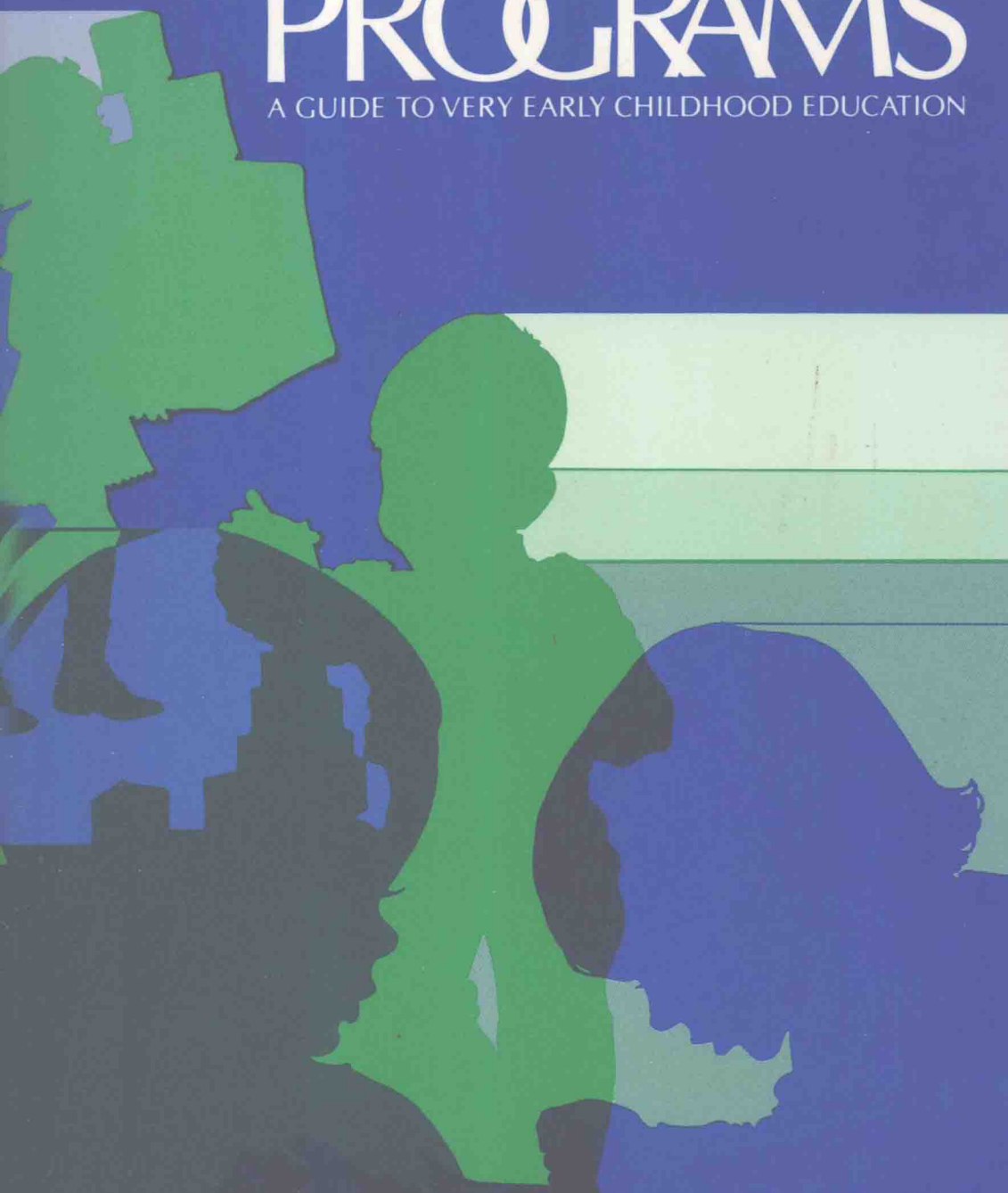


CHRISTINE Z. CATALDO

INFANT & TODDLER PROGRAMS

A GUIDE TO VERY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



INFANT AND TODDLER PROGRAMS

A Guide to Very Early
Childhood Education

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To both my families:

*My husband
and
my children,*

*And
the infants, toddlers, students,
parents, and staff
with whom I have worked*

Photographs courtesy of the author, Christine Cataldo, her husband, Jerry, and the Early Childhood Research Center, State University of New York at Buffalo.

