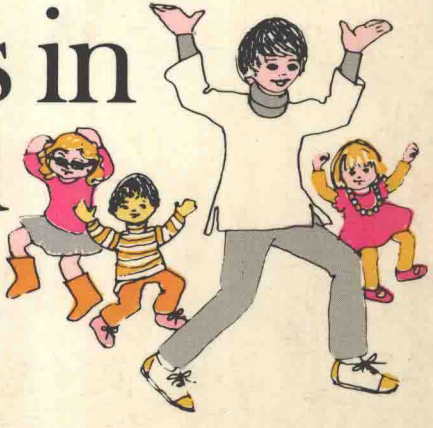
Margot Kaplan-Sanoff / Renée Yablans-Magid

EXPLORING EARLY CHILD-HOOD

Readings in Theory and Practice



Exploring Early Childhood

Readings in Theory and Practice

MARGOT KAPLAN-SANOFF

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Beaver College

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To Robby and David
With Love and Thanks

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Preface

Because early childhood development is currently one of the most rapidly expanding fields in education and psychology, few textbooks have been able to keep up with the recent flow of new information and ideas. This book of readings, although by no means exhaustive, is meant to provide an organized approach to the study of early childhood. It explores not only the most recent theories in child development but also their practical application.

The book is divided into three sections—an introduction to early childhood, a review of the four major content areas in the field, and an introduction to the administration of early childhood centers. The introductory section provides several major readings on the theoretical approaches to early childhood development. It raises such issues as the role of intrinsic motivation in cognitive development and the connection between environmental variables and learning. The second section of the text explores the current theories of infant and early childhood development in the four major categories of growth—motor, social, language, and cognitive development. In addition to the theoretical aspects presented, each chapter also includes recent projects, teaching techniques, and programs based upon those theories. Part III discusses the important issues involved in administering early childhood centers. Preceding the chapters on administration is a brief, basic overview of the process of administration that acquaints the reader with the logical sequence of planning, operating, and evaluating a center.

In selecting the readings, careful consideration was given to choosing articles from a variety of disciplines. The articles represent ideas not only from the field of education but also from business administration, psychology, and pediatric medicine. Rather than choosing only those articles that are consistent with a single philosophical orientation, the editors tried to select readings from a wide array of theoretical perspectives. Attention was given to including contemporary readings as well as major seminal studies in theory and research. Indeed several of the articles are published for the first time in this book.

Exploring Early Childhood was not designed with any one type of course or student in mind. Rather it was the editors' intention to compile a book of readings that can be used at both the undergraduate and graduate levels either as the primary text or as a secondary text in conjunction with others. As a primary text, the book offers a logical and sys-

tematic approach to the field of early childhood development. Whereas most primary texts currently available tend to provide little more than a broad overview of the subject matter, this book introduces the student in an organized fashion to the sophisticated analysis of the major writers in early childhood. As a secondary source book, *Exploring Early Childhood* can be used to supplement the general discussion provided in a basic text by acquainting students with a variety of viewpoints compiled within a single text. When employed as a secondary source book, it is not necessary for students to read the material in any particular order. Furthermore, the book is meant to serve as a permanent reference for students as they pursue their professional careers. In this regard, the book can be used as general required reading within a student's total program of study.

In the hope that students will use this text as something more than mere required reading, the editors have employed a system of cross-referencing, indicating with an asterisk those references cited within a reading that also appear in the text. Thus a student can read independently other related articles cited in the assigned reading. In addition, the Appendix contains a list of the names and addresses of research centers and agencies that publish and report work in the field of early childhood development; students may write for information directly to a cited source. Finally, the editors acknowledge the use of the general term "he" throughout the book to provide continuity of writing style; however, in all cases the term "he" is meant to represent both male and female roles.

The editors would also like to take this opportunity to thank the many people who helped in the organization and publication of this book. Our greatest debt is to the authors whose articles are represented here. Because many of the articles originally appeared in *Young Children,* we wish to thank the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for their generous cooperation. And of course we must acknowledge the valuable role our students played in providing both the impetus and the encouragement to complete this project. Special thanks to Ellen Feldman, Donna Greenberg, Bobbi Cornman, JoAnn Finkle, Katie Sturgill, and H. Johnson for their assistance in typing, handling correspondence, and proofreading.

