asking questions and pursuing the cognition that led the child to his/her explanation (Piaget, 1955). Whether the answer was right or wrong was trivial, the focus was on why the child answered the way he/she did. The goal of this approach was to find the reasoning behind the answer. Piaget believed that the child brings a series of rudimentary cognitive systems into the world (genetic) that facilitates interactions with the world. This linkage was referred to as **genetic epistemology**.

Charles R. Darwin

While best known as a naturalist and biologist, Darwin was an early proponent of a qualitative approach to child study. In the 19th century, he published a detailed description of his own children. His descriptions of neonatal reflexology and infant behaviors are compelling and medically precise. In observing his wife preparing to nurse their baby, Charles Darwin noted, “a warm soft hand applied to the side of his face excited a wish to suck. This must be considered as a reflex or an instinctive action, for it is impossible to believe that experience and association with the touch of his mother’s breast could so soon have come into play” (Darwin, 1877, pp. 285–286).



Photo 1.2 Dr. Maria Montessori with children at a *Casa dei Bambini*

SOURCE: Getty Images. Used with permission.

Maria Montessori

Darwin was 73 years old when he died in 1882. That same year Maria Montessori was an academically **gifted** 12-year-old whose family had just moved from Ancona Province (in eastern Italy) to Rome where she could get a good education. Breaking with all tradition, she entered medical college, and at 24 became Italy’s first female physician. She earned the rank of full professor at the University of Rome, and the Italian government gave her the responsibility for a school populated by the poorest children in Rome (see Photo 1.2).

In her school, *Casa dei Bambini* (the Children’s House), Montessori introduced new concepts in early education that are commonplace today. Gone were fixed student desks, replaced with small chairs and movable tables constructed for the comfort of children. Teachers were given carefully prepared classrooms filled with manipulable materials that taught children

as they interacted with them. Children were granted much freedom to explore and learn from graduated towers of stacking blocks, counting beads, graduated measuring sticks, nesting boxes, and sandpaper letters (Montessori, 1949). All materials used in a Montessori classroom were carefully designed to teach a specific concept to the child who manipulated them.² The teacher's role was to demonstrate to the child how the materials were to be used, then to stand aside while the child did the work of learning.

Assessment and Montessori

The Montessori educational model is currently used throughout the world, and in as many as 5,000 preschool classrooms in the United States.³ The materials are designed to be self-correcting. That is, they only work when placed in the right order or form. Montessori assessments are based on this property. Did the child understand and use the “Golden Beads” correctly, or was the “10-Tower” built to full height? The assessments are frequently carried out using a checklist that can be individualized.

Sample Items on a Montessori Checklist

Linear Counting: Indicate all answers as **Y** for yes or **N** for not yet.

The child can:

- _____ Verbally count 10 beads while placing them in a cup
- _____ Make four or more combinations of beads that add up to 10
- _____ Demonstrate that the number 11 is a 10-bead column plus one more
- _____ Demonstrate all combinations of numbers from 11 to 20
- _____ Count by units of 10 using bead columns from 20 to 100
- _____ Demonstrate combinations of all numbers from 10 to 100 (e.g., 56, 73, etc.)

Anyone can confirm how little the grading that results from examinations corresponds to the final useful work of people in life.

—Jean Piaget

Jean Piaget

Piaget provided the theoretical basis for understanding the success of the teaching approach introduced by Montessori. Piaget's writings describing how children develop their understanding of the world and their conceptualizations about the processes of mathematics, science, language, space, and time have influenced curriculum writers throughout the world. His writing even provides a framework for understanding how children develop a conceptualization of morality (Piaget, 1932, 1952, 1955, 1960; Piaget & Inhelder, 1956).

Through tens of thousands of hours of patient questioning and observation, Piaget collected the qualitative data needed to build a model for understanding how thinking processes mature and develop over time with children. Case in Point 1.2 provides an example of Piaget's method of using questions to explore the cognition of young children.

Case in Point 1.2

Interview of a Child by Jean Piaget

The following is part of the translated transcript from Piaget (1960, p. 335).

Piaget: Terry (age 6 yrs., 6 mos.), How do people get wood?

Terry: They make it with things.

Piaget: With what things?

Terry: With wood.

Piaget: And where does that wood come from?

Terry: From the forest.

Piaget: How does the wood get into the forest?

Terry: God helps men to make the wood and then they plant it in the ground.

Piaget: Where do they get this wood which they plant?

Terry: First of all they make wood, then they plant it in the ground.

Piaget: Are there sometimes new trees?

Terry: Yes.

Piaget: How are they made?

Terry: You sow things.

Piaget: What do they sow?

Terry: Things like seeds you get at the shops.

Piaget: How do you get seeds?

Terry: You must have round things.

