

## Day Care and the Public Schools — Natural Allies, Natural Enemies

A blending of early childhood and elementary programs—  
as in Little Rock's Kramer Model—seems a logical way to benefit  
children, parents, and society.



**M**y personal interest in day care began about 20 years ago at a time when any program of infant stimulation ran against the grain of theoretical ideas about proper upbringing for young children. To some extent this was true even if the mother was the "stimulator." It was especially true, however, if anyone other than the mother were the agent of stimulation and enrichment.

Our concern (Caldwell and Richmond 1964) was primarily directed to young children of poverty who were known to be growing up in somewhat chaotic family circumstances. As many of the mothers were minimally available to their children, either physically or psychologically (Caldwell et al. 1963), our interest was in developing an enrichment program that would in some way supplement the experiences available to children in their homes. Our idea was to have teachers and other specially trained caregivers work with the children for a few hours each day and introduce them to various developmental events intended to excite and stimulate them.

The idea of bringing infants together in groups was totally unacceptable at that time. The common fear was that even short-term separation of infants from their mothers would be tantamount to creating "institutional" rearing conditions. The deleterious consequences of growing up in institutional care were constantly cited in the professional literature (see Bowlby 1952) and publicized in the popular press. Our proposal to develop such a program in Syracuse, New York, was turned down, but we were offered a loophole. The Children's Bureau was willing to consider our request provided we used as subjects only those children who were already receiving some sort of substitute care and that we would not reduce in any way the daily time they spent in contact with their own mothers. In short, we could conduct our own project with children who were already in day care (see Caldwell 1971).

Our center served children from six months through five years of age. It

was affiliated first with the Department of Pediatrics of the Upstate Medical Center of the State University of New York and later with the College of Home Economics of Syracuse University. Although the resources of two great universities were behind it, it operated essentially in isolation from the mainstream of either university. It also operated in isolation from the public school system into which most of the children graduated.

While my professional concern centered on preschool children, I was personally involved with the public schools, having a set of twins who entered kindergarten at precisely the time that our project was "discovered" nationally. Occasionally I would be late picking them up from school, and Syracuse winters can be very cold. There I would find two forlorn twins with icy hands and frozen cheeks. I can remember reacting with horror to their not being allowed to wait inside to be picked up; when school was out, children were expected to go home immediately. To me it seemed the most logical thing in the world to think that their elementary school could have provided some sort of extended day care. It struck me as rather ironic that while I was working hard in one part of the city to provide both care and education for other people's children, no one was concerned about providing the care needed to supplement the education mine were receiving.

Shortly thereafter I moved to Arkansas and took with me something of an obsession about the need to develop child care programs in the public school. This obsession was no longer based only on my perception of the need for such care as a service to families but also on my awareness of the need to change the public conception of what day care was or should be. Considered by many people as a service that provided only "care and protection" for low-income children, child care was actually a comprehensive service that could and did provide education, access to medical care, and social services to large numbers of

children from all levels of society. It was my conviction that an alliance with public education would help to "legitimize" child care and help it gain respectability with parents, professionals, and policymakers. Likewise, it was my hope that the provision of day care in a public school setting would make the elementary educational program more relevant to modern social realities.

### **Natural Allies— The Kramer Model**

What developed from this obsession—with a great deal of help from Little Rock School District officials, personnel from the University of Arkansas, an interested granting agency (the Children's Bureau, shortly thereafter subsumed into the newly created Office of Child Development), and a favorable zeitgeist—was the Kramer Model. From 1969 to 1978 the project operat-

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ed essentially as described here. Some of the major components are still in operation, although with slight programmatic changes and major administrative changes.

### **Early Childhood-Elementary Continuity**

Continuity between early childhood and elementary educational programs should be as normal and routine as continuity between 2nd and 3rd grades. In most educational settings, however, this is definitely not the case. In fact, there is often a change in auspice (from private to public, or from one type of public funding, such as Head Start, to another); in location and size (from private home, church, or small-group center to large school); in educational philosophy and curriculum (from much free choice to a high degree of structure and adult control); and in training background of the personnel. Not infrequently there is distrust on the part of early childhood personnel of elementary personnel, and vice versa. Early childhood teachers often accuse elementary teachers of being concerned with subjects rather than children and of neglecting the "whole child"; elementary teachers sometimes assume and

imply that their kindergarten colleagues "just play" with the children and do not "really teach" them anything.

