

## The Child

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# Education and Children's Ways of Knowing

I will begin with a disclaimer: I am not a librarian. I cannot provide authoritative information about library services to children, of either a descriptive or prescriptive nature. I am not a child development specialist. I cannot provide authoritative information about the nature of childhood. I cannot nor will I attempt to present the characteristics of the various stages that children achieve at particular age levels, which enable developmental planning of appropriate services for young children.

My field is education; I am an early childhood educator. I am interested in the nature of schools for young children — the purposes that these schools serve, the activities that take place in these schools (often in the name of achieving these purposes), and in the personnel that staff these schools: teachers and others. I am concerned with the interactions that take place among the individuals who are related to these schools — children, teachers and parents — and with what is transmitted and created as a result of those interactions.

I have identified my profession as that of *educator*, and identified the artifacts and activities with which I am concerned as related to *schools*. Nevertheless, education occurs in many places other than schools. Churches educate, as do the armed forces, many corporations, museums and — probably the most potent educational institution of them all — the family. There are even those who say that libraries educate, despite the fact that libraries have often been conceived of as repositories of knowledge. However, accepting (at least tentatively) the proposition that

libraries do serve educational purposes, they can be studied as educational institutions by comparing and contrasting them with other educational institutions and examining the educational processes within them.

There are many advantages that libraries have over schools as educational institutions; there are also disadvantages. The library has the advantage (or disadvantage, depending on your point of view) of being an institution that serves a voluntary population. There are no compulsory library attendance laws; persons who enter libraries do so of their own volition, to achieve their own purposes. Furthermore, there are no educational curricula for libraries. Since librarians are not expected to instruct, they are not faulted if children do not learn as a result of library attendance. They are not concerned with "covering" a body of knowledge with all children; they are not evaluated by children's scores on standardized achievement tests. In addition, members of the community will not exhort libraries to go "back to basics."

With these advantages come some disadvantages. Since children are not compelled to attend these institutions, they must somehow be enticed to attend. The community will not support transportation for them; special hours are not set during which all children must be in libraries.

There are undoubtedly other advantages and disadvantages that a library has and a school does not, but the point is that schools and libraries serve a common purpose: to educate children. Thus, there are parallels that enable one institution to learn from the other. An expert in one field of education, such as that concerned with early schooling, might therefore be able to contribute some knowledge to practitioners in another field which could be adapted and made relevant.

I would like to review panoramically a number of issues relating to the education of young children. The first set concerns conflicting conceptions of early childhood curriculum that have been perpetuated throughout the history of early childhood education. The second refers to related thrusts of these conceptions of child development theory. The third involves conceptions of knowledge and how they fit into the educational enterprise. Finally, some inferences will be drawn from these materials which may be useful.

While the process of educating young children is probably as old as the human race, the establishment of schools specifically designed for young children is a relatively recent development. Its 150-year-old history can be characterized by both continuities and discontinuities. Modern ideas have developed and replaced older ideas, but vestiges of the old continue to intrude into modern practices.

The continuities of early childhood education can be seen in the per-

sistent concern of early childhood programs for one of two types of goals for young children. One set of programs has been concerned with the support or stimulation of growth or development. The other set has been concerned with achieving specific learnings. Conceptualization of growth and importance attributed to particular learnings have changed over time and differ from program to program.<sup>1</sup>

## HISTORICAL CONCEPTIONS OF CURRICULUM

Four major historical movements can be traced in early childhood education. The earliest conception of a curriculum designed especially for young children can be found in the work of Friedrich Froebel. The program generated by Froebel was an outgrowth of his views on the nature of childhood and the nature of the world. Froebel viewed development as occurring in stages, with later stages of development dependent upon the fulfillment of earlier stages. In the early stages, knowledge was viewed as growing as a result of actions of the child, an idea similar to the "operations" of Piagetian theory. Education was viewed as originating in actions; living, doing and knowing were considered to be connected processes. According to Froebel, insight and knowledge developed concurrently with the creative processes, a concept still held by many contemporary early childhood educators.