M. K. S.
R. Y. M.

Contents

PART I
INTRODUCTION TO EARLY CHILDHOOD

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD 1

1. **Perspectives on Early Childhood Education** 3
   LILIAN G. KATZ

2. **Early Childhood Education: Who's Doing What to Whom, and Why?** 8
   DIANE DIVOKY

3. **Present Imperatives for Public Parenting** 19
   MATTHEW W. GAFFNEY

THEORETICAL APPROACHES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD 23

4. **The Epigenesis of Intrinsic Motivation and Early Cognitive Learning** 23
   J. McV. HUNT

5. The Act of Discovery 42
JEROME S. BRUNER

6. Piaget's Theory of Child Development and Its Implications 53
ROBBIE CASE

7. Piaget and Montessori 65
DAVID ELKIND

8. Behavior Analysis Applied to Early Childhood Education 74
SIDNEY W. BIJOU

PART II
CONTENT AREAS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

MOTOR DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD 87

9. Observations on the Development of Visually Directed Reaching 89
BURTON L. WHITE, PETER CASTLE, and RICHARD HELD

10. Motor Development: A Broader Context 105
MARGOT KAPLAN-SANOFF

11. Perception in Relation to Cognition 114
M. D. VERNON

12. Play as a Medium for Learning 126
MARY W. MOFFITT

13. Concept Learning Through Movement Improvisation: The Teacher's Role as Catalyst 132
MIRIAM B. STECHER

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD 143

14. Mother-Infant Interaction and the Development of Competence 144
MARY D. SALTER AINSWORTH and SILVIA M. BELL

15. Socialization and Instrumental Competence in Young Children 162
DIANA BAUMRIND

16. Stages in the Development of Psychosexual Concepts and Attitudes 180
LAWRENCE KOHLBERG and
DOROTHY ZELNICKER ULLIAN

17. Moral Education in the Schools: A Developmental View 188
LAWRENCE KOHLBERG

18. Dealing with Student Misbehavior: An Eclectic Review 208
CARL D. GLICKMAN and CHARLES H. WOLFGANG

19. Spontaneous Play: An Avenue for Intellectual Development 221
MILLIE ALMY

20. Teaching Preschool Children to Play 234
CHARLES H. WOLFGANG

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD 245

21. Code Switching in Children's Language 246
JEAN BERKO GLEASON

22. Early Experience and the Socialization of Cognitive Modes in Children 253
ROBERT D. HESS and VIRGINIA C. SHIPMAN

23. How to Talk to a Scribbler 269
JOSEPH J. SPARLING and MARILYN C. SPARLING

24. A Language Model for Moral Development 276
KATHRYN CASTLE

25. Psychological Theory and Young Children's Literature 285
CHARLES H. WOLFGANG

26. We Can Teach Reading Better 294
DAVID ELKIND

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD 301

27. Views of Cognition in Children: "Process" vs. "Product" Approach 302
EDITH LEVITT

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28. Teaching the Very Young: Procedures for Developing Inquiry Skills 310
FRANK J. ESTVAN

29. Sciencing for Young Children 317
DONALD NEUMAN

30. Piaget, Children, and Number 329
CONSTANCE KAMII and RHETA DeVRIES

PART III
INTRODUCTION TO EARLY CHILDHOOD ADMINISTRATION

OVERVIEW 341

31. The Process of Administering Early Childhood Programs 342
RENÉE YABLANS-MAGID

THE PLANNING PROCESS 349

31. How to Choose a Leadership Pattern 350
ROBERT TANNENBAUM and WARREN H. SCHMIDT

33. Planning the Preschool Program 361
ORALIE McAFEE

34. The Function of Early Childhood Education 367
EVELYN WEBER

35. Considering Regulations 378
CELIA A. DECKER and JOHN R. DECKER

36. Managing School Finances 398
ANNIE L. BUTLER

37. The Educational Manager: Artist and Practitioner 411
E. G. BOGUE and ROBERT L. SAUNDERS

THE OPERATING PROCESS 422

38. Teachers of Young Children Need Basic Inner Qualities 423
DOROTHY WEISMAN GROSS

39. Teaching in Preschools: Roles and Goals 425
LILIAN G. KATZ

40. Theory and Practice: A Model for Staff Training and Development in Early Childhood Education 435
MARGOT KAPLAN-SANOFF

41. Curriculum Leadership in Early Childhood Education 443
DENNIS A. PICKERING

42. Teacher–Parent Relations in Preschool 452
ELLEN HANDLER

43. Providing Food Services 463
LINDA REGELE-SINCLAIR

THE EVALUATION PROCESS 471

44. Supervision in Early Childhood Education 472
MARGARET V. S. YONEMURA

45. Developmental Stages of Preschool Teachers 478
LILIAN G. KATZ

46. One Model for Developing a Prekindergarten Assessment Program 482
ANN E. BOEHM

47. Evaluating Settings for Learning 488
THELMA HARMS

48. How to Evaluate and Report Individual Progress 493
ANNIE L. BUTLER

APPENDIX: List of Agencies and Research Centers 499

INDEX 505

Part I Introduction to Early Childhood

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Within the last decade, the field of early childhood has grown from one primarily concerned with preschool development to one that spans such diverse issues as infant stimulation, cognitive assessment, and enriched play environments. Similarly, research has expanded to include topics as disparate as neurological influence and interactional factors. Although it is impossible within the scope of any book to discuss all the varied perspectives and approaches that inform early childhood development, one can identify several distinct themes that serve to unify the viewpoints presented by the literature in the field.