Piaget: Where do you find them?

Terry: In the fields, you move away the grass and then you take the seeds on the ground.

Piaget: How did they get there?

Terry: They were lost while being sowed.

Piaget: Where did they come from when they were sowed?

Terry: The shopkeeper. He makes them from other seeds.

Piaget: What did the shopkeeper do to get the first seeds?

Terry: They were sent to him from the factory.

Piaget never created **norm groups** or published a standardized test, yet his model for understanding the child's intellect is central to how educators interpret children's cognitive processing.⁴



American Child Study Through Testing

Americans are a pragmatic folk. We always stand ready and able to take ideas and use them in bigger and better ways. In Europe at the start of the 20th century, the scientific method was applied to educational and psychological **measurement** for the first time. This occurred at about the same time the scientific study of children began in the United States. The American leaders of this field, G. Stanley Hall and James M. Cattell, were greatly influenced by the application of the scientific method in the social sciences, first developed in the 19th century in Germany. This American movement for the scientific study of children grew rapidly through the support of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation, which provided initial funding for academic departments and university clinics from coast to coast.⁵

A central tenant of the American **child study movement** of that era was the prime role played by human genetics in determining all individual characteristics and many human behaviors. This faith in the primacy of genetics included every aspect of the infant and growing child, including cognitive abilities. One reason for this is the impact the writings of Charles Darwin had on his younger cousin, Francis Galton. Sir Francis was a physician by training and wealthy through inheritance. This made it possible for him to pursue scholarship on his own terms. The focus of most of his life's work was human heredity. He was among the first to do systematic research into the nature of individual differences. While all aspects of the human were fair game for his studies, the intellect became the focus of much of his study and writings.

G. Stanley Hall

An American scholar, G. Stanley Hall, believed that each human has a vestige of past eras in the elaboration of our human species, which is expressed in the pattern of growth and personality development seen among children.⁶ While the child's genetics was seen as providing a blueprint for the growth and development that would occur, Hall also believed that the human brain was "handmade." That is, he agreed with many European authors who saw experience as central to all cognitive development (Hall, 1904).

Lewis M. Terman

One student of G. Stanley Hall was Lewis M. Terman, who became the leading authority on testing in the country. He created the first practical test of mental ability, the Stanford-Binet Scale of Intelligence (Terman, 1916), and the first standardized **achievement test** battery, the Stanford Achievement Test first published in 1923 (R. Wright, 2008). Contemporary versions of both tests are still published today. One of Terman's graduate students, Arthur S. Otis, was the father of modern group-administered tests of intelligence. One bearing his name is still used in schools today.⁷

Terman also was the first psychologist to systematically identify and study the nature of academically gifted children (see Case in Point 1.3). He held a strong belief in the importance of having those who were most capable of becoming society's leaders be provided with an enriched education, a concept known as **meritocracy**.

Case in Point 1.3

Terman's Monumental Study of Gifted Children

The first large-scale study of gifted children was initiated by Lewis M. Terman at Stanford University in 1921 with a longitudinal study of over 1,500 California children. Each child had a measured IQ score of 140 or more (99th **percentile**). This longitudinal study lasted into the 21st century, providing data on the lives of white, middle-class children as they grew and matured, and aged.⁸

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Terman's sample of children was 11 years old when his landmark study began. As a group, they were well adjusted, middle class, happy, and otherwise quite normal. Public schools of San Francisco and Los Angeles provided the sample in 1921. Children were all nominated by their teachers and were tested by one of Terman's evaluators (graduate students). The gifted sample included only two children who were African American, six Japanese American, and none who were of Hispanic or Native American origin (Leslie, 2000; Shurkin, 1992).

Most children in the sample were born in 1910 and lived through two world wars, the cold war, and many lived to see the liberation of Europe from communism. For the most part, they lived longer and had healthier lives than did their less gifted peers. As a group, they were successful in their chosen careers. About 46% of the male sample became professionals with graduate-level degrees, and another 41% were managers and business executives. Girls in the sample later became leaders in a number of fields including education (Shurkin, 1992). It is important to note that while these bright children grew to become successful adults, none of them produced a work of great genius. The implication is that the creative genius of Newton, Mozart, or Einstein involves something beyond the measurement of cognition on an IQ test.

Today, researchers at the University of California, Riverside, are still collecting data from the sample to study the processes of successful aging and eventual causes of death for this group of bright individuals.

Arnold Gesell

The second highly influential student of G. Stanley Hall was Arnold Gesell (see Photo 1.3). After earning his graduate degree from Clark University in 1906, Gesell spent a short time in Los Angeles where he taught at the State Normal School.⁹ In 1911, he moved back across the country to Yale University where he established a laboratory for the study of child development. The data he gathered at the Yale Clinic of Child Development provided the yardstick used by most pediatricians and many worried parents to chart dimensions of child development.

