The role of public schools in the education of 4-year-olds

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The role of public schools in the education of 4-year-olds

Abstract
A major educational issue in recent years is the role of public schools in the education of 4-year-olds (Day, 1988). This issue impacts all areas of society. It is a complex and emotional issue for teachers of young children, for parents, administrators, and officials in local, state, and federal governments.

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THE ROLE OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN THE EDUCATION
OF 4-YEAR-OLDS

A Research Paper
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education

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University of Northern Iowa
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for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>THE PROBLEM</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>History of Early Childhood Programs in the United States</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Societal Factors</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compatibility with the Public School Setting</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compulsory Attendance</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>SUMMARY AND SYNTHESIS</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implications for Practice and for Future Research</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

A major educational issue in recent years is the role of public schools in the education of 4-year-olds (Day, 1988). This issue impacts all areas of society. It is a complex and emotional issue for teachers of young children, for parents, administrators, and officials in local, state, and federal governments.

Including 4-year-olds in the public schools has been viewed by some as a new and revolutionary idea. But, the historical evidence for including 4-year-olds in the public schools is lengthy. As early as 1817, Boston funded education for children who were ages 4 to six. This education was not mandatory, but was directed toward the poor immigrant children. Toward the middle of the 19th century, the kindergartens that were established included multiage grouping. These schools served children aged 4, 5, and 6, and sometimes children as young as 2 and 3 (Bloch, Seward, & Seidlinger, 1989). Education was provided for children younger than 6 until the early 1950s. During the 1950s, 4-year-olds were excluded from the public schools due to the large number of children resulting from the postwar baby boom. Space and teachers were
needed for the great number of children who were 5 years old and older.

It was the work of Hunt and Bloom in the 1960s that provided the impetus for the education of young children. Their work laid the cornerstone for the federal funding of the Head Start programs which began in 1965 (Leeper, Witherspoon, & Day, 1984). Hunt released findings showing that intelligence was not fixed, but fluid. His research provided evidence that intelligence measures of children reared in deprived environments could be positively impacted if the environment was enriched (Hunt, 1960). Bloom, in his work, Stability and Change in Human Characteristics, (1964), reported that 50% of intelligence at age 17 was gained between conception and age 4. This research revealed the need to help "at-risk" children prior to their entrance into the public school system.

Over the past two decades, the issue of including 4-year-olds in the public school has become a major educational issue. Reasons include the changing family, the need for quality child care, and the research-based results of premier early childhood programs such as Head Start and the Perry Preschool Project. Research has shown beneficial effects for at-risk children attending preschool. Program results of the Perry Preschool Project showed that at age 19
there were still benefits to those who had participated in a preschool experience (Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein, & Weikart, 1984).

The "traditional family," with the father as the wage earner and the mother as the homemaker, has virtually disappeared. Single-parent families, frequently headed by women, are on the increase and as more women have entered the workplace the roles of men and women have been redefined. Because more women than ever before working outside the home, there is a great need for quality child care. Further, the mobility of Americans has affected the family. Frequent moves impact families as they become removed from the physical presence of other family members (Nelsen, 1987). In the past, the extended family provided many kinds of support to younger families with children (Gestwicki, 1988).

Another issue related to public school programs for 4-year-olds deals with the compatibility of the field of early childhood education with the public school setting. Programs outside the public schools, such as private preschools and day care programs, have been considered the stepchild of the organized educational system (Caldwell, 1986). Traditionally, preschool teachers have been held in low esteem by the educational community at large. Typically, preschool
teachers serving programs outside the public school setting have had little communication with the educational mainstream (Caldwell, 1986; Modigliani, 1986). Financial pressures that already affect the public schools have been another concern.

A third issue is one raised by Elkind, Zigler, and others, who have questioned mandatory or compulsory programs for 4-year-olds in the public schools (Elkind, 1988; Zigler, 1986). In recent years, public schools have not generally used developmentally appropriate practices to meet the individual needs of children. Kindergarten curriculum has become more like first-grade curriculum in many schools. The fear that kindergarten curriculum could be passed down to 4-year-old classes is well-founded. Further, in 1987, Moore voiced concern about compulsory programs for African-American 4-year-olds. African-American males begin to fail by third grade in the public schools and have a high dropout rate. Therefore, it is appropriate to ask, "Why start failure yet another year earlier?"

