



7. Needed: A New Early Childhood Educator

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A LOT of work remains to be done in our society if we are to realize the hopes that we have for our young children. We need to think beyond the services that professional educators customarily provide for children to a broader educational context if we are to make significant improvements in those services and in the lives of our children.

This article includes a partial description of this broader educational context, proposes a new role for the professional educator, and suggests steps to take toward development of this role.

A Broader Educational Context

Our main aim as educators should be to see that the environment in which each child grows up contributes as much as possible to his full development as a human being. Children and their families need consistently accessible, better planned and co-ordinated agency services than are presently available. Above all, services to children and their families must be provided under only

one main category: young children—and not just for the “disadvantaged,” the children of mothers on welfare, “high potential” children, or the children of working mothers. Young children are those ranging in age from birth (or earlier, in the case of prenatal and “pre-parent” education) to age four or five, since these are the children for whom the fewest provisions are now made.²

More Than Schooling

The enhancement of child development is to be carried out through a wide variety of means, each adapted to the particular requirements of the situation in which the child is living. The approaches to be employed could include all of the following, either alone or in combination: “pre-parent” (that is, for high schoolers) and parent education and training to improve child-rearing practices and attitudes; group child care and day school settings; a wide range of health, recreation, and educational services; and the use of mass media.

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² The need for improvement of, and articulation with, existing educational programs for children age five through grade three is acknowledged. However, the first steps are to be taken in areas where there is not as highly organized and institutionalized an operation as the public schools represent.

Procedures might run the gamut from intensive and systematic training to the general improvement of the environmental setting in which children and their parents live. Instruction could occur in classroom-type settings or during field-oriented activities taking place wherever children and/or their parents are located—in homes, on the streets and in the fields, in stores and other business establishments, as well as in churches and other agencies.

The current models for early childhood education, as exemplified by Head Start Planned Variation, do not offer a full enough range of options, even though some models do involve going out to parents rather than merely having children brought into centers for group instruction. We need to go even further to tailor services to local situations. We also need more professionals who can adapt their activities to these situations, and especially to the desires of the parents, without losing sight of what will bring out the most and best in children.

Parent Power

Parents should have a central role in choosing and carrying out the kinds of programs which are provided for their children. Major emphasis should therefore be placed on helping parents: (a) to clarify the goals and aspirations they have for their children, and (b) to come to understand the alternative ways in which they can get help in achieving these goals. A parental role in decision making will be viable only if parents and other local community members are the real locus of power to choose what services are to be implemented. Parents need to be well enough informed to choose among the "experts" whose help they might engage. A wide range of options must be actually accessible to them. For meaningful participation, parents must be able to wield strong influence on crucial program decisions. Obviously, the common practice of having various (governmental) agencies decide what is "good" for various groups of children, and then trying to get their parents to agree, must be abandoned.

More Inclusive Objectives

Goals for young children's development will have to be framed in terms that are broad enough to include a wide variety of specific ways in which children can realize these objectives. Allowance should be made for many *equivalent* ways of achieving the same levels of development on individual time schedules. For example, the poor do not necessarily need middle class traits and blacks do not have to become "white" to be competent;³ language development does not mean just standard English, and "readiness" for the first grade (or to begin learning to read) should not be limited to a given score on a readiness test battery.

Burton White's list of characteristics of the competent young child offers a good example of a statement of developmental goals that are general enough to be inclusive of a wide variety of individual styles and yet explicit enough to serve as a basis for obtaining agreement on whether or not a given child has achieved them.⁴ In his research, White has developed an observationally-based list of abilities which distinguish "competent" six-year-olds from their less competent peers. These abilities are clustered in categories with some familiar labels, and could serve as early childhood program objectives.

A. "Non-Social" Abilities

1. Linguistic, including grammatical capacity, vocabulary, articulation, and extensive use of expressive language
2. Intellectual, including sensing of dissonance, anticipating consequences, dealing with abstractions (e.g., numbers, letters, rules), taking the perspective of another, and making interesting associations
3. Executive: planning and carrying out

³ See, for example: Stephen S. Baratz and Joan C. Baratz. "Early Childhood Intervention: The Social Science Base of Institutional Racism." *Harvard Educational Review* 70: 29-50; February 1970.

