

# PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN DAY CARE

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“In health or education programmes designed for the welfare of infants and young children the gains that the children make vanish unless parents are closely involved.”

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## A Discussion In The Light Of Some Recent Research

The following quotation appeared in a publication by E. M. Duvall:

### Thus a Child Learns.

Thus a child learns: by wiggling skills through his fingers and toes into himself, by soaking up habits and attitudes of those around him, by pushing and pulling his own world.

Thus a child learns: more through trial than error, more through pleasure than pain, more through experience than suggestion, more through suggestion than direction.

Thus a child learns: through affection, through love, through patience, through understanding, through belonging, through doing, through being.

Day by day the child comes to know a little bit of what you know, to think a little bit of what you think, to understand your understanding. That which you dream and believe and are, in truth, becomes the child.

As you perceive clearly or dully, as you think fuzzily or sharply, as you believe foolishly or wisely, as you dream drably or goldenly, as you are unworthy or sincere . . . thus a child learns. (1)

## Families

The family of 1977 is significantly different from the family of only 25 years ago. Profound changes have occurred in society through such things as urbanization, transportation and technological developments.

Change in itself is neither good nor bad but it does make tremendous demands on families as a whole and on family members as individuals.

The fragmentation of extended families, the mother working outside her home, separate patterns of social life for different age groups, supermarkets and television are some of the manifestations of progress that decrease opportunity for meaningful contact between children and people older and younger than themselves.

The increase in the number of homes from which the father is absent places greater responsibility and anxiety on young mothers. For some, the resulting pressures appear to grow beyond endurance.

It is much more difficult to learn how to rear children without the benefit of extended family support where society fails to prepare their young for confident parenthood and citizenship.

Even so, the nuclear family has aspirations to a quality of life for each of its members. How successful a family becomes in pursuit of its aspirations depends on the good health of its members, on customs and habits that involve the total life experience of its members and beliefs and morals which go back to previous generations. (2)

## Parents

It is now well established that the corner stone on which the infant's future will be built is the quality of his early parental (biological or psychological) relationships, particularly his mother/infant relationship. This information has been inadequately disseminated and still finds too little place in the education of parents.

Whilst in recent years much emphasis has been given to education of parents in the ante natal period, much of it is devoted to the skills . . . the techniques of mothercraft rather than developing an enjoyment and understanding of mothering and parenting. Parents who have insights and understanding of their own need for stability and security and have developed ability in their own adjustment are more likely to provide opportunities for the development of emotional security in their children. These parents know that children must learn to be loved and have the experience of being cherished before they can learn to love in return. (3)

James Coleman in his paper "Equality of Educational Opportunity" comments that children from advantaged groups assume that the environment will respond if they are able to affect it; children from disadvantaged groups do not make this assumption, but in many cases assume that nothing they do can affect the environment . . . it will give them benefits or withhold them but not as a consequence of their own action. This involves a lowered self esteem and the roots of a belief that whatever they do does not matter, that what parents do with or for their children is not important and also that what their children do has no meaning. (4).

It is necessary to understand the meaningfulness of the parents' behaviour and how the behaviour may be modified before attempting to intervene with infants and young children. The mechanism of maintenance of self-esteem has manifold consequences for the development of children. (5)



*Parental Involvement Critical*

## Infants and Young Children

The following is from a book by D. Burlingham & A. Freud:

The child has instinctive understanding of whatever emotion moves the mother; he watches her face and through imitation reproduces her facial expression. It is the same emotional interplay with the resulting imitation which is the powerful drive towards expression in speech. With the restriction of this interplay in the absence of the mother there is a definite lessening of the urge to speak. (6)

Unlike those who argue that a good educational programme for very young children can better society as a whole, Marvin Lazerson contends that the "use of education as a surrogate for Social reform" is a polite way of by-passing the real problems confronting society. (7)

### Head Start

The Head Start programmes began with parent and community involvement where in a number of areas mothers and neighbourhood workers were brought into the classrooms to share experiences with their children. Head Start derived from a theory of cultural deprivation that poor parents and migrants

cannot provide a foundation for success in the larger society. Lazerson comments that educational reformers begin with a fundamental hostility to the home and life style of the disadvantaged and seek to overcome the gap between social classes by creating a bridge between school and home. (8)

### Literature Available

Much of the literature available generally indicates that Head Start came too late in their lives to prepare pre-school children for school. Some children's IQ's did increase as they participated in the experiments but their score tended to lapse back again, or even to get lower, after they entered school. Under the impression that Head Start was too late, research workers began exploring the effects of cognitive stimulation on babies. (9) Studies at the Meninger Foundation found positive correlations between the mother's talking to the baby and the baby's vocalization and his later IQ. These findings probably reflect the mother's affective response to the communication initiated by the baby as well as the baby's response to the mother. This is what Kempe describes as the mother turning the baby on, and the baby turning the mother on. (10)

## Research Projects

A research project at the Children's Hospital, Washington, aims at giving the mother help closely related to the needs of her child, in the belief that if the gains from a good beginning are to be maintained the mother must be helped to understand his needs and to use community resources to strengthen family life. She will also receive training and education that will develop her own potentialities, confidence and feelings of reward in supporting her child's development.