Sensitivity to the needs of the child, the family, and the community are necessary if programs for 4-year-olds are implemented in the public schools. Four-year-old programs in the public schools can be positive if all work together.
Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this paper is to synthesize and analyze the literature related to the public school's role in the education of 4-year-olds in the United States. Specifically, the study addresses the following questions:

1. Can the history of early childhood programs in America inform and impact programs for 4-year-olds?
2. Are there societal factors today that call for the expansion of early childhood programs?
3. Is the field of early childhood education compatible with the public school setting?
4. If 4-year-old programs become universal, should attendance be compulsory?

Significance of the Study

A teacher can use instructional skills to channel energy, to encourage curiosity and creativity, and to develop problem-solving and social skills in each child. Support and respect from parents, educators, and administrators can enhance the teacher's ability to promote these dispositions in children. This respect and support includes appropriate class size, adequate salary, professional status, and encouragement. If a positive disposition toward learning is created, as Katz (1988) advocated, it must be activated from the moment the child arrives at school. Programs should
help the 4-year-old learn with both "richness and vigor" (Hymes, 1987, p.52).

The stated purpose of this paper is to provide a review of the literature relating to the public school's role in the education of 4-year-olds. This paper may be useful for persons who are presently investigating this issue, as well as those who might consider it in the future. The historical development of early childhood education in America is reviewed. The changing family and the need for quality child care is traced. The paper addresses the compatibility of the field of early childhood education and the public school setting. Finally, the paper addresses the issue of compulsory attendance if programs became universally available. Having knowledge of these issues, parents, communities, and governmental agencies could provide the resources to implement developmentally appropriate programs which can meet the real needs of 4-year olds. These 4-year-olds will one day be adults. They will be our leaders. Children deserve the best educators have to offer.

Definition of Terms

Early Childhood Education

The branch of education that serves birth through age 8 (Bredekamp, 1986).
Preschool

Any one of a number of early childhood settings where a child has a variety of play and learning experiences with other children in a caring and friendly environment. The term usually refers to a 2 1/2-hour program, but not more than 1/2 day, which occurs several times a week, but usually not daily. Preschool programs most often are for 3-, 4- and/or 5-year-olds, although 2-year-olds are occasionally included. The terms nursery school and preschool can be used interchangeably. These programs most often follow the public school year calendar (Brenner, 1990).

Day Care

An early childhood setting which could include infants through age 5 involving longer hours. These programs include both care and education. Day care operates 12 months a year and children can be enrolled at any time (Brenner, 1990).

School-Connected Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) Programs

There are 28 states which have some kind of pre-K funding. Over half of the programs enroll 4-year-olds. Most enroll "at-risk" children. Usually, the program is housed in the school (Brenner, 1990).
At-risk

A child who may have difficulties in a traditional classroom because of the language he/she speaks, socioeconomic status, and/or family problems (Brenner, 1990).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Practices that include ways to provide a quality program for children, birth through age 8. The focus of the program is on the children, rather than on the delivery of curriculum. Emphasis is placed on all four areas of development, including cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development, with none being more important than another. The curriculum emphasizes learning as an interactive process. Teachers prepare the environment for children to learn through active exploration and interaction with adults, other children, and materials. The activities are concrete, real, and relevant to the lives of young children (Bredekamp, 1986).
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Should public schools offer programs for 4-year-olds? In recent years, this question has been a major issue in early childhood education (Day, 1988). It is both complex and emotional, affecting teachers, children, parents, administrators, and officials in local, state, and federal governments. This chapter examines the following issues: the history of programs for young children in the public schools; societal issues, such as the changing family and its need for quality child care; the compatibility of the field of early childhood education and the public school setting; and the issue of universal and/or compulsory education for 4-year-olds.

History of Early Childhood Programs in the United States

The role of the public schools in the education of 4-year-olds is not a new idea. For most of America's history, 4-year-olds have been included in the public schools.

1. Can the history of early childhood programs in America inform and impact programs for 4-year-olds?

Very early in America's history, the Puritans passed the Massachusetts Law of 1642, which was the first time in the English-speaking world that all boys and girls would be taught to read (Hewes, 1989). Their
religious doctrine advocated that children were born sinners and the way to salvation, as they perceived it, was through Bible study. The only way to study the Bible was to read it. So, children were taught to read. This religious doctrine was so important to them that they funded schooling with public tax funds.