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PREFACE

Affectionate, competent adults and an interesting, explorable environment are the heart of very early childhood education. Good programs for infants and toddlers reflect babies' special needs and qualities, yet they are also continuous with traditional preschool programs in the use of people and settings to encourage learning. Very early education resembles the total care likely to be found in homes where parents provide love and learning, plus the extra enrichment of playmates, many challenging activities, abundant playthings, trained staff, and developmental monitoring. Infant and toddler education, therefore, aims to support children's personal and social growth, enhance overall development, and provide good physical care. Taken together, these goals help to ensure that infants and toddlers receive balanced experiences that add something special to their lives without compromising their personal styles and family strengths. This entire process can happen in nursery schools, day-care centers, home-visiting programs, intervention projects, and stimulation or enrichment programs in a variety of settings.

It is fairly new ground, this specialty of education prior to the preschool years. To establish some direction, this book begins by exploring the roots of infant and toddler education. Early childhood programs, day-care, special education, mental health, nursing, and social services fields have all contributed useful information concerning babies and their families. Model programs and authoritative guidebooks have provided a wealth of ideas and techniques. Today we are fortunate indeed. We have a history of infant and toddler education, developmental guidelines, effective learning strategies, program structures, staff and parent roles, and even some notions of potential problem areas. We can begin the process of implementing and studying educational programs for babies. This book is a starting point to help the student and practicing teacher or caregiver to understand or develop such programs.

The text aims to provide integrated and comprehensive information. It is the product, in part, of my six years of designing and conducting infant and toddler education programs and teaching college students. I have made an effort to tie the material together in a single philosophy, although the work of others is discussed at length. The major sections of the book present a rather complete coverage of the field. Program principles, history, research approaches, and an overview of development in the earliest years are discussed as a foundation section for any interested reader. Several practical chapters follow that relate to program staff, setting, activities, and problem areas. These will guide the practicing professional and the participating student. Finally, program models, parent-program relationships, and ad-

ministrative issues are presented in the final section for the more advanced student and professional. Care has been taken throughout to make the material meaningful to readers from any of several disciplines. A balance of the philosophical and applied is used, so that *Infant and Toddler Programs* can serve as a guide to very early childhood education, in all its forms, at the conceptual and the practical levels. It is both a text and a resource book, to be used for programming in the present or future and for understanding the field at any time.

Other special features of the text were designed to help readers enjoy reading the book. The photographs were carefully selected to illustrate points in the text. They come from real, ongoing infant and toddler programs and from actual home settings. They reflect the pleasures and challenges in working with babies. Tables that summarize information in unique ways are included in each chapter, as are discussion questions and suggested projects. These features help to make the text valuable to teachers, caregivers, administrators, and students at both two- and four-year colleges in the areas of child care and early education, special education, nursing, child development, social work, and related areas. At the graduate level the text can be supplemented with a readings or developmental text, while the beginning student or untrained caregiver can use it with a companion activities book. I have successfully used sections of the book at each of these levels.

There are ten chapters in the text. Chapter 1 describes basic principles of early childhood education and trends from theory, practice, and research that contributed to the evolution of programs for children in the first three years. The wisdom and experience of the past provide a foundation upon which infant and toddler programs can be built. Chapter 2 presents program approaches that have emerged from child care and early intervention materials. These are viewed as pieces of the comprehensive program. The concept of education for the very young is then described, and my interpersonal-environmental approach, used in some later chapters, is presented in detail. Chapter 3 is also a background chapter. It provides thorough descriptions of the development of infants and toddlers, organized into five areas of growth and development. The information selected in these pages is that which programmers particularly need to know; it is not a detailed treatment of all developmental issues. A final section of this chapter contains guidelines for stimulating and responding to children's developmental progress.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 deal with more practical matters in programs for babies. Chapter 4 describes the roles of teachers and caregivers, including the interpersonal atmosphere, records, staff and parent relationships, and specific, observable competencies. Chapter 5 concerns the physical setting

and child environment of a center. This includes the daily program, health and safety considerations, interest or work and play areas, and the child's peer environment. Chapter 6 presents a wide range of program activities. The emphasis here is not solely on the planned, curricular types of activities found in many resource materials but also on the more intangible yet important areas of independent play, peer play, learning with playthings, language exchanges, and other types of activities. Chapter 7 is an important chapter about issues and problems. It contains straightforward discussion about babies' adjustment and distress, exploration and safety, friction between babies, balancing caregiving and learning goals, and dealing with children who present special challenges.