⁴ Burton L. White and others. "Competence in Young Children." Handout for 1969 symposium presentation to Society for Research in Child Development. Mimeographed at Harvard University. *Research in Education* ED 032124.

multi-stepped activities and using resources effectively

4. Attentional: maintaining attention to an immediate task while at the same time monitoring peripheral events.

B. "Social" Abilities

1. Getting and maintaining attention of adults in socially acceptable ways

2. Using adults as resources

3. Expressing both affection and hostility to adults

4. Leading and following peers

5. Expressing both affection and hostility to peers

6. Competing with peers

7. Showing pride in one's accomplishments

8. Involvement in adult role-play behavior, or otherwise expressing desire to grow up.

The statements of objectives in this list are made at the intermediate level (see Frost, pp. 796-801), and many other intermediate and instructional goals are, of course, implied by them.

A New Educator Role

In order to realize the kinds of early childhood program objectives described here, it will be necessary to replace many of the current approaches to working with young children (and their families) or to coordinate such approaches into fresh configurations. For example, new policies enacted will have to preclude the mere extension downward of the main types of instructional programs now common at the preschool and kindergarten levels. Such extensions downward have not contributed significantly in the past to the enhancement of any children. Policies also must not foster any further attempts to take children away from their parents in order to make them more like the "mainstream." At the very least, the "both-and" philosophy exemplified by the Navajo-controlled Rough Rock Demonstration School in Arizona must guide the work with children of ethnic minority groups.

If the above early childhood program objectives are to be realized, we need to develop a new professional role (and extend some old ones); and we need expanded concepts of the human being and of human development. This role might be called Child Development Specialist or Children's Advocate, a position which has already been proposed, for example, by the Office of Child Development. This is, of course, a position which many persons may believe they already fill. Whatever it is called, this position should be occupied by a new kind of professional who knows how to locate and coordinate the resources needed to foster full human development. There are relatively few people who are now equipped to do this, or at least there are very few who have been in situations that have released them to play this role.

The Children's Advocates would be a new breed of professionals unlike most classroom teachers, child psychologists, adult educators, social case workers, recreation workers, and parents. They would, however, exemplify many of the best qualities of all of these. Some child development specialists, for example, would serve the more familiar roles of teacher, home visitor, and staff trainer. With extended capabilities, they will be able to extend the scope of these roles beyond the limits of classroom and living room to connect with resources in the wider community.

However, in the Children's Advocate we would have a professional worker who is enough detached from the usual institutional involvements to be able to consider the total environment. He would also help children (and adults) gain access to developmental nurturance in a variety of settings by working with and through other individuals and agencies. By being free of direct administrative ties to the educational and welfare agencies, such a worker should be better able to view the whole environment in which children live. Thus he should be enabled to see the gaps and omissions as well as the overlapping and duplication in efforts to improve children's welfare and to take appropriate action. The Children's Advocates will

be able to help parents and children get better services from these agencies, to make arrangements for the provision of services not yet available, and to help policy makers to strengthen legislative and administrative structures.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE (Child Development Specialist)

The Person Most Directly Related to Work with Children

1. Possesses an understanding of human behavior and development (in both adults and children) that is broad enough and deep enough to encompass:

a. A wide variety of ways of developing adequately (e.g., individual learning styles, sense modality preferences, timing and pacing), along

b. A continuum of stages or sequences in which some aspects of development are prerequisite to others, across

c. A wide range of dimensions of human characteristics (whole range of ways of knowing and being human, including language, science, self-knowledge, and morality), and resulting in

d. A wide variety of personalities and styles of living (reflecting cross-cultural differences as well as individual differences within cultures).

This understanding of human development must be of such a nature that it is easily translatable into practice in a wide variety of everyday situations, including school classroom and day care settings.

2. Understands the conditions under which the various dimensions of human development take place in such a way as to be alert to sources of developmental nourishment in many aspects of a child's environment. This involves two main things:

a. Understanding the nurturing potential of a wide variety of actual resources, both human and material, and their locales (e.g., in homes with parents and siblings, through other adults and agencies, in the physical environment in which the community is located, and through a wide range

of materials and equipment, including the mass media)

b. The kinds of interactions ("developmental tasks") with these resources in which children can engage to enhance their development (e.g., places besides classrooms to encounter examples of concepts and relationships; to find opportunities to discriminate properties, classify, seriate, and count; to have materials and equipment to manipulate; and to be with persons who will support and guide exploration and inquiry).