Gesell and his colleagues at Yale provided a sequence of milestones marking the growth of normal children over a range of dimensions. Gesell's sample was populated by children of middle and upper middle class families. Many of the children were offspring of Yale University's students and faculty. Virtually all of the children in the Yale sample were healthy, middle class,



Photo 1.3 Professor Arnold Gesell at the Yale University Clinic

Anglo-white infants and youngsters. Gesell had the goal of finding and charting the ideal order and sequence that occurs in child development. These types of data were sought in order to chart the genetic plan for the progressive growth (sequential unfolding or flowering) of the human child. In this regard, Gesell never strayed far from what he was taught by G. Stanley Hall. For that reason, Gesell decided to concentrate on ideal examples of infants and children. All infants and children in his sample had to be well cared for, healthy, and from “good” homes.

His work was not without its critics. Lev Vygotsky (1998/1934), a leading child psychologist and psycholinguist of the Soviet Union, once described Gesell’s approach as “delusional.” He argued that the concept of an evolutionary basis for the growth and development of children is too stilted. He presented a model for a **dialectic** understanding of the processes, rather than a simple measurement-based model.¹⁰ His argument was that development of children requires much more than a good set of genetic plans and time.¹¹ His position involved the full nature of the child across all aspects of the culture in which the youngster grows (Vygotsky, 1929).



Antecedents of Contemporary Problems in Measurement

Today, there are several pressing problems to be considered whenever young children are evaluated using a formal testing procedure. These problems are not new, and have been part of the American fabric since the colonial era. One of these issues is that of measuring children for whom English is not the primary language. The second concern is the assessment of children who have been identified as needing special educational assistance.

English Language Learners

From the colonial days, there has been a strong **nativist** movement in this country that has emphasized the need for all citizens to be English speakers (Franklin, 1751). A charge given to public schools was to be a melting pot in which many cultures and languages are balkanized and true Americans are created.

Language differences have also facilitated **cultural prejudice**. One basis for selecting certain schools to be studied by Lewis Terman in his research of gifted children was that there had to be few, if any, Mexican children enrolled (Shurkin, 1992). Today, we require that high-stakes tests published in English be taken by children who have not reached a level of English language proficiency required to even read the directions (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of the issues related to evaluating Hispanic children).

The problem many children have reflects the way families can live in communities where they never need to speak English (see Chapter 12 for a discussion of engaging Hispanic parents) (see Case in Point 1.4). Several German-speaking communities in Pennsylvania have avoided becoming bilingual in English for over 200 years. Today, 67% of the population of Miami, Florida, is not fluent in English (Booth, 1998). English is the preferred language in only 60% of the homes in New York City. The New York and Miami examples are typical of many large cities. Nationally, the 2000 U.S. Census reported that 82% of American households use English as the primary language. Spanish is the primary language in 11% of all homes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). The remaining 7% is made up of 47 other languages.

Case in Point 1.4

Roadblocks to Learning English

When families immigrate to the United States, they tend to live in communities of other people with similar life stories. For that reason, a child who is new to the country is frequently surrounded by children and adults who speak the child's first language. The community is likely to provide churches, stores, and medical practitioners who are also speakers of the child's first language. Television stations and radio channels also provide entertainment in the child's first language. This pattern means that the child may never experience immersion in an English language environment until he or she is in school. When the school day is over, the child returns to the family and the non-English-speaking community. This linguistic isolation continues for the 10-week summer break and can erase most of the English a child has learned at school.

The assessment of young children who are **English language learners (ELL)** can result in inappropriate placement recommendations (Lopez & Flores, 2005; Spinelli, 2008). This occurs because as children struggle to learn English they will lose aspects of their native language proficiency. At some point in time, their skills in both languages will be relatively weak. At this low point, children will not be functioning well in either language. Barry McLaughlin and his colleagues at George Washington University (1995) describe this period as a time of **semilingualism**. With young children, there will be shifts back and forth between the languages that accompany this stage of semilingualism (see Case in Point 1.5). Early childhood educators should be sensitive to this **code-switching** and be extra sensitive to the complexity of the developmental process taking place.

Case in Point 1.5

Multiple Language Learning

During a visit with a Dutch-speaking tennis star and his French-speaking wife, I was introduced to their preschool daughter Natalie. The family lived most of the year in the United States and several months in Europe. The girl was attempting to make linguistic sense of a world of three languages. She picked the words and grammar that best fitted her goal in speaking. One example was when she asked her mother, "*Mama, me donnent davantage ice tea, tevreden,*" (Mama, give me more ice tea please). At another time she asked me if I had children her age as, "*Avez-vous kinder in mon âge?*"

There is no appropriate way to use a standard **curriculum probe** to assess the prereading skill level of a child with this type of language development in progress. Any measure of her reading skills would need to be carefully crafted to her special circumstance.