From the years 1642 through the early 1800s, education was provided at home, either by the mother or a private tutor, if the family could afford it. (There were variations due to parental backgrounds and different state laws.) In spite of the home tutoring, 4-year-olds were included wherever public school programs existed in America. In the rural areas, one-room schools served older children as well as 4-year-olds, and many times children younger than 4. There were even children as young as 2 who came with an older brother or sister. Public schools had two purposes, to educate, and to form good moral character, especially in poor children who were perceived to be "lacking" (Bloch, Seward, & Seidlinger, 1989).

In 1817 and 1818, the Primary School Board in Boston determined that public education should begin at the age of 4. This move was supported by public funds. It was not mandatory, but was available for poor immigrant children (Bloch, Seward, & Seidlinger, 1988).
During this time, infant schools, developed in England by Robert Owen, began to flourish in America. These schools emphasized singing, dancing, and playing outdoors. Owen felt that a child could be "trained without corporal punishment or fear" (Hinitz, 1981, p. 23) which was common at the time. Philanthropists, women's groups, and church groups supported these infant schools. Because these schools targeted poor children and children whose mothers were employed, they became a "child rescue movement" (Woodill, 1986, p. 16). This was true both in Europe and American due to rapid industrialization, the prevalence of child labor, and the 19th century middle-class moralism.

In 1831, the school board of New York City established a policy allowing expenditure of school funds to educate all children between the ages of 2 and 15. In Pennsylvania, a similar law was passed in 1838 (Bloch, Seward, & Seidlinger, 1989).

During the late 1830s, infant schools began to lose their popularity, and by 1842, few infant schools remained (Hewes, 1989). There were two reasons for their decline. First, public education was becoming more academic, and second, the social consciousness of the day turned toward an emphasis on the maternal role in caring and educating children at home (Day, 1988; Hewes, 1989).
As infant schools declined, Froebelian kindergartens were being introduced in this country. Froebel, a German, known as the "Father of the Kindergarten," felt that children should not be molded like wax; rather, a teacher should follow the nature of children. He felt that children could develop naturally by participating in a well-structured environment. Froebel wanted teachers to follow children's play interests, rather than actively giving information to the child. He developed a curriculum of "occupations" which included games, songs, work in language and math, and nature study. Through this curriculum, he believed that children would develop an understanding of universal principles. "Among the occupations were paper cutting, paper weaving, bead stringing, drawing, embroidering, and weaving" (Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1990, p.30). His kindergarten practices were different from the elementary schooling of the day, which emphasized literacy for classical and Biblical studies (Lay-Dopyera & Dopyera, 1990).

In 1856, Mrs. Carl Schurz, who studied under Froebel, introduced a German-speaking kindergarten in Watertown, Wisconsin. Most often her classrooms included multiage groupings, 4-, 5-, and 6 year-olds, and sometimes 2- and 3-year-olds. In 1860, the first English-speaking kindergarten was started and privately
operated by Miss Elizabeth Peabody in Boston. In contrast to other programs for children, the kindergarten began as an educational movement, unlike previous efforts, which grew out of perceived social needs (Bloch, Seward, & Seidlinger, 1989).

In 1873, St. Louis became the first public school system to adopt a kindergarten program. Susan Blow, the first teacher, worked closely with William T. Harris, who was superintendent of the St. Louis schools. Harris became the first superintendent of public schools in America who advocated, not only publicly supported kindergartens, but also, outlined how 4-year-olds could fit into the system. The interest in public financing of kindergarten was based on the belief that kindergartens could be used to "catch children early and teach them good, moral 'American' behavior before they became immoral, too different from the American standard, or eventually, delinquent or criminal" (Bloch, Seward, & Seidlinger, 1989, p. 13).

In 1891, Michigan became the first state to make kindergarten open and available to all families. In 1893, Ohio passed a similar bill that allowed the board of education to establish kindergartens in connection with the public school for children who were 4 to 6 years old (Bloch, Seward, & Seidlinger, 1989).
During the early part of the 20th Century, education for 4-year-olds was usually for those who could afford it. Many of the programs in existence then were associated with universities. During the Depression, nursery schools were sponsored by the federal government through the Works Progress Administration (WPA). These nursery schools allowed unemployed teachers to pursue employment (Gordon & Browne, 1989, p. 19).