The first theme stresses the interdependence between one area of development and all the other areas of growth. No longer can we speak of social skills as being separate from cognitive awareness, nor can we consider language development as isolated from the social and cognitive milieu from which it evolves. Motor, social, language, and cognitive development are all intimately related—each one affecting the others.

The second theme explores the origins of competence, delineating how children develop feelings of control and mastery over the people, events, and objects in their environment. Detailed studies of infant and child growth have provided insight into the processes by which a child manipulates the objects in his world and learns to communicate his understanding of how those objects work through language and symbolic expression. Also of great concern to researchers and educators are the methods by which adults can facilitate the development of competence through discovery, learning, spontaneous play, and supportive adult-child interactions.

The third theme relates directly to our assumptions about how children learn. Theoretical differences in teaching and research strategies stem from the debate over whether learning involves an essentially passive child who is taught through direct reinforcement or an intrinsically motivated learner who actively explores

the environment. These two radically different strategies, often referred to as the process/product dichotomy, have radically different implications for curriculum development, staff training, and environmental design.

In order to understand the significance of these three themes, it is important at the outset to understand the major historical events and theoretical orientations that have influenced research and educational programs for young children. The readings in this first chapter are divided into two sections. The first section provides a historical overview of early childhood development. For example, Katz looks at both the past and present assumptions behind the education of young children, and she argues for the establishment of appropriate goals for early childhood.

However, when considering the issues related to a specific discipline, it is crucial to review not only past events but also future goals and perspectives; in the field of early childhood those perspectives include the politics and reality of child care. Gaffney's article summarizes the need for a nationwide early childhood program, whereas Divoky's advocates the examination of alternatives before delegating the sole responsibility for child care to either the public schools or the social service agencies.

A brief introduction to several theoretical approaches is offered in the second section of this chapter in the readings by Case, Elkind, Hunt, Bruner, and Bijou. Each of these articles presents a major theoretical argument. For example, Bruner's seminal work defines self-discovery learning and its importance for problem solving, recall, and motivation. In addition, these articles highlight the inescapable influence of Jean Piaget, B. F. Skinner, and Maria Montessori on theoretical discussions of early childhood development.

LILLIAN G. KATZ

1. Perspectives on Early Childhood Education

When you look back at the early days of Head Start and other early childhood program plans, the original ideas of the program designers seem both naive and oversimplified. The early designers based their plans on several premises. The first was that the preschool years are the most formative ones in children's development. Secondly, that those years should be full of stimulation or enrichment. Thirdly, that the children of families who are poor do not have enough stimulation or enrichment, and finally, that this supposed lack of stimulation causes children of the poor to be unresponsive to schooling. They hoped that a summer of enrichment would give children a headstart to later schooling.[1]

Now, seven years later, are these ideas still accepted? Judging from the current scene and recent experience, the most obvious error in the thinking of the original designers was that poor children are understimulated. This is very rarely the case. Poor children frequently have rich environments—rich in social, cultural, and linguistic experiences—as rich in meaning and complexity as the environments of children who are in a better-off socioeconomic position.[2]

Many children who are poor are overstimulated. They very commonly suffer from insufficient adult help in making sense out of their rich environments. It is in this sense that many poor children can be said to "starve in the midst of plenty" and appear to be understimulated.[3]

A second early idea that proved to be in error involves our stereotyping of a "poor" child. There is no "poor" child as such. There are just as many individual differences among children who are poor—of every ethnic group—as there are among middle-class white American children. The volumes of research which are processed through our Clearinghouse reveal in numerous tables and charts that individual differences are found in every

From Lillian G. Katz, "Perspectives on Early Childhood Education," *The Educational Forum*, Vol. 37 (May 1973), pp. 393–98. Reprinted by permission of Kappa Delta Pi, an Honor Society in Education, owners of the copyright.

[1]M.E. Akers, "Prologues: The Why of Early Childhood Education," in I. Gordon (ed.), *Early Childhood Education*, The Seventy-first Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972); and J. O. Miller, "Early Childhood Education Program and Research Support Literature: A State of the Art Review," in *National Program on Early Childhood Education* (St. Louis, Mo.: CEMREL, Inc., 1972).

[2]S. Baratz and J. C. Baratz, "Early Childhood Intervention: The Social Science Base of Institutional Racism," *Harvard Educational Review*, 40, 1:29–50 (February, 1970).

[3]A. P. Streissguth and H. L. Bee, "Mother-child Interactions and Cognitive Development in Children," in W. W. Hartup (ed.), *The Young Child: Reviews of Research*, Vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1972).

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