Non-Asian children for whom English is not the first language tend to have lower assessment scores in reading than native speakers of English.¹² Testing rules under federal guidelines provide for immigrant children who are **limited English proficient (LEP)** to have a one-year waiver from being tested for reading skills in the English language; but no waiver is given with the required science and math tests (see Chapter 2).

Testing language minority children using standardized measures in English will not yield valid scores. Yet, reading and language skills of children are central factors measured by all high-stakes tests. At this point, there is no clear model as to how to evaluate the learning of language minority children, nor is there a clear set of goals for such evaluations (Solano-Flores, 2008). Yet, we go ahead as if there were no differences in how and what language minority children learn in our classrooms as compared with their English-speaking peers.

An appropriate assessment of children learning English requires a multifaceted approach (McLaughlin, Blanchard, & Osanai, 1995). The considerations include the cultural context in which the child is being raised. This issue is one requiring the assessor to understand the verbal and nonverbal cues that the child uses. An assessment of a prekindergarten ELL child needs to involve parents and English-speaking family members who can assist the assessor in understanding the child's context for language learning. The best assessments for young ELL children are based on authentic oral language tasks. Assessments should be based on the child's demonstration of what he/she can actually do (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of these measures). The best approach for tracking the progress and language development of young ELL children is through the use of portfolio assessments (McLaughlin, et al., 1995).

Children With Disabilities

Normally, it is a time of celebration when a baby is born into a family. The birth of a seriously disabled child, however, can be overwhelming for unprepared parents. It can become a time of heartache and feelings of guilt. For that reason, it is not unusual for parents to experience the emotion of grief over what is perceived to be a loss of the child's future (see Chapter 11).

Other children with milder forms of disabilities may not be identified until the youngsters enter a child care program or preschool. All too often, children who are not identified for their first few years are members of lower socioeconomic groups, including children of parents who are learning the English language (see Chapter 2).

Before 1960, public school was rarely an option for children with disabilities (Osgood, 2005). Arnold Gesell never included **children with disabilities** in the normative data used to assess child development (Gesell, 1940). Schools were under no obligation to provide an appropriate education for children with disabilities until 1973. That year saw passage of the reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act. Title V, **Section 504** of that act specifies what schools must do to meet educational requirements of children with special needs. The right to a thorough and efficient education was spelled out in 1975 with passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142). These two federal acts brought testing and assessment mandates with them (see Chapter 11 for a detailed discussion of early childhood **special education**). A series of amendments to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1986, extending special education programs to all children with disabilities from birth through high school graduation or age 21 (P.L. 99-457). The federal government could not require states to start schools for children below kindergarten age, but did require states to address educational needs of young children to qualify for federal funds (Bowe, 2004). The URL for the Division for Early Childhood for exceptional children is <http://www.dec-sped.org>.

In Summary

The framework for the modern world of education and assessment practice in the United States was well established by the dawn of the 20th century. This development occurred through the growth of the social sciences

in the United States and Great Britain. Both countries chose to follow a scientific approach to the management of education and to the assessment of children. A continental approach to understanding and assessing children's learning has focused on how the child interacts with the environment. It is an approach that is more qualitative and less empirical.



Industrialization and the Rise of American Public Schools

After the Civil War, one state after another followed the lead of Massachusetts, and passed enabling legislation for local communities to tax real estate in order to build schools and organize school districts (S. Braun & Edwards, 1972, p. 90). States created normal schools and churned out a stream of young female teachers who filled the new schools. Before 1830, almost all teachers were male; however, by 1880 almost all primary teachers were female.

From 1860 to 1900, preschools were not seen as being part of the organization of school systems. At the close of the 19th century, cities experienced a flood of families who came to the United States from Ireland, Russia, Poland, and Germany. Most ended up in the poorest neighborhoods of the inner cities. With adults and older children of families employed all day trying to make a living, the care of young children was a major concern. One answer to this need came from the **settlement house** movement. These social welfare outreach centers were established to strengthen neighborhoods and improve the lives of individuals in the community. They were usually secular, supported by private philanthropy, and provided a range of social and educational services including day care for preschool children. Goals of these programs were family focused and developmental. No one bothered to discuss evaluations of programs or children. That lack of oversight was an advantage of having private support provided by wealthy benefactors. By 1900, there were over 100 settlement houses in inner cities and over 400 by 1918 (Blank, 1998). Over 200 of these agencies are still serving their communities today (see Case in Point 1.6).