With the onset of World War II, women were needed to work in the factories to help the war effort. The Lanham Act (1941) was passed to provide day nurseries for children so that the mothers could be employed outside the home. Edgar Kaiser, manager of the Kaiser Shipyards in Portland, Oregon, employed only the best trained specialists in early childhood education to work at his child care centers, including James Hymes, Jr., the director, and Lois Meek Stolz, who was a pioneer in child development theory. On a daily basis, children ranging in age from 18 months to 6 years were cared for in these centers. Kaiser had Portland architects design the children’s centers. They produced two round, wheel-like buildings with large rooms in the spokes and a protected playground located in the central hub of the wheel. The classrooms were large and had storage space and bathrooms with
child-sized sinks and toilets. The full staff consisted of 100 teachers, six group supervisors, ten nurses, five nutritionists and two family consultants. Special kitchens provided the children with breakfast, midmorning snack, noon meal, afternoon snack, and supper in the evening. The goal was to provide two-thirds of the child's daily nutritional requirements. A mother could even order the family's evening meal and pick it up as she picked up the children after her work shift. The center had a library from which parents could borrow children's books. The staff wrote a biweekly newsletter describing the children's activities and distributed booklets written by the staff on various topics, including ideas about child care or how to talk to their child about the war (Zinsser, 1984).

Those sympathetic with the day care concept hoped that the work done at the Kaiser Shipyards' day care would become a model for future day care centers. When it was learned that the nurseries were to be closed, the women who used the services registered protests with both Congress and the President. Hymes was asked to prepare a report for Congress, defending the centers. When Congress learned from his report that education in general, and the day care centers in particular, were not financially self-sustaining,
congressional support was withdrawn (Zinsser, 1984). The centers operated for only 2 years.

The early 1950s saw the end of 4-year-old programs in the public schools. It was a simple matter of utility. With the postwar baby boom, classroom space and teachers were in short supply and resources were expended for children aged 5 and older (Block, Seward, & Seidlinger, 1989).

In 1957, the Soviet launching of Sputnik pushed American schools into change. The education system was under attack. Critics claimed that American education was "soft" and characterized by a progressive philosophy, emphasizing the child's social integration to the exclusion of academic rigor. Further, "play" which traditionally had been suspect and without legitimacy in school, now provided fuel for the critic's burning crusade to place more emphasis on academics. What was needed, the critics proposed, were schools which helped children develop the ability to think (Woodill, 1988). An academic emphasis became prevalent in the schools.

During the early 1960s, in the aftermath of Sputnik, several important educational ideas began to surface. Research conducted by Hunt suggested that intelligence measures of children from disadvantaged home environments could be enhanced through
stimulation. Therefore, intelligence was defined as a fluid characteristic rather than a fixed attribute. Secondly, Bloom, in his work, Stability and Change in Human Characteristics, (1964), reported that 50% of an individual's intelligence at age 17 was gained between conception and age 4. As the work of Hunt and Bloom was being reported and examined, the Civil Rights movement began to gain momentum. Through its various programs, the movement addressed the low quality of education in the inner cities, while targeting at-risk children, just as poor children were targeted in the previous century. New research in the education arena, coupled with the social context surrounding the Civil Rights Movement, gave impetus to federal funding of a new program, "Head Start."

Federal funding of Head Start resulted form research done during the 1960s. This research demonstrated that there was a connection between poverty during childhood and school failure. Other research has shown that good programs in the early years can help to prevent school failure. It has been found that quality intervention programs for young children have short-term, mid-term and long-term effects (Schweinhart, Koshel, & Bridgman, 1987).
The long-term evidence has come from the results of the High Scope/Perry Preschool study. This project was conducted in Ypsilanti, Michigan, in 1962, with 123 black youths from families of low socioeconomic status who were at-risk of failing in school. The purpose of the study was to explore the long-term effects on these youths versus no participation in a program of high-quality early childhood education. The children, who were from the same school attendance area, were randomly divided at the ages of 3 and 4.

Final data were collected when these youths were 19. Findings indicated lasting beneficial effects of preschool education in: decreased delinquency and crime; decreased use of welfare assistance; decreased incidence of teen-age pregnancy; improved cognitive performance during early childhood; improved scholastic placement and achievement during the school years; increased high school graduation rates and frequency of enrollment in postsecondary programs; and increased incidence of employment (Berrueta-Clement, Schweinhart, Barnett, Epstein, & Weikart, 1984).