To Froebel, the world was a living work and a manifestation of God, containing a universal order that was all-pervading, self-cognizant and everlasting. Man's responsibility was to understand that order and his role within it. Froebel defined the goal of education as an understanding of the unity of man, God and nature. Froebel used the metaphor of the garden to illustrate that an education should follow the nature of the child, but not mold or impose upon it. He outlined a curriculum using symbolic activities, which would allow the child's potential to unfold as he was presented with representations of Froebel's basic conception of the order of the world. Froebel used "gifts" as curriculum materials to illustrate his concern for symbolic learning. The first gift was a set of worsted balls. These symbolized the concept of the unity of God, man and nature. The second gift consisted of a ball, a cube and a cylinder. These symbolized unity, diversity and the mediation of opposites.<sup>2</sup>

The second major conception of childhood education was developed by Maria Montessori. Montessori's view of human development was not unlike that of Froebel's. However, her conception of appropriate educational activities for young children was quite different. For Froebel the symbolic meanings of materials and activities were important; Montessori

placed importance on the physical attributes of educational materials and on the skills to be attained from their proper use.

Montessori was concerned with increasing young children's sensitivity to impressions. She wanted them to improve the uses that they made of these sensory impressions through information processing techniques. The skills needed in practical life situations and in basic academic areas were also important. To this end, Montessori provided materials which differed in their visual, auditory, tactile, baric and thermal qualities. Children were taught to discriminate among different intensities or pitches of sounds made by objects enclosed in a box. They were taught to discriminate among different colors, sizes and weights of materials. They learned precise ways to open a door, dust their classroom and pour a glass of water.<sup>3</sup>

While Froebel's program was seen as supportive of development in general, Montessori's program was essentially an instructional one, although the instruction was mostly of an indirect kind. The Montessori directress used a prepared environment, with self-correcting materials. These were offered to children in specific activity sequences, very much like individualized and programmed instruction found in schools today. The goals of each set of activities were clearly spelled out. Specific equipment and activities were developed to aid in the achievement of each set of goals, whether the goals were to learn to discriminate colors, distinguish sizes, wash one's hands, add, or write the letters of the alphabet.

The third historical movement in early childhood education was the creation of the nursery school. This paralleled the fourth movement, the reformation of the kindergarten into the progressive kindergarten program in use today.

The nursery school was developed prior to World War I to serve as an avenue for social reform. While it could not diminish the inequities of British society, the nursery school could at least alleviate some of the consequences of these inequities for urban slum children. The social purposes of the nursery school seem to have been forgotten in its continued development. As they expanded, these schools had to depend on tuition payments from their students to support their own survival. Thus, they became middle-class institutions.

The nursery school, much as the Froebelian kindergarten, was seen as a supporter of development. Activities, however, were viewed less as representative of higher-order relationships among man, God and the universe. Instead, they were intended to be a way of helping children cope with their immediate life situations. An understanding of the world around them was stressed as an important element of education for these children, as was development of the imagination. Nurturing was a concept under-

lying the educational and social goals of the school. The program contained activities to teach self-caring skills and perceptual discrimination, but these activities were less specific than those of the Montessori program. The focus of the program was on play, expressive activities, and an avoidance of premature imposition.<sup>4</sup>

These emphases were also to be found in the reformed kindergarten. Although a behavioral emphasis undergirded some curriculum constructions of the 1920s, the reformed kindergarten manifested a concern for free play, integrating activities into projects, and providing children with the means for self-expression. This program has been based on assumptions regarding the young child's use of play as a vehicle for learning at this stage of development.<sup>5</sup>

As stated earlier, two basic thrusts in early childhood education have influenced programs of early childhood education to the present. One thrust began with Froebel; the other began with Montessori. Each of these two foundational thrusts occurred independent of (and even predated) the development of the child study movement. The establishment of the movement to study childhood scientifically had a major impact on later curricula, especially those in the nursery school and progressive kindergarten. This movement, currently conceived as child development, continues to provide an important resource for curriculum construction today. The various approaches to child study or child development theory have been used to suggest innovative educational practices and to provide a rationale for existing practices. It is important to note that they did not in any major way change the two thrusts — a concern for growth and a concern for learning — that had already been established in the field.

## EARLY EDUCATION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

The establishment of the field of child study, which later became the field of child development, paralleled a major shift in the field of psychology. That field changed from its view that human beings might best be studied through introspection or speculation, to a view that human beings might best be studied through direct observation. This was a move in orientation from psychology as a form of philosophy to psychology as a form of empirical science. According to D. Bruce Gardner, four major streams of child study thought can be identified which have contributed to the establishment of contemporary child development theory. These are: the behaviorist stream, the normative-descriptive stream, the field theory stream, and the psychoanalytic stream.<sup>6</sup> Until the mid-1960s the norma-

tive-descriptive and psychoanalytic streams probably had the greatest influence on early childhood curriculum development.