Case in Point 1.6

Role of Settlement Houses

Most settlement houses have kept their traditional names and continue their work today. A good example is the Corona-Norco Settlement House in Corona, California. This settlement house is an agency that offers a range of programs to assist the local community including the daily operation of a food pantry and providing food baskets to the indigent on holidays and wrapped holiday presents for children. It provides rent assistance, utility assistance, emergency shelter, and provides clothing and school supplies for poor children, permitting them to attend public school.

In 2010, New York City had 37 settlement houses serving over 200,000 people a year. One of these settlement houses is the Jacob Riis Neighborhood Settlement House in western Queens. It provides direct services to 450 people a day.



American Early Childhood Education During the 20th Century

Roosevelt's WPA

The crash of the stock markets in October of 1929 was followed over the next few years by a great economic depression. The Depression resulted in the failure of banks, the closing of industrial plants, and the downsizing of governmental agencies. By 1934, the unemployment rate was 25%. In 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected the 32nd president of the United States. His Democratic Party, given a majority in both houses of Congress, was able to push recovery programs through to law. The name applied to these initiatives was the “**New Deal**.” One of the initiatives of the New Deal was the **Works Progress Administration (WPA)**. In an effort to employ laid off schoolteachers, the WPA established nursery schools throughout the country employing thousands of teachers (S. Braun & Edwards, 1972) (see Photo 1.4 for a view of one of these WPA nurseries).



Photo 1.4 A WPA nursery in Scottsdale, Georgia, in 1936. Several of the children in this photograph may not have had shoes to wear

These “emergency nursery schools” had a curriculum focused on the social–emotional development of children. Two other elements in the curriculum included the health and physical growth of children. The missing component of the curriculum was the cognitive domain. The primary concern at that time was the rapid establishment of nurseries; and little thought was put into developing an evaluation model for emergency nurseries.

The Nursery School Goes to War

In 1942, the Second World War was raging and Congress updated the Lanham Act of 1940 to include funding for day care programs in support of war industries. These nursery schools provided child care needed to permit women to be employed in war industries. There was little thought given to evaluation and **accountability** (Rose, 2003). They existed for a very well understood reason, were assumed to be a temporary wartime measure, and were generally left alone.

After the war, federally funded nursery programs were closed and women returned to their homes, leaving factories that had employed them to the men of their families. The job of early education for young children was once again “mother’s job.” Settlement houses, university laboratory schools, and a few private and church-based nurseries remained the primary source of care for children outside of the home for the next 20 years.¹³

War on Poverty and Head Start

During his state of the union address on January 12, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced a major change in the direction of federal policy with regard to education. This new direction involved the development

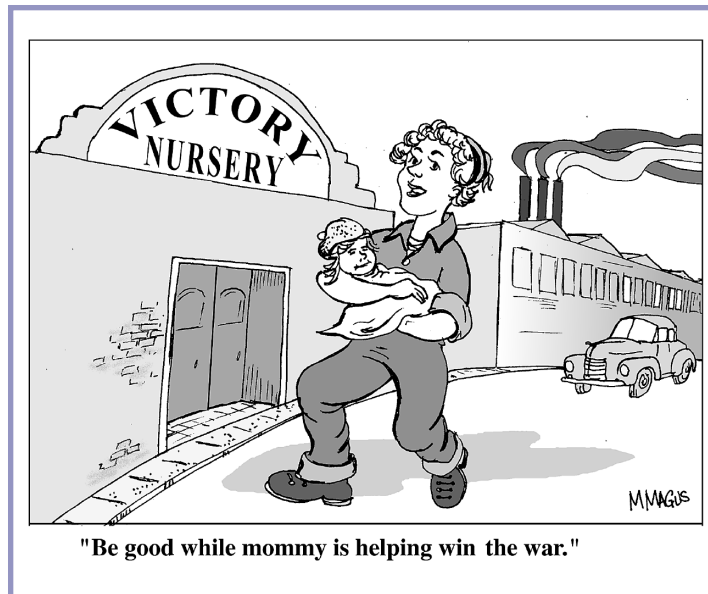


Figure 1.1

Head Start Program

Head Start started as a part-time, eight-week-long summer program designed to sharpen academic skills and improve the socialization and emotional growth of children from impoverished homes before they began public school. It has grown into a full-day program covering two and a half years.

One difference between the WPA nurseries of the 1930s and the Head Start program is the organized research and accountability studies that are part of the latter (McGroder, 1990). The Westinghouse Learning Corporation wrote the first report of Head Start outcomes in 1969 (Zigler & Muenchow, 1994).

That report was not positive, showing that academic and social gains made in Head Start by impoverished preschoolers faded out by third grade.¹⁴ Numerous reports on the impact of Head Start since the original Westinghouse Report have been much more positive. Samuel J. Meisels of the Erikson Institute has argued that there is always a potential for what he describes as the “**fadeout effect.**” This occurs when children transition from enriching prekindergarten education programs where they are prepared for the academic experience of schools, and enter the enervating environment of inferior elementary schools (Meisels, 2007).