The final section of *Infant and Toddler Programs* contains three specialized chapters. Chapter 8 describes features of parent-child infant education, which many professionals prefer over center-based or child-only programs. Several types of programs are discussed, and guidelines for each are presented. Chapter 9 deals with the many published model programs for infants and toddlers. It is especially appropriate for students who want to examine "what is out there" and for advanced professionals who wish to make comparative analyses among models. Finally, Chapter 10 is geared toward the program administrator. Suggestions that will help the program to function more smoothly are provided. These include staff and parent relations, program maintenance, and record keeping.

The three major sections of this text, taken together, should provide the reader with a wide range of background information, program details, and specific topics. Those who spend time with babies will appreciate how much more can be learned from the children and families themselves. In that sense, this book is just a beginning, an orientation upon which experience can build.

Buffalo, New York
August 1982

C. Z. C.

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This book was inspired by learners at both ends of the education spectrum—college students and babies. Their needs provided the framework and drive to launch this project some six years ago. The many practicing teachers and caregivers who attended workshops, discussed their concerns, and observed our programs all contributed to the content and shape of the text. Colleagues in this and related fields provided a critical perspective and demonstrated their interest in the project; this made my task especially satisfying.

The Early Childhood Research Center at the State University of New York at Buffalo was my primary workplace. The challenges and rewards I have experienced in working with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, students, staff members, parents, and colleagues have been a constant source of motivation to me. Their support over the past six years has been exceptionally valuable. The graduate assistants who managed the daily programs have taught me more than they realize. I thank each of them. The families who attended the Center and the children whose pictures appear across these pages have my gratitude and affection. Their personalities have become a part of this book and other related articles. My secretary, Joan, has my personal thanks for the time and enthusiasm she has given to this project.

I am indebted, as well, to the children and staff at the Cantalician Center for Learning in Buffalo, where I have come to understand the role of education and intervention for handicapped babies and their families. I thank them for their willingness to share their experiences and resources.

My children, Jason and Claudia, have my loving appreciation for all the years, from pregnancy to middle childhood, that they have cheerfully provided me with ideas, understanding, challenges, and skills. It is through them that I may very well have learned the most about the wonder of early learning and personal growth. My husband, Jerry, has contributed his faith and respect for this project, and I thank him now for all the time I have been able to devote to this book. Other members of my family and many of my friends helped to provide the confidence and extra support needed in such a project.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Emergence of Infant and Toddler Programs

Infant and toddler groups are, to put it humorously but accurately, the babies of the early childhood movement. Many teachers, parents, and care-givers have just begun to appreciate the potential of our littlest learners—the sociable infant and the active toddler—to gain from their experiences. Some are delighted and intrigued by the child under three; others are skeptical about whether professionals can effectively manage even the smallest group of tots in a way that helps them learn and develop well. Some feel overwhelmed at the prospect of babies in child care centers, and others question visits to parent-infant pairs in homes. But many embrace education for this group with a sense of excitement and see it as a base for the child's progress through the early years.

Programs for infants and toddlers may be a recent trend in child care, but today's preschool and day-care programs do have a long history behind them. Nursery schools for middle-class children have flourished for over fifty years, while Head Start and day-care efforts have continued to gain in public support since the 1950s. Early intervention programs have received even more recent attention and study.

These programs share a heritage in that each attempts to provide for the special needs of the very young child. To a certain extent, child growth and development, high-quality care, and active play define the basic concerns of all these preschool programs. In some, there is an increased emphasis on learning. For others, family education provides the backdrop for assuring child development. All reflect a faith in the value of good early experiences in helping children grow well, regardless of their particular educational orientation or supporting discipline.

Understanding how programs have developed helps programmers to support them. The teacher, parent, caregiver, or administrator becomes better able to articulate sound principles for interacting with babies, for structuring program activities, and for dealing with groups of very young children and their families. In other words, looking at these programs helps us to explain where infant and toddler education is today and where it needs to go in the future. This will help define the place of infant and toddler programs in the world of early education and child care.

The content of this chapter will provide an orientation to later, more practical guidelines in working with infants and toddlers. Several types of information will be discussed, all of which have contributed to recent belief in the potential of programs to benefit children and families. Basic principles of early childhood education are elaborated in an effort to provide a humanistic perspective to programs and guidelines for the use of play and materials. Findings from Head Start and day-care research can help the staff to explain program benefits and initiate family support and early intervention strategies. Trends from model infant programs and developmental theorists provide an intellectual rationale for applied practices, while new information from researchers gives programmers a better understanding of the nature of learning and social interaction in the first years of life.