Sigmund Freud, whose concern for personality development provided the cornerstone of psychoanalytic theory, viewed the child in his development as moving through a series of psychosexual stages to maturity. Problems arising at any stage of development could lead to a thwarting of the achievement of maturity. Immature acts were controlled in the adult through unconscious mechanisms. The view of Freud and his followers led early childhood specialists to view education as emotional prophylaxis. The nursery school could limit the major frustrations of childhood and provide a means for the catharsis of difficult experience, helping to rid the child of the results of these experiences by playing them out. The teacher was viewed as a supporter of development, i.e., a provider of activities for the expression of emotions, either through dramatic play, crafts or other expressive activities. This role was consistent with the ideas of both Froebel and Freud.

Arnold Gesell and his colleagues are probably the best known of the normative-descriptive child development specialists. This approach to child study was concerned with providing descriptions of the normal processes of development for children. Samples of motor behavior, social behavior, intellectual behavior and language behavior were collected through careful observations. These samples were organized according to the ages of the children observed. The masses of information were then collated into a set of averages and ranges of behavior, organized by age, and used to establish "norms."<sup>7</sup> Using these norms, one could plot the rate of growth for all children. One could also identify the relationship of a single child's development to a total population of children of comparable age, thus characterizing children as slow, average or fast developers.

The conception of the nature of development underlying the normative-descriptive approach was similar to that of Froebel's view of "unfolding." It was believed that while one could nurture or thwart development, in the final analysis, the basis for the total development of the child was predetermined. The role of early education conceived from this point of view was to follow and support rather than influence development. It was felt that only frustration could occur from pushing a child beyond his capability.

During the first half of the twentieth century, most early childhood programs were consistent with a normative-descriptive, or maturationist, point of view. Early childhood education did not identify specific learning tasks as educational goals, and was generally seen as supportive of development. It was not that educationists were unconcerned with the effects

of environment on the young child or with what the young child learned; rather, the concern was to provide the best possible set of environmental conditions in support of the child's unfolding development. It was believed that a loosely constructed, supportive educational environment would allow the child to set his own pace and find his own ways toward whatever goals were desirable. Given this point of view, the focus of early education was on providing appropriate experiences and activities for the children. The quality of these activities, rather than the resultant learning outcomes, were the basis for curriculum evaluation.

In a recent article, Kohlberg and Mayer identified three thrusts of education: "romantic," "cultural transmission" and "progressive." Underlying the romantic thrust is a conception of development as a process of unfolding. Education resulting from this thrust is seen as essentially a support for development. The cultural transmission thrust is concerned with transmitting elements of the culture from the older generation to the younger generation. There is little concern for developmental theory within this thrust; however, there is a great deal of concern for how children learn. The third, progressive thrust views development as occurring through an interaction of the individual with his environment, with the individual essentially creating his own development through his actions on his environment.<sup>8</sup>

Using this tripartite view of education, one could conclude that the mainstream of early childhood education during the first six decades of the twentieth century was primarily in the romantic thrust. However, as suggested earlier, elements of the cultural transmission thrust can be found in the "conduct curriculum" of the progressive kindergarten of the 1920s. During this period the focus of early childhood classes was primarily on activities. Many of these were the activities of the original Froebelian curriculum, modified in accordance with research findings or to conform more closely to American predispositions. Such activities included paper-folding and weaving, paper-cutting, picture-drawing, singing and playing games.

The essential belief in the nursery school point of view is the importance of growth. Growth was seen as "development in power and control: control of the body, a growing power to deal with the environment and to understand their relationship to it, with a resulting harmony in functioning."<sup>9</sup> To this end, teachers were to become students of child behavior. They were urged to observe children closely in order to identify the universal impulses and stages of development. What they learned from these observations could be fed back into the curriculum of their classrooms.

## NEWER CURRICULUM CONSTRUCTIONS

With the 1960s came a heightened concern for social justice for persons of poor economic circumstances and for members of minority groups. It was believed that, under the proper conditions, all persons could join in the mainstream of an affluent society.