Financially, the Perry Preschool Project also revealed that the impact of quality programs can translate into savings for the taxpayer over many years. Specifically, it was estimated that the taxpayer could save $28,000 per participant in future
costs (e.g., special education, welfare payments) by participants' attending quality programs such as the Perry Preschool Project. This is nearly six times the initial cost of a 1-year program and three times the cost of the 2-year program for the Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1986). The High/Scope Foundation estimated a savings of seven dollars for every dollar invested in high-quality preschool programs. On a broader scale, the Children’s Defense Fund (1987) estimated a national savings of ten billion dollars in reduced costs of special education, repeated grades, delinquency, and other consequences of school failure, if Head Start could provide services to every poor child 3 to 5 years of age (Day, 1988).

For the past 20 years, the federal government has been the major provider of public early education, such as Head Start. In the absence of a federal mandate, states have begun to take on the burden of this issue. Even though education was left to the states by our Founding Fathers, there has been no common plan between states on implementation procedures. There are, however, 28 states that provide some kind of funding for prekindergarten programs. Of these 28 states, 7 do not identify the population that they plan to serve as at-risk. Only Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Vermont's programs include a "full working day" as their hours of
operation. Staff/pupil ratios varied from 1:6 to 1:22. Eleven states required early childhood training for their teachers (Day, 1988). Beginning in 1989, New York City began offering a program in the public schools to every 4-year-old. In addition, New York City lowered class size in Grades 1, 2, and 3 (Jarvis, 1988).

Mitchell (1987), through Bank Street College, conducted a national survey on the "nature and extent of public school programs for children under five" (p. 1). (Prior to this survey, the most recent national study was a survey of day care conducted from 1977 to 1979.) Mitchell's Public School Early Childhood Study was sent to all public schools which operated any program for children who were younger than the usual kindergarten entry age. Information was gained from the early childhood specialist, if one was identified for the district. Little information was available in states that had no funding stream for early childhood (Mitchell, 1987).

The survey included a district overview and a questionnaire that described the various programs. Results showed that the districts operated a variety of programs for children from birth through age 5. The most frequent programs that schools offered were a variety of special education and Head Start programs.
The most common operating schedule was 3 days per week from September to June. Salaries and benefits for preschool teachers who were associated with programs in the public schools were the same as other public school teachers (Mitchell, 1987). The smallest program, which served 45 children with $197,000 in funding, was in Alaska. The largest program, which served 48,000 children with funding of $64.5 million, was in Texas (Day, 1988).

In summary, the literature clearly suggests that public education for 4-year-olds is not a new idea. In fact, it could be stated with confidence, that 4-year-olds have been included in the public schools more years than they have been excluded. Those who advocate public school programs for 4-year-olds are strongly supported by past practice.

**Societal Factors**

2. Are there societal factors today that call for the expansion of early childhood programs?

The issue of including 4-year-olds in the public schools has emanated, in part, from four decades of a changing family structure. The Cleaver family of the 1950s represents only 7% of the homes in America today (Gestwicki, 1988). The "traditional family" with a wage earner father and a homemaker mother, has all but disappeared.
With these major social changes, families today are not operating under the same conditions of other generations. Marital instability, leading to more single-parent families, is on the rise. Most of these families are headed by women. Sixty percent of the families with young children live at the poverty level (Halpern, 1987).

Another factor is the changing roles of men and women. More and more women are becoming second wage earners. While some women are pursuing a career, others have to work to make ends meet. In 1986, McCormick estimated that nine out of ten mothers, either single or married, would be in the work force by 1990. According to both Mitchell (1987) and Zigler (1987), the 1985 Census statistics reported 59% of mothers of 3- and 4-year-olds were employed. Also, almost half of the mothers of infants were employed outside the home.

Another factor affecting the family is mobility. Families who move frequently become removed from the physical presence of other family members such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles, who act as a support system. In past times, these extended family members provided physical, emotional, and sometimes, financial support. The family was not isolated as it is now. For instance, if the mother had to go to work, there was a
member of the extended family that could provide child care for a child that was not in school (Gestwicki, 1988).

With the family changes that have occurred during recent decades, the most immediate need for parents is to find a quality place to leave their children. Most parents want the best care and education for their children that they can afford. Yet, to have a child or children in quality day care and/or preschool program is costly. Many see the public school as a natural choice to make room available for a 4-year-old program (Zigler, 1987). Also, the tuition would be taken care of through taxes, so the parent would not have the financial burden directly.

