

Unanticipated Effects of Federal Policy: The Kindergarten

LAUREL N. TANNER*
DANIEL TANNER

IN 1964 Bloom found that with increasing age it becomes more difficult to change human characteristics.¹ Pedagogical attention was focused once again on early childhood education. Many educators in the 1960's regarded Bloom's findings as new and revolutionary. Yet Bloom had simply confirmed what investigators during the child study movement had concluded before 1890: the early years of development are not barren but influential on subsequent development.²

In the 1890's this finding had a ready impact on educational policy. Educators demanded that public education be extended downward to include the kindergarten. Said Superintendent Andrew Draper of Cleveland at the annual meeting of the National Education Association (NEA) in 1892:

The duty of the state is clear. . . . Then let the friends of the kindergarten and the friends of the school system prepare legislation which will give sanction and approval of the state to the kindergarten, which will make it the duty of the state school authorities to aid its advancement, and which will modify the

school age and otherwise open the way for its general introduction.³

Yet the policy of making the kindergarten an integral part of the public school did not gain national acceptance. Fifty-seven years later, in 1949, less than 30 percent of children in the eligible age group were enrolled in public kindergartens and, as recently as 1962, the proportion was still well under half of those eligible.^{4,5} A 1967 study⁶ con-

³ Andrew S. Draper. "The Duty of the State in Relation to the Kindergarten." In: *Proceedings*. New York: National Education Association, 1892. pp. 185-86.

⁴ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *School Enrollment of the Civilian Population: October, 1949*. Series P-20, No. 30. Washington, D.C.: the Bureau, April 26, 1950. p. 2.

⁵ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. *School Enrollment: October 1962, Current Population Reports, Population Characteristics*. Series P-20, No. 126. Washington, D.C.: the Bureau, September 24, 1963. p. 8.

⁶ National Education Association, Research Division. *Kindergarten Education in Public Schools, 1967-68*. Washington, D.C.: the Association, 1968. pp. 52-56.

¹ Benjamin S. Bloom. *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964.

² Edgar Wesley. *NEA: The First Hundred Years*. New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1957. p. 163.

* Laurel N. Tanner, Associate Professor of Curriculum and Instruction, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Daniel Tanner, Professor, Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey

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uncoordinated programs. Overlapping and duplication at the federal level created problems at the state level. It was difficult, for example, to coordinate Head Start programs with early childhood services funded and administered at the state level.

Paradoxically, when Head Start was created, fewer than half of the children of kindergarten age were in kindergarten. In states where kindergarten was not a part of the public school system, the gap between Head Start and the first grade became only too evident. This gap lent cogency to the argument for kindergartens.

Survey of Kindergarten Legislation

Many educational policy analysts maintain that as a result of the national policy which took an affirmative view of society's responsibility for early childhood education, kindergarten gained national acceptance. Yet there have been few serious attempts to assess the impact of federal interest in early childhood education on state kindergarten legislation. This was the objective of the inquiry. It was hypothesized that in the decade 1960-70, the volume of state kindergarten legislation enacted from 1965 through 1970 was more than double that enacted from 1960 through 1964 (the years preceding the national policy).

Each of the 50 chief state school officers was asked to respond to a questionnaire concerning state legislation on the kindergarten from 1960 through 1970. Specifically, they were asked what laws were passed regarding: (a) state aid for kindergarten, (b) legal entrance age for kindergarten, (c) pattern of organization of kindergarten programs, and (d) the kindergarten curriculum. They were requested to indicate the year when each law was passed and, where possible, to include the texts of the enactments. The data were compiled and the hypothesis tested.

Forty-nine states responded to the survey. Twenty-nine states reported the enactment of 49 laws from 1960 through 1970. While only 5 laws were passed from 1960 through 1964, 44 (9 out of 10) were enacted

ducted by NEA's Research Division identified 18 states (or more than one-third) providing no state aid for kindergartens.

At the time Bloom's findings were reported, the nation was involved in the Pursuit of Excellence and the War on Poverty. Bloom's conclusion led to the shaping of these two objectives into a single federal educational policy: the early cognitive stimulation of the disadvantaged, with excellence as the goal. The early education model of Head Start was the result. Head Start, created in 1965 and funded by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), focused on disadvantaged children of nursery school age. Head Start was not a part of the public school system. The federal policy which created Head Start and, subsequently, Follow Through programs was based on the premise that the public schools had failed to educate disadvantaged children.

Federal interest in early childhood education led to a plethora of competing and

State aid for kindergarten available prior to 1960	California*, Connecticut*, Hawaii, Illinois*, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine*, Maryland*, Massachusetts*, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island*, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, Wyoming
State aid became available in 1960-64	None
State aid became available in 1965-70	Alaska, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Hampshire, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas*, Virginia
State aid became available in 1971	Arizona, West Virginia*
No state aid for kindergarten	Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon

* States mandating districts to offer kindergarten.

Table 1. State Aid for Kindergarten

from 1965 through 1970, thus confirming the hypothesis.

Twelve states (nearly one-quarter of all states)—Alaska, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Hampshire, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia—initiated some form of financial support for kindergarten in 1965-70 (see Table 1). In most of these states, kindergarten is funded by the state on the same basis as it funds elementary and secondary schools—daily membership. In 1970 state aid was still unavailable for kindergarten in 12 states: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Idaho, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, and West Virginia. In Arizona and West Virginia, kindergarten was placed under the regular foundation program (which establishes formulas for distribution of state aid to local schools) in 1971. As indicated in Table 1, 10 states remain which do not provide state aid for kindergarten and, thus, do not consider kindergarten a part of the school.