A number of formulations supported the potential impact of preschool programs of compensatory education on disadvantaged children, as children from poor and minority backgrounds were called. There was the formulation of "a hidden curriculum" in middle-class child-rearing practices that was absent in lower-class child-rearing practices. It was suggested that there were different language codes among the advantaged and the disadvantaged. These and other ideas supported the formulation of new preschool programs of compensatory education. Other support for these programs came from developmental research and theory which suggested that intervention in the life of the child would have the greatest long-term effect.

At about this time, the work of Jean Piaget, which had been accumulating for decades, began to receive the attention of American psychologists and educators. Piaget's theories described children's cognitive development as moving through a series of stages. Achievement at later stages of development was considered to be dependent upon successful progress through the earlier stages. The early experiences of the child were seen as having a significant impact on his total intellectual development. This should not, however, suggest that direct instruction was viewed as effective in moving children through these stages. The child had to construct his developing knowledge. In his classic formulation, *Intelligence and Experience*,<sup>10</sup> Hunt brought together a wealth of data from many sources which supported the idea that the experience of the human organism, and especially those experiences in the early childhood period, had a major impact on the developing intellect. The young child's intelligence, he suggested, is not predetermined genetically at birth; rather, it resulted to a great degree from the range of environmental encounters provided him. Bloom's analysis of test data on intelligence, mentioned earlier, suggested that a great deal of the variance in later tests of intelligence could be accounted for by variance in tests before the age of five.<sup>11</sup>

New power was seen in the impact of early experience and hence in the provision of early education. The limits of growth were no longer considered predetermined. An interacting approach to early education, conceiving of education as stimulating rather than supporting development, began to replace the maturationist view as the central thrust of early childhood education. This is what Kohlberg and Mayer have called the



“progressive” thrust. In addition, intellectual as well as social, emotional and physical growth were seen as central to early education. Changes took place in psychologists’ and educators’ views of what areas of growth were important. Changes also occurred in opinion of elements considered important in influencing or determining the ultimate development of the individual. However, the essential concern for enhancing development rather than for achieving specific learning outcomes remained.

Another thrust affecting programs of early education grew out of the laboratory work of behaviorist psychologists. These researchers had been concerned with manipulating the motivational sets of children by modifying behavior through reinforcement. They were also concerned with analyzing complex tasks into simpler components that could be taught separately and later reintegrated, creating complex behaviors through “shaping” and “chaining.” The behaviorists developed a technology that could be used to teach specific skills to young children. This work evolved into a set of curriculum proposals for the education of young children consistent with a cultural transmission thrust. Behavioral principles were used as the basis for systematic programs to teach specific skills and performance to all children, including the young and the handicapped.<sup>12</sup>

A host of new curriculum concepts and program models were developed during this period. While each program is unique, most have some essential elements in common so that they can be grouped together into curriculum models.

A number of different schemes have been designed to identify the similarities and differences among curricula. Kohlberg and Mayer suggest that programs differ on the basis of ideologies. Identifying three different ideological positions, they categorize the range of educational programs available. The Educational Products Information Exchange (EPIE) report on early childhood education identifies three views of human development: a behavioral-environmental view, a maturational-nativistic view, and a comprehensive-interactional view.<sup>13</sup> The views of human development presented in the EPIE document are similar to the ideological stands of Kohlberg and Mayer (the behavioral-environmental view paralleling the cultural-transmission ideology, the maturational-nativistic view paralleling the romantic ideology, and the comprehensive-interactional view paralleling the progressive ideology), which might suggest that psychological theories in actuality represent ideological positions.

Conventional wisdom suggests that early childhood programs grow out of child observation. Harriet Johnson, one of the pioneers of the American nursery school movement, suggests that building nursery school programs requires: “an ordered analysis of observed behavior; the out-

lining of stages and phases in development; and the conception of certain interests and impulses dominant in early childhood. . . . It must also assume a logical relationship between the trends in behavior and the educational process."<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, while Johnson saw nursery school curriculum as following the interests of children, it was not expected that these interests would be followed blindly. Rather, the nursery school teacher, in constructing the curriculum must "know the attitudes, interests, and capacities she believes it desirable to foster, why she considers them important, and by what methods she proposes to further their development among children in her care."<sup>15</sup> Johnson observed young children, as did Froebel and Montessori. The programs that they generated were very different from one another. Were the children they observed so different from one another, or was the difference in what the observers brought with them? How each viewed children seems to have grown out of different conceptions of what was important — values. And it was the difference in values that led to different programs rather than the differences observed in children. Conceptions of child study are a result of ideological positions as much as is early childhood education.