Many feel that during the first few years of life the best place for a child is at home with mother (White, 1988; Zigler, 1986b). According to Zigler (1986b), recent studies have shown that:

The conversations children carry on at home may be the richest source of linguistic and cognitive enrichment for children from all but the most deprived backgrounds. Because parent and child share a common life and frame of reference, they can explore events and ideas in intimate, individualistic conversations with great personal meaning. (p. 12)

Yet, with over 50% of mothers in the workforce the point is moot. Zigler (1986b) argued that the real question is: How can one provide the best experience
for a 4-year-old during the day when the child is not able to remain at home because the parents are not able to be there due their jobs.

In conclusion, today there are many societal factors which have necessitated the expansion of early childhood programs. These include the changing family structure, the changing roles of both men and women, and the mobility of the family. These societal factors have caused a need for quality care of children.

Compatibility with the Public School Setting

3. Is the field of early childhood education compatible with the public school setting?

Caldwell (1986) spoke of the association of the public schools and the early childhood programs as natural enemies who could be natural allies. In the first place, early childhood education is equated with day care. Day care rose out of the social service orientation which provided "care and protection" for young children. To this day, in the state of Iowa, day care and private preschools are under the supervision of the Department of Human Services. Schools, on the other hand provide "education". It is really contradictory to try to distinguish the programs in this manner, because day care, preschool and public schools provide both care and education. To Elkind (1988), education and care raised a question of an
"artificial dichotomy. At all levels of education, there is child care" (p. 22).

Another distinction is that day care provides for poor children and schools provide education for all children (Caldwell, 1986). This might have been true in the late 1960s and 1970s, but now all socioeconomic levels use day care, due to the large number of families that have two wage earners. Also, there are high-quality day care centers and high-quality schools, just as there are low-quality day care centers and low-quality schools.

Animosity between early childhood educators and public school educators also stems from the fact that both the day care/child care industry and public education have been held in low esteem by the public in general. The idea that anyone can take care of a child is held by many. This is, however, really no different than the general attitude toward educators. It has been said by critics of education, that anyone can teach. Further, many charge that day care has weakened the family. In retaliation, the day care movement points out that educators have also failed children. Rather than forming a "natural alliance," each group took a stance to bolster its own esteem by "asserting its independence from and superiority over the other" (Caldwell, 1986, p. 38). Representatives of
both groups need to work together to enhance working conditions and salaries for those in the child care field. Working together for common goals could help both groups.

Educators in the field of early childhood insist on developmentally appropriate curriculum, while educators and administrators in the public schools are hesitant to implement developmentally appropriate curriculum. If programs for 4-year-olds are added to the public school, the fear is that the focus will become academic. As the kindergartens have, in many cases, become more like first grade, the fear is great that 4-year-old programs will implement an academic curriculum. The concern is real. Today, most kindergartens use an academic, rather than a developmentally appropriate, approach. The Educational Research Service, an independent, nonprofit corporation serving the research and information needs of the nation's school systems, surveyed kindergartens in 1986 concerning the educational focus of their program. This survey found that only 8% of the programs were developmental in focus, as opposed to 22% of the programs which had an academic focus emphasizing skills and achievement. Sixty-three percent of the programs surveyed focused on emphasizing both academic and social readiness (Day & Thomas, 1988). If
administrators and teachers in the public schools request developmentally appropriate curriculum, those in the public school setting and early childhood field could move closer to becoming allies and supporting each other. Much educating and inserviceing must be done to help those in the public school setting understand developmentally appropriate curriculum and ways to implement it successfully.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (1986) strongly advocated that programs be developmentally appropriate for the age child that is being served. A quality program for children, birth through age 8 includes: a low staff/child ratio; parent involvement; adult/child interaction; educational preparation of staff; both teacher and staff knowledge of the developmental stages of children physically and cognitively, as well as socially and emotionally. Developmental practices stress that teachers treat the child as a whole.

These practices do not emphasize one area of development as being more important than another area (i.e., cognitive as more important than the social-emotional area). Rather, there is a balance between all areas. Developmental curriculum emphasizes learning as an interactive process. Teachers prepare the classroom so that children learn through active
exploration of the environment and interaction with adults and other children. A variety of activities and materials are used within a rich, supportive, and challenging environment (Bredekamp, 1986).