Governmental Initiatives

America is the only western democracy that does not provide universal preschool education for all children (Kamerman, 2005; Stipek, 2005). The first time universal preschool was proposed in the country was in the form of the John Brademas’s Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971. That bill cleared both houses of Congress and was vetoed on ideological grounds by President Richard M. Nixon. His veto message noted that public preschools should not raise the specter of “Sovietization” (Beatty, 2004; Stein, 1972).

of a partnership between the federal government, states, and local school systems. President Johnson called for, and Congress passed, a series of laws designed to address the root causes of poverty in America. This legislative package was designed to create a “**Great Society,**” and the “**War on Poverty**” was one step in that direction (Johnson, 1966). Part of that War on Poverty involved the establishment of **Head Start.**

A national educational assessment ordered by Congress and published by a social scientist James Coleman in 1966 demonstrated how poor and minority children do not have the same educational opportunity or achievement that middle class children have. Coleman’s report provided justification for a federally funded early childhood educational program (Viadero, 2006).

Case in Point 1.7

Public Demand for Universal Preschool Programs

In 2002, Florida saw its voters pass by referendum a requirement for universal preschool education. This occurred after the state's conservative legislature refused to provide universal preschool education. Florida's voter-mandated program began in 2004–2005. The program the state provided was a voluntary half-day preschool program that worked on a very limited budget.¹⁵ These limitations notwithstanding, state tests of first-term kindergarten students in 2006 found that the new kindergarten class had significantly better academic preparation for school than did kindergarten classes prior to the preschool law. It is interesting to speculate what the outcome would be if Florida provided a fully funded, full-time program for all 4-year-old children.

Sometimes the voters of a state take matters in their own hands and force reluctant political leaders to provide preschool education programs. See Case in Point 1.7 for an example.

The Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, has recently argued against tax-supported, large-scale preschool programs.¹⁶ Two issues for the Heritage Foundation and other conservative organizations (including the Manhattan Institute) are cost-effectiveness, and big government meddling in a field (early childhood education) dominated by private enterprise (Goldsmith & Meyer, 2006; Olsen & Snell, 2006).

Impact of Early Childhood Education

Recently these concerns of conservative policy experts have been addressed, and the lasting value of preschool education has been established (Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Consortium, 2008; Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005). In an **experimental study** including a **control group**, Lawrence Schweinhart and his colleagues at the Perry Preschool in Ypsilanti, Michigan, followed a group of children who had a two-year preschool experience involving the **HighScope approach**.¹⁷ The experimental sample was compared to a true control group that did not attend preschool. Both groups (experimental and control) were children from urban African American families living in poverty. After 40 years, members of the experimental group were significantly more likely to have graduated from high school, and be married homeowners. They had significantly less drug addiction and far fewer run-ins with the court system.

The overall impact of high-quality preschool programs also has a significant positive impact on the American economy (Hurst, 2004). For every dollar invested in preschool education, the return is about \$13.00 (Jacobson, 2004). Approximately two thirds of this economic advantage is brought about by higher graduation rates for inner-city children and lower crime rates. The importance of child care programs and preschools is growing along with the population (Holzman, 2005). In 2007, there were more children born in America (4.32 million) than ever before (National Center for Health Statistics, 2008).

During his presidential campaign, Barack Obama pledged that federal efforts to support early education programs would be greatly increased (Dillon, 2008a). After eight years of no growth, the Early Head Start Program was given additional funding with a goal of seeing it quadruple in size. The Obama administration established a federal Early Learning Council to coordinate federal, state, and local policies for early education.

The National Governor's Association has also gone on record in support of universal preschools. Their recommendation is that each state establish learning goals and standards, and develop valid and reliable

measures for publically funded preschools (National Governors Association, 2005). Rand Corporation concluded that only a handful of states lacked a subsidized preschool initiative.¹⁸ Some were only open to children of the poor, and others were open to children with disabilities (Christina & Nicholson-Goodman, 2005). In 2006, Illinois made preschool education free to all families, income level notwithstanding (Grossman, 2006). New Jersey followed suit in 2007 with a universal free preschool program.

Private Preschool Admission Assessments for 3-Year-Olds

While various states are developing universal preschool programs, private preschool education is also flourishing. In large urban centers like New York City, there are preschools that have a “buzz” about them. Whatever the source of the cachet may be, the result has been an increased amount of pressure by upper middle class parents to gain admission for their children into these schools. In 2006, an increase in the population of toddlers had resulted in the most competitive year ever for admission into the top-ranked urban preschools (Saulny, 2006). Additionally, their popularity has made it possible for some preschools to increase their costs to a level not too different from the cost of attending an undergraduate college (Moyer, 2007). Tony preschools in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Boston, and New York now charge parents over \$30,000 per year for tuition for their 3- and 4-year-old children. In these selective and expensive preschools, there are many more applicants than there are admission slots for children.