Not only are conceptions of childhood and of school curriculum a result of ideological positions, but the conceptions of knowledge used by schools are also a result of ideological positions. Analysis of the three educational thrusts identified by Kohlberg and Mayer reveals that each position contains within it a different conception of knowledge. The "cultural transmission" thrust views knowledge as essentially the accumulated wisdom of the past organized in such a way that it can be handed down from one generation to another. This conception of knowledge is much like that referred to by Friere when he talks about a "banking" system of education.<sup>16</sup> Teachers and others make deposits of knowledge (often in the form of books, lectures and media presentations) in schools and libraries. Students can then go to these institutions and withdraw this knowledge by reading a book, viewing a film or listening to a presentation. Thus, knowledge is organized into finite elements that can be passed on from one person to another, or from one generation to another.

The "romantic" thrust views the source of knowledge as being within the individual. It may be seen as instinctive or as natural patterns of actions which must be allowed to unfold. From this point of view, what is transmitted is not as important as what is allowed to develop within the child. Talent, intuition and other forms of natural predispositions are the bases of knowledge. Natural contacts within the environment allow the child's knowledge to unfold. Schools educate by increasing the possibility of contacts with the educative environment, but there should be no further intervention.

The “progressive” thrust contains within it a constructivist conception of knowledge. Knowledge neither emerges from within nor is transmitted from without. Rather, knowledge is constructed by each individual through interactions. The child or adult receives information from the outside world through his senses. This information is related to intellectual schemes that the individual has previously constructed. If the information fits easily into those schemes, it is assimilated. If, on the other hand, the information does not fit, then the schemes may have to be modified or even discarded. New schemes would then be constructed to take their place. This is the dual process of “assimilation” and “accommodation” that Piaget talks about.

Each of these conceptions of knowledge has evolved as a result of viewing children in schools. They are each inadequate in referring to all the forms of knowledge that society has created and that children need to know. Even when combined, they leave much to be desired in explaining how knowledge is generated, verified and transmitted in society. Piaget posits several forms of intellectual knowledge only, and others have identified broader realms of knowledge that need to be the basis for school programs.<sup>17</sup> Each of these conceptions of knowledge, however, is consistent with a conception of children and schooling, and has been used to justify an educational point of view.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR LIBRARIANS

Libraries are not schools. Thus, what implications could these ideas about schools have for libraries? It seems that before these implications can be identified, certain assumptions need to be clarified. Libraries have been considered here as educational institutions. (One could probably make a case for libraries not serving educational functions; for example, libraries might be considered as recreational institutions.) Libraries, however, should not become more like schools; conceptions of curriculum would be misplaced in libraries. Nevertheless, the ideologies that underlie both curriculum and the institutions which support curriculum — schools — also underlie libraries. Libraries can be designed to support the growth of children, or they can be designed so that particular learnings are achieved by children as a result of library service.

Similarly, libraries can serve a “cultural transmission” thrust, a “romantic” thrust or a “progressive” thrust. The concept of a library as a repository of knowledge can easily be modified to encompass that of transmitter of the knowledge that reposes within it. It would seem that traditional library programs for children reflect such a thrust. Many recent

innovations in library service have been designed to serve that thrust more efficiently and effectively.

There are also some library programs that reflect a romantic thrust, especially as the child grows older. As children mature, they make use of secondary sources of knowledge as well as primary contacts with nature. Storytelling and other library services for young children can also be related to the romantic thrust. Bibliotherapy, e.g., the resolution of inner emotional conflicts through contact with characters in a story who have similar conflicts, reflects this thrust.

More difficult and challenging would be the evolution of library services that support a progressive educational thrust. From this point of view, it is not enough to relate the accumulated knowledge of the past, nor is it enough to allow the child to have contact with the content of libraries, however that content is conceived. Children must interact with information and fantasy, i.e., they must do something with what they hear, see and read. They must go beyond the internalization of the external. A constructivist view of knowledge would require that libraries become arenas for action. This action need not (and often should not) be physical. Instead, this action would be primarily mental, both emotional and intellectual. It is difficult to imagine what such a library might look like, or even if such libraries exist. I am not the expert on libraries; librarians are the experts. If such libraries do exist or if they should, it is the responsibility of the professional librarian to identify or create them.

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