At this point in time, the field of early childhood education is not compatible with the public school setting. They are still "natural enemies" who do not support one another. There are many misconceptions held by those in the public school settings about the field of early childhood education. Developmentally appropriate practices are the cornerstone of the field of early childhood education. These practices are not generally understood by those in the public school setting.

**Compulsory Attendance**

4. If the programs become universal, should attendance be compulsory?

Elkind (1988) encouraged one to think clearly with regard to educating the very young. He felt strongly that "today's parents want professionals to care for their young children because they do not have the time to do so themselves" (p. 22). Elkind felt that schools are becoming involved with early childhood programs because parents want quality care facilities for their children (Elkind, 1988).
Further, in Elkind's conceptualization, education is not a race. There is no starting line nor finishing line. Rather, education is an ongoing "adaptation to our social and physical environment" (Elkind, 1988, p. 23). Elkind felt that it is unfortunate that Head Start was given that name, because education can not be a race and should not be compared to a race. Further, the idea of the "super baby" syndrome is a myth. Parents need to understand that formal instruction which is done to produce learning to read and "do" other academics early is inappropriate for young children (VanHoven, 1987).

Stressing academics too early can actually put the child at-risk for both the short-term and the long-term. Elkind has labeled this as "miseducation". In his article, "Educating the Very Young" (1988), Elkind stated:

In Denmark, where reading instruction follows a language experience approach and formal instruction is delayed until age seven, there is almost no illiteracy. In contrast, in France, where state-mandated formal instruction in reading begins at age five, some thirty percent of the children experience reading problems. (p. 23)

After reviewing the literature with regard to this question, it appears few would advocate compulsory attendance. Although most authors have agreed that it certainly is very important for the disadvantaged, at-risk child (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1986; Zigler,
1986) the African-American community disagrees. Schools have failed miserably in the education of most of the minority population. Why should another year of failure be added onto the existing inappropriate program (Moore, 1987)?

Most of the positions reviewed in the literature accepted a universal program idea, but without compulsory attendance. A universal program would include every 4-year-old in every district. Attendance could be compulsory, but not necessarily. A universal program must be sensitive to the individual needs of the child, family, and the community. If the approach included only the at-risk children, the program could be artificially segregated both racially and socioeconomically. According to Zigler (1986), Head Start's weakness was the built-in economic segregation. A universal program could better integrate children across socioeconomic lines and introduce equity into the early childhood programs.

Zigler argued for a family-oriented multiservice community school that would best meet the needs of the preschooler and the family. He envisioned the community school to be part of the neighborhood. It would act as a local center for all of the social services. Zigler would include full-day, high-quality, developmentally appropriate care for both 3- and
4-year-olds. Teachers would serve in a supervisory role, using certified Child Development Associates (CDA) as direct caregivers (Zigler, 1986). (The CDAs are now used in many Head Start programs, as well as in some day care and preschools.)

In conclusion, the public has paid for a "modest utilitarian Model T and expected it to out perform a luxurious Dusenberg" (Clinchy, 1989, p. 294). In 1988, 6.4% of the gross national product was spent on weapons and defense. During the same year, the amount spent on education from preschool through college in the U.S.A. was 4.5% (Clinchy, 1989, p.293). Education has continuously been expected to perform miracles on a shoestring budget.
CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND SYNTHESIS

The review of literature relating to the public schools' role in the education of four-year-olds raised four questions.

1. Can the history of early childhood programs in America inform and impact programs for four-year-olds?

From the information cited, including 4-year-olds in the public schools is not a new idea. Over the past 100 years, 4-year-olds have been included and excluded from the public schools, depending on the needs of the society.

2. Are there societal factors which call for the development of early childhood programs?

Society has repeatedly dictated the necessity of quality child care due to the needs of the changing family. Changing demographics, and life styles, family mobility, dual careers, single-parent families and the increase of poverty in the homes of children have hastened the implementation of programs for 4-year-olds in the public schools. Research on quality programs for early education has shown positive results in both the short- and long-term for participants. In addition, research has estimated early programs save staggering sums of money for society over the lifetime
of the participants. Certainly, quality programs would be expensive, but the savings in future costs of special education, repeated grades, and delinquency are enormous. The financial strain that the public school experiences could be offset by the savings in future costs incurred when educating these children.