"The programme is directed to the development of competence and skill based on enhanced self esteem . . . we have ample evidence that 'simple' intervention does not stick. Parents **must be involved** in the programme for the changes in the children to be meaningful." (11)

One of the reasons for setting up the programme was the frequent observation of the effects on infants of being socialized for failure, by mothers whose own life experiences had left them with the expectation that nothing is ever going to be any good.

Ira Gorgon's experiments in teaching indigent mothers how to stimulate their children is directly concerned with their mothers' sense of personal worth and competence.

It seems that researchers are working on the theory that if parents can begin to identify with healthy attitudes, to imitate child rearing practices which reward them and are significant to their own culture, they will develop into more confident parents and their relationships with their children will contribute to fuller family development.

Schaefer, in the results of a programme of home teaching, produces data suggesting that "the quality of early maternal care has significant effect on a child's adjustment, task oriented behaviour and mental test scores at three years. If these findings can be replicated, they have major significance for future programmes of prevention of social, emotional and cognitive

deficits in children . . . Their credibility is increased by related finding that supplementary teaching and the adequacy of maternal care bear similar relationships to the child's adjustment and mental test scores at three years." (12)

The Brookline Early Education Project (BEEP) was initiated by Dr R. L. Sperber "to provide resources for parents in their role as teachers of the young child". He was concerned about the number of children entering school with a previously undetected learning handicap and who became caught in a cycle of school failure. The BEEP programme emerged in 1973 and provides comprehensive diagnostic and educational services for 225 families, beginning in the antenatal period and continuing through to school beginning. The aim of the diagnostic service administered by a paediatrician, a public health nurse and a psychologist is to ensure that all physical and educational han-

dicaps are detected at the earliest possible time. The important aspect of the regular examinations is to enable parents to be well informed regarding the uniqueness of their child and its patterns. The aid of the educational service is to provide resources for parents in their role as teachers. To increase parental understanding of their child and enjoyment of their roles in socializing their child for success.

The BEEP educational philosophy is oriented towards assisting the family to arrange an environment within which the child can exercise his natural talents.

There are three programme levels which differ but each is directed towards full family involvement and each provides similar basic education services. (13)

Hunt has shown too that Head Start is too late even when provided for disadvantaged children of 3 or 4 years of age. The programmes call

Competence Skills



for high teacher/pupil ratio, are very expensive and are too late in a child's life to overcome the incompetence inculcated during the first 3 or 4 years. He describes a number of research models where emphasis is on teaching the mothers such things as how to read a story to her child with enjoyment, talking to her child whilst performing daily chores — peeling potatoes and washing, etc. Emphasis is on interpreting to the mother what the kindergarten teacher is doing, and why, and with what expectations. Emphasis is placed on helping adults and small children to re-experience pleasure in the simple things.

The main purpose of these demonstrative studies of teaching mothers to be more effective teachers at home is to focus upon the gains in measured competence of the infants, but it has also

**enriched the lives of the mothers or both parents.** (14) That such simple measures as picnics, visits to the fire station, the park, etc., with listening and two way conversation when demonstrated to lowly motivated mothers can sometimes achieve greater gains than professional or expert talk alone.

The Champaign-Urbana Parent and Child Centre project as described by Badger (1971) in most enthusiastic terms, was geared to improve parent self esteem, to demonstrate to parents rewards to be had from the children's gains. Again the results showed that the enrichment of parents lives was concomitant with such improvement in the children's progress as increased attention span, and an increased frustration tolerance in solving problems. Badger states quite categorically that **any programme that directs itself to the education of**

**the parents hits the real target.** If parents feel a sense of defeat and hopelessness, so will their children; but if they exude a feeling of confidence this will be transmitted to their children. (15)

### Conclusion

If day care centres are coming it seems then that they must be "designed to re-involve and strengthen the family as the primary and proper agent for making human beings human." (16)

It means that parents and other significant people from the child's environment must play a part in the day to day activities of the centre. It also means that the programme is not entirely confined to the centre but can reach out to the homes and to the locality so that the community is involved in activities with its children.

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