Principles from Early Childhood Education

While the management of infant and toddler programs is somewhat different from the management of preschool programs, many basic early childhood education principles apply to both. Approaches to learning, materials, the interpersonal atmosphere, and child behavior are similar across ages and in center- or home-based programs. The same principles concerning the setting, materials, teacher's role, curriculum, structure, and goals are used in various types of programs. Infants require special, intimate, personalized care routines, while toddlers need a great deal of independent activity and a special organization of the setting and relations with peers, yet these characteristics are continuous with the needs of preschoolers.

The principles that have shaped early education contribute very significantly to the design and conduct of programs for babies. While professionals always need to reevaluate their assumptions and personal philosophy, the early childhood education heritage nevertheless provides a positive focus, a sound beginning to guide the programmer. Several clusters of principles will be explored: the child and the teacher; the group setting; learning; behavior and peer relations; goals; and the program and the family. (See Table One.)

The Child and the Teacher

One almost universal hallmark of traditional preschool programs is a view of the young child as a dynamic, whole individual. That is, no single aspect of the child's development receives overwhelming attention or is excluded from the others. In order to learn to walk, for example, the toddler must want to walk, must be physically ready to walk, and must accept the assistance of a friendly adult. To help the child, all these factors are tied

together. The traditional child-centered or child development approach also emphasizes that young children change and grow rapidly and dynamically. Their personalities are being newly formed, and experiences with others contribute to the growth of social skills on a daily basis. The child's emotional responses to parents, teachers, homes, and program settings become part of their individual histories and styles of relating to self and others. Babies' personal-social growth thus cannot be put aside; it is part of every interaction and within the realm of the program.

The implications of this child-centered perspective are that the young child needs personal nurturance and attention as an individual and a member of the group. These are the formative years, in which adults facilitate emerging personality. Children's feelings, their needs and concerns, are an important focus of the preschool program. They cannot be separated from the curriculum, and children cannot be treated as though they are identical in personal background and in response to the program. Each child has slightly different needs and interests that are valued and treated as special.

The child-centered approach also emphasizes that the teacher's role in the program is to guide and consult with the child, based upon expressions of need, interest, or confusion. The teacher helps the child to learn and grow in a way that is positive, supportive, and oriented toward success. The interpersonal atmosphere of the classroom is warm and inviting. Strengths are emphasized, and the child is treated with affection and regard. In difficult situations the teacher aims for understanding and increased learning about handling needs. Parents' perspectives about their child's personal and social styles contribute as well to the teacher's goals for the children and to his or her style of managing their behavior.

The curriculum also reflects the program's orientation toward the child as an active and individual learner. Children's interests and concerns are as important a source of activity planning as the teacher's goals. Momentary excitement about a child's filled container at the water table or a worm found in the playground is a valued part of the daily program, as is a toddler toy-grabbing situation or a baby's attempt to pick up and eat a piece of banana.

The Group Setting

As preschool programs have embraced notions about the whole, growing, active child, they have also developed a style for managing a group of busy, sociable little ones. A setting for young children usually contains a variety of sectioned work or play areas. They are divided to reduce distraction and organized to create minicenters that encourage particular activities



within them. Low, open shelving provides easy access for children, who can then select playthings, games, or learning materials by themselves. Teachers station themselves or circulate among these “interest areas,” helping children to understand concepts, solve problems, or make discoveries. Children work individually or with a small group of their peers.

In addition to providing an organized physical arrangement and materials, the setting is also organized into a daily program of events, such as open work or play time, snack time, clean-up time, a brief group period, and outdoor play. The child’s active, curious nature and concrete style of learning by doing dictate that most of the day be devoted to play that includes moving, doing, exploring, and learning. Playtimes are often robust and noisy, even for babies. Children are engaged in examining, experimenting, interacting, communicating, thinking, and even watching. Children themselves control the pace of learning.

Routine care is another important part of the setting. Routines include washing, eating, dressing, using the toilet, and arrival and departure. Since children are busy most of the day (even when resting), they are typically learning or consolidating skills and developing understandings and relationships at all times, even during routine activities. Some are mastering the hand-washing process; others are participating in one-to-one adult-child affection and babbling as in diapering or watching each other try out vegetables and dip at snack time.