The Person Most Directly Related to Work with Other Adults

3. Possesses an understanding of cultural structures and functions in society as a basis for adapting own behavior (approaches to clients, strategies for working, etc.) to the requirements of particular situations and settings. Thus is able to help parents, teachers, older children, and other adults:

a. Grow in their understanding of human development and the conditions under which it takes place

b. Identify and clarify goals for young children and understand the requirements and implications of various alternative courses of action in pursuance of these goals (including translation of general goals of development—e.g., B. White's "competence" criteria—into various subcultural equivalents)

c. Adopt or develop simple yet valid approaches to monitoring children's developmental progress (or lack of it) and/or understand assessments made by others

d. Become alert to potentially nourishing resources in the environment (both human and material) and fruitful "developmental tasks" for children to carry out in relation to these resources

e. Translate nurturing instructional practices (e.g., providing materials, guiding, modeling, providing feedback, etc.) into a variety of equivalent approaches or combinations in order to facilitate tailoring to many different situations and settings

f. Decide on promising courses of action, whether starting fresh or filling in and rearranging within a context of existing programs, and mustering the necessary financial

resources, administrative and policy backing, and training of personnel involved through local, state, and federal channels.

The Person Related to Work with Both Children and Adults

4. Possesses deep insight into self as person, understands his own main strengths and weaknesses, knows what effects he has on others, understands and is aware of what attitudinal biases might influence work with children and others.

5. Understands conditions (e.g., of interpersonal and organizational "climate") under which it is possible for self and others to be relatively free from unnecessary restraints to give fullest attention to needs of children. Can operate as autonomous agent in complex situations and help set scene for others to develop similar autonomy.

6. Can accept and value others' subcultural and individual variations in behavior and development without relinquishing high standards and expectations for their future development. For example, can accept parents' goals for their children without either belittling them or accepting low levels of expectation, or can accept parents' and teachers' approaches to working with children and still find ways of bringing about changes in such approaches that would be to children's benefit.

Some Next Steps

In order to support the development of this new professional role, we need a concerted effort on the part of professional organizations, researchers, and other supporting agencies to build the role of the Child Development Specialist and to prepare people to fill it. This means intensive development and research efforts coordinated by task forces within NAEYC, ACEI, EKNE, ASCD, and other organizations. It means that university-based and other types of professional staff development programs will have to be extended and created along these lines, and closely related to research efforts aimed at developing more inclusive and potent conceptions of the human being and of human development.

Simultaneously, we need to create a demand for people trained in this way to serve as early childhood workers—whether as teachers, children's advocates, or staff and parent trainers—who possess an expanded perspective on the forces that shape children's development.

Finally, we need further studies to strengthen our conceptualizations of human development and the conditions that nourish it, such as those reflected in the four views summarized by Milly Cowles. There are two interrelated tasks here. The first is to extend each view so that it covers dimensions of development now omitted and to test each view cross-culturally so that a full range of equivalent ways of developing and learning in various subcultures has been clearly identified. This work would help us to avoid problems caused by the relative narrowness of our notions of what adequate development of language, intellectual and social abilities, and self-concept entails.

The second task is to translate each view into program procedures in much more valid and imaginative ways. Right now the educational programs based upon any one of the four views are limited largely to activities very similar to the laboratory procedures of the researcher. In many cases the educational application is more narrowly conceived than the research strategy, as for example in the giving of tangible rewards as the main source of reinforcement in a behavior modification approach or in the use of Piagetian "experiments" as mastery exercises with children.

In our desire to help children become what we would like them to become, we tend to overlook two important considerations. One is that children's development is continually being shaped by forces that are only partially grasped in our psychologies. The second is that, with the rapidity of change in the world today, we may not be able to specify what a person should *be*, or what he should be able to *do*. Educational engineering based on too narrow a view of mankind's potentialities may limit or endanger mankind's future. □

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