3. Is the field of early childhood education compatible with the public school setting?

The cornerstone of early childhood education is developmentally appropriate practices. These practices included in a quality program could have the biggest impact on the lives of 4-year-olds. This program design includes a low staff/child ratio, parent involvement, and adult/child interaction. The educational preparation of the staff is crucial to a program of quality. The staff must have knowledge of the developmental stages of children--physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Further, the staff must have experience working with children this age. Research has shown that prior experience and specialized training in early childhood education for the staff have a major impact on the quality of the program. The curriculum must be used within an environment that encourages exploration and interaction with adults, children, and the materials.
All educators, whether they are part of the early childhood field or part of the public school setting, must find strengths in each other and be supportive of each other’s professionalism. The concern that formal academic education would be pushed down into the 4-year-old program, as it has been in many kindergartens, is real. But, this concern can not stop early childhood educators. They must actively promote programs that are developmentally appropriate. Asserting superiority of one area over another area must stop. Early childhood and public school professionals must unite. Early childhood education can no longer be a stepchild of the educational mainstream.

4. If programs for 4-year-olds become universally available, should attendance be compulsory?

Few experts argue for programs to be both universally available and compulsory in attendance. Most feel that children who are at-risk should have the opportunity to attend a quality program for 4-year-olds. According to Zigler, one of the weaknesses of programs like Head Start is the built-in "economic segregation" of children (1986b, p. 12). More affluent children are sent to private preschools, whereas poor children only have the opportunity to attend programs like Head Start. If universal programs
were implemented, integration among various socioeconomic groups could put programs and children on equal grounds.

**Implications For Practice and For Further Research**

It seems appropriate to state that adding 4-year-olds to the public schools is an idea whose time has come again. The addition of 4-year-olds to the public schools will not be a cure-all for society's ills. Yet, if a child can have the opportunity to experience academic success, the child's chances for future success can be strengthened.

Having a universal program for 4-year-olds that is not compulsory could be much like the present kindergarten program. For the past 30 to 40 years, kindergarten attendance has not been compulsory; yet, 99% of the population send their children to kindergarten. Perhaps, the same pattern will be followed if 4-year-olds are added to the public schools as a universal program.

Public schools are operated for the education of all children. They are publicly supported and staffed with professional teachers. They are accessible, visible, and open. Many districts have empty rooms that could be converted for use in a 4-year-old program. Other empty rooms could be used to implement Zigler's "community approach" mentioned earlier in this
paper. Public schools can be as good and responsive as the public wishes to make them.

The influence of the early childhood programs could strengthen the parent component of the public schools. Research shows that parental reinforcement of school learning is an important component of lasting retention of what is learned in school. Parent involvement and education are integral parts of good early childhood programs. These models could be implemented in the public schools.

Four-year-old programs in the public schools could help to legitimize early childhood as a profession. It could help to bring salaries up to a similar level as the public school teachers and give respect, for the first time, to the early childhood educators. Further, the existence of programs for 4-year-olds in the public schools could help to reeducate public school teachers, administrators, parents, and legislators regarding what is sound education for young children.

Including 4-year-olds in the public schools could assist the flow of information concerning a child from the preschool classroom to the elementary classroom. This practice is very rare now. Because early childhood educators are not seen as professionals, their input is rarely asked for concerning the children that would be going into the public school. According
to Caldwell (1986), inclusion of 4-year-olds in the public schools would avoid the "apartheid" between early childhood educators and public school employees. This inclusion could then extend the developmental approach upward instead of pushing formal education downward.

Including 4-year-old programs in the public schools could have a positive impact on the next generation, if implemented with the development of the young child as the foremost consideration. Teachers and administrators must take a proactive stance regarding education programs for young children. Those educators must inform others about the profession. Research must become more relevant. Researchers must have a working relationship with those who teach, so their findings can be communicated in a meaningful way. The National Association for the Education of Young Children must continue to support developmentally appropriate practices and find ways to communicate the importance of these practices for those working with young children. Administrators, teachers, and staff working in the public school setting must be trained to understand and implement developmentally appropriate practices. Inservices must be held. Parents and school board members must be kept informed and involved in the inservices as well. The staff must be
encouraged and opportunities must be provided for the staff to visit programs which are developmentally appropriate.

Finally, if all segments of the society worked together, the 4-year-olds in this country could be included in developmentally appropriate programs. This programming would have a positive impact on the participants and their families and significantly impact the future of our country.
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