A consortium of preschools in New York City cooperates in a joint effort to test and screen 3-year-old children whose parents wish to have them attend one of the prestigious independent preschools. This admission testing in New York is repeated in many schools and communities throughout the United States. Since 1966, the Educational Records Bureau (ERB) has served as the testing agency for admission into the 138 preschools (lower schools) of the Independent Schools Admission Association of Greater New York. Naturally, parents have a vested interest in seeing their children admitted into the best possible school. These parents often hire tutors for their 3- and 4-year-old children (Borja, 2005; R. Gardner, 2005) (see Case in Point 1.8).

Case in Point 1.8

Entrepreneurial Opportunities in Early Education

The press for academic and cognitive achievement in early childhood can be seen in a decision by the Sylvan Learning System to tool up and provide 1,200 locations nationwide where parents can take 3- and 4-year-old children for tutoring (Paul, 2007). Centers owned by Sylvan developed a preschool reading curriculum based on the report of the National Reading Panel. That curriculum is a **phonics**-based approach to developing prereading skills. Those centers also employ flash cards, worksheets, and workbooks to reinforce learning. The tutorial program makes heavy use of online instruction at Sylvan learning centers with the child's tutor present to provide encouragement and answer questions.

Not to be outdone, Kaplan, Inc. reports having enrolled 16,000 preschool children in structured tutoring classes in 2005 (Kronholz, 2005). Another entrepreneur, Kumon North America, offers anyone the opportunity of owning and operating a tutoring center through a franchise operation. This Japanese-based company has a long history of offering tutorial schools in Japan and has recently gone worldwide with variations of the Japanese *juku* (cram school) for young children.

Parents in New York can find listings for ERB coaching services in phone directories and online. ERB coaches typically provide hour-long tutoring sessions, three or more days per week, for several months prior to the big test day. The cost of a private tutor in the child's home runs between \$75.00 and \$150.00 per session. Another strategy that has become common for these parents involves taking children to the office of one or more licensed psychologists for a cognitive assessment. It is usual in such circumstances to arrange to have a parent watch the child respond to the type of questions and tasks that the ERB employs to assess young children applicants.¹⁹

Summary

Modern concepts of early childhood education were born in the writings and educational practices first developed in Germany during the early years of the 18th century. The push to make preschool education more academic and to use high-stakes assessments with young children is a recent development that is not universally admired.

The culture of educational testing and **developmental assessments** was originally built on an assumption of a genetic basis for individual differences among children. The unabashed goal for educational leaders including Lewis Terman was the establishment of an American meritocracy. One result from that golden age of testing was the justification of cultural prejudice.

Early education programs started in settlement houses at the start of the 20th century. The Depression and war years saw great expansion of publicly supported nursery education. The 1960s and 1970s brought new social policies and federal laws designed to provide children with disabilities a level playing field, and the ability to partake in a school's educational offerings. Beginning at birth, public agencies must work to identify children who may have special needs and provide them and their families with services and support.

Children who are English language learners (ELL) represent another class of preschoolers that requires extra services. One major concern for early childhood teachers is finding appropriate techniques for assessing bilingual and other young ELL children. The assessment of English language learners is also a special concern for people administering large-scale tests with young children.

Discussion Questions

1. How is the kindergarten concept developed in the 19th century being changed by American educators today?
2. The American approach to assessing children is highly empirical and involves comparing individuals to group outcomes. Many European educators encouraged a child-centered and qualitative approach. Which is a better model for preschool children in the United States today? Explain your position.
3. What factors led President Roosevelt to involve the federal government in preschool education programs?
4. Why did federally sponsored WPA nursery schools not include a systematic evaluation of the programs?
5. President Nixon rejected an effort to establish universal child care (John Brademas's Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971). From your knowledge of the history of that era, what are some reasons that would lead two successive American presidents (Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon) in such different directions?

Related Readings

- Bowe, F. G. (2004). *Birth to eight: Early childhood special education* (3rd ed.). Clifton Park, NY: Delmar-Thomson Learning.
- Fischer, C. S., Hour, M., Jankowski, M. S., Lucas, S. R., Swidler, A., & Voss, K. (1996). *Inequality by design: Cracking the bell curve myth*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gesell, A. (1943). *The infant and child in the culture of today: The guidance of development in home and nursery school*. New York: Harper Brothers.