The question still remains, nonetheless, as to whether kindergarten *can* be considered an integral part of the public school system unless districts are required to offer it. In only nine states is kindergarten mandatory. Six of these states—Connecticut, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Texas—enacted legislation in 1965-70 requiring districts to offer kindergarten. While kindergarten is not mandated in Colorado, districts must offer it to be accredited by the

state board of education. (This regulation followed the enactment of the Public School Foundation Act of 1969 which placed kindergarten under the foundation program.) But the fact that only 61 percent of the nation's five-year-olds were enrolled in public kindergartens in the fall of 1971 (with another 10 percent enrolled in private kindergartens) indicates that kindergarten must be mandated if it is to become an integral part of the public school.⁷

In 1965-70 a number of states lowered the age required for school entrance. While this was done in most instances to assure a free public education to every five-year-old, in Illinois and Connecticut the minimum age was dropped to four. In Connecticut, as mentioned earlier, kindergartens are compulsory; the age when a child must be admitted is five. However, school boards have permissive authority to admit at age four. Interestingly, there is nothing in the statute which states that admission at age four or five is to kindergarten. The placing of children in classes is the prerogative of the local board of education. Many districts in Connecticut have nursery classes.

Only a few states reported legislation relating to the length of the kindergarten day. One was California, which in 1967 provided a bonus of \$160 for kindergartens that were maintained for 180 minutes, the minimum school day. In 1968 the state withdrew the bonus, apparently with something more powerful in mind. In 1969 the California legislature passed a law phasing out double-session kindergartens.

Only one state, Iowa, reported legislation concerning the kindergarten curriculum. The Iowa law, passed in 1965, states that "kindergarten programs shall include experiences designed to develop emotional and social living, protection and development of physical being, growth in expression, and language arts and communications readiness."⁸ This is not to imply that kindergarten

⁷ U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. *Primary Enrollment October 1971*. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1972. p. 11.

⁸ Iowa, 61st General Assembly, 1965. Section 257.25, Code of Iowa.

curriculum policy was not being made at the state level in other states. In New Jersey, for example, the state board of education ruled in 1969 that kindergarten programs may include instruction in reading and other subjects when the teacher determines that a child is ready for such instruction.

In Illinois, legislation requiring elementary school districts to establish kindergartens was followed by the development of a guide, *Early Childhood Education in Illinois: Focus on Kindergarten*, by a committee of specialists in early childhood education. The guide was authorized by the Illinois Curriculum Program to aid teachers and administrators in establishing "educationally sound" kindergarten programs. Pointed out in the preface is that "much of the total knowledge an individual achieves is reached by the age of eight."⁹ (The influence of national educational policy on state educational policy in Illinois is readily apparent.) Significantly, while the guide warns of the dangers of forcing kindergartners into first grade materials or structures, the kindergarten curriculum is described in terms of separate subjects: reading, language arts, creative arts, science, mathematics, social studies, and physical education.

Kindergarten: A Concomitant

The data from this study indicate that the national policy of exploiting the young child's capacity to learn exerted a powerful influence on state educational policy. The implications, however, go far deeper. Kindergarten was a concomitant of the federal policy, not the target. It was not the objective of Head Start and other early childhood programs to get states to include kindergarten in the public school system but, rather, to provide compensatory education for educationally handicapped children of nursery school age. Indeed, Head Start and other OEO programs such as the Job Corps were an attempt to set up an alternative educational system rather

⁹ Division of Instruction, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Illinois. "Preface." *Early Childhood Education in Illinois: Focus on Kindergarten*. Springfield: the Division, 1970.

than an effort to improve the existing public school system.

Yet nearly a fourth of all the states began kindergarten during the years 1965-70, with two more states initiating programs in 1971. Moreover, whereas only five laws on the kindergarten were enacted during the first half of the 1960-70 decade, 44 laws were passed during the second half of that decade—a period of unprecedented federal support for preschool education. It may be concluded that kindergarten became a part of the public schools in these states because middle class people, the taxpayers, wanted for their own children the advantages they were providing for the children of the poor.

This is not the first time that programs for children with special problems have become available for all children. An example is the work experience programs offered to mentally retarded high school youth as a part of the special education curriculum. Such programs not only prepare them to make a living, but allow them to earn while they learn. This kind of program, long coveted and demanded by non-handicapped youth, is gradually becoming available to them as an accepted part of the secondary school curriculum.

But the point to be emphasized is that oftentimes educational policy or legislation is drawn up without anticipating the concomitant effects. Sometimes these effects are positive and sometimes negative. An example of the latter is the federal policy of the late 1950's and early 1960's which sought to influence the career choices of youth by steering them into the sciences. This policy is identified by some analysts as a major factor in the drop in physics enrollments through the decade of the sixties.¹⁰ Examples of educational policies and legislation with negative concomitants are legion.

If the concomitant effects of a policy or legislation are anticipated, such a policy or act can be modified. When a desirable concomitant is anticipated, it should be included in the legislation or policy as a target. □

¹⁰ Laurel N. Tanner. "The Swing Away from Science." *Educational Forum* 36: 229-38; January 1972.

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