Notes

1. Frank was named Frank Lincoln Wright, but later changed his name to Frank Lloyd Wright to honor his mother.
2. The Montessori curriculum has recently been used with good success in assisted living centers to reduce cognitive decline among senior citizens (Leland, 2008).
3. At the turn of the 20th century, most of the leading experts on childhood (including the psychoanalysts Anna Freud, Eric H. Erikson, and Alfred Adler) spent time in Rome studying with Maria Montessori. After spending time in Rome with Maria Montessori, the Genevan theorist Jean Piaget established *La Maison des Petits* (the Children's House) in Switzerland. This became the center for his early research into the cognition of children.
4. In 1920–1921, a young Piaget spent a year working with Theodore Simon in Paris to translate and standardize the English intelligence tests created by Sir Cyril Burt of the University of London. After that year, he never revisited the idea of a group measure of intelligence.
5. The foundation was created by John D. Rockefeller in memory of his wife Laura in 1918 following her death. The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Foundation was focused on educational, race relations, health, and child welfare matters. It was folded into the Rockefeller Foundation in 1929 when the Rockefeller foundations were merged. At one point in his life, John Rockefeller was the wealthiest man in the history of the world with an estimated worth of \$320 billion (inflation adjusted). In addition to the many child study clinics and laboratories, he was responsible for starting and endowing Spelman College, Rockefeller University, and the University of Chicago.
6. This was named the recapitalization theory, and it was simply expressed as “ontology recapitulates philology.” In other words, the growth of children (ontology) goes through stages similar to the stages in the genetic evolution (philology) that led to *Homo sapiens*.
7. The Otis-Lennon School Ability Test, 8th ed. (OLSAT-8). Information about this assessment is available at <https://harcourtassessment.com/haiweb/cultures/en-us/productdetail.htm?pid=OLSAT>.
8. There is no doubt that Lewis Terman was a man of his times and a racist. In the manual for his first test of mental ability, he stated, “Their [i.e., children of minorities] dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they came. The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans, and Negroes suggests quite forcibly that the whole question of racial differences in mental traits will have to be taken up anew by experimental methods.” He went on to predict that there would be enormous differences by race in measured levels of general intelligence (Terman, 1916, p. 91).
9. Today we know that normal school as the University of California, Los Angeles.
10. Vygotsky saw child development as a continuous process, internally regulated and powered by the formation of mental structures that were not previously present. To read a translation of the works of Vygotsky, see <http://www.marxists.org/archive/vygotsky/works/1934/problem-age.htm>.
11. As a psychologist working in the Soviet Union, Vygotsky had to follow the official orthodoxy espoused by the other scientists of the USSR. The Russian Academy of Science had adopted an anti-genetic explanation for evolution and the diversity of life. This was espoused by the biologist Trofim Denisovich Lysenko and published in *Biulleten' VASKhNIL*. This position in opposition to Mendelian genetics was endorsed by Joseph Stalin, the dictator of that era. As such it was assumed to be fact by all of Soviet science (Roll-Hansen, 2008).

12. Not all Asian Americans share the same heritage and culture. Therefore, it is inappropriate to make generalizations about the academic ability of Asian American children. On average, children whose families immigrated from Korea, China, and many Southeast Asian countries have the highest scores on standardized tests compared to all other groups of American children (Xie & Goyette, 1998). The test scores of Asian American children tend to be about equal or slightly lower than the scores of Anglo-white children.
13. This can be seen in the size of the membership in the National Association of Nursery Educators (NANE), which was less than 5,000 in 1950. By 2000, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (née, NANE) had a membership of over 100,000 (NAEYC, 2001). During these slow years (1945 to 1965) assessment and program evaluation were rarely issues as preschools struggled to survive.
14. The Westinghouse Report was an example of badly flawed research (Morris, 2006, p. 204). Another outcome of this report was a major cut in Head Start funding by the Nixon administration.
15. Research has shown that a full-day program is far superior for teaching early academic skills to young children (Lee, Burkam, Ready, Honigman, & Meisels, 2006).
16. Before World War II, the term day care was universally employed to describe the setting where children were cared for away from their families. More recently, the term child care has supplanted that term. The point can be made that the care of children can occur at any time of day or night. In a similar way, the term nursery school, common prior to World War II, is now described as preschool.
17. The HighScope approach requires that only fully certified teachers with a bachelor or master's degree be employed to teach, and that preschools provide five days of education in small classes a week. Preschools follow an academic and social skills curriculum. Only about 20% of the Head Start centers follow this approach to preschool education. More about the HighScope curriculum can be seen at <http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentID=223>.
18. States without programs for early education in 2008 included Alaska, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming.
19. For more information on preschool admissions in New York City, see <https://www.ecaatest.org/ERBRegistration/ParentPortal/PDF/ERB-In-School-Brochure-2008.pdf> or <http://www.isaagny.org>.