If the transition is from anything other than a public school kindergarten, there is seldom any exchange of records. School personnel do not appear to be particularly interested in knowing much about previous educational experiences, and rarely do they send reports to teachers who previously worked with the children. Thus the new teachers receive no benefits from the insights gained by their predecessors, and the former teachers have no opportunity to confirm or disconfirm their predictions about future educational progress of individual children.

By having both an early childhood and an elementary program in the same building—with teachers from both segments serving on all committees, attending all meetings, and sharing the same lounge—we hoped to kindle a spirit of united effort directed toward common goals. Although it took some time for this spirit to develop, it unquestionably became an important feature of the Kramer Model.

### **Educational Day Care**

The most important component of the Kramer Model was the conversion of the entire school to an "extended day school." That is, the school officially began at 6:45 A.M. and closed at 6:00 P.M. year round. The bells rang at the same time as in all the other elementary schools within the Little Rock School District, but the program operated for the full day. The extra hours and days were funded out of the program grant. Teachers at Kramer taught for the same number of hours and total days as all other teachers in the system (although they did have the option of applying for summer and holiday work for extra pay).

Extra hours were covered by part-time and split-time staff, or, for the early childhood segment, by staggering beginning and ending hours so that at least one certified teacher was on duty at all hours. In a situation like

this it is easy to let "natural" preferences work themselves out instead of conforming to systemwide work hours. That is, there were always one or two early risers who preferred to begin work at 7:00, and there was always at least one person who preferred to begin work at 9:30 and stay later in the afternoon.

When day care in the public schools is discussed, concern usually is limited

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to children roughly in the age range of five or six to ten years. (Where kindergartens last only a half day, most working parents keep their children in a child care program until they reach 1st grade.) While this in itself is beneficial, it does not provide the range of coverage that many parents need. That is, a working mother may have children aged seven, four, and two, all of whom need day care. In many communities

that can mean three child care arrangements (one school-age setting, one preschool, and one infancy program) rather than one. The elegance of the Kramer extended care arrangement was that it accommodated children from 6 months to 12 years of age in the same physical location. The convenience of this arrangement for working mothers is truly remarkable—and quite rare.

Traditional starting and ending times for public school schedules, and dates for opening in the fall and closing in the spring, are entirely anachronistic in today's world. The times and dates we now have were not arbitrarily set; they were chosen to allow the schools to dovetail with the social realities of the children and families they served. The hours allowed children to complete chores before and after school, and the dates corresponded to times when the children would be needed to help in the fields. It is unfortunate that we are so bound to custom that we have lost sight of the fact that the custom originally corresponded to demographic realities. Once we fully understand today's demographic realities, the question of whether schools should provide day care will become totally obsolete.

#### **Public School-University Collaboration**

Other major features of the Kramer Model include having a university professor run the school and serve as its principal; establishing an advisory board to oversee school operation consisting of university and community personnel, in addition to representatives of the Little Rock School District; and establishing special work arrangements for Kramer teachers involving both extra requirements (take a certain inservice course of work and the late-day shift) and special privileges (having an aide in the classroom) not available to other teachers in the system. Although many of the special arrangements required for Kramer went far beyond the day care situation, the same flexibility may well be necessary if a public school day care program is to be anything more than an appendage to the existing operation without any curricular or developmental relevance.

One clear but often overlooked benefit of this university-public school alliance was the constant presence in the school of student teachers and a few doctoral candidates. Not only did their presence confer status on the Kramer teachers, but their excitement



Taken in 1974 when the Kramer Project was five years old, this photograph shows "all of us"—teachers and staff, researchers and students from age six months to 13 years—arranged on the Kramer School playground in Little Rock, Arkansas.

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about the Kramer philosophy was contagious. For example, it was not uncommon for a 5th grade teacher to complain to an early childhood teacher that a mess "your" children made at the water fountain caused "our" children to slip down. To the students, all the children were far more likely to be perceived as "our" children, and they contributed to eliminating some of these exclusionary references.

Everything possible was done to help the students "think developmentally." For example, teachers had to spend some time with a class in each quadrant of the program—infancy, early childhood, primary (grades 1-3), and intermediate (grades 4-6). Obviously, they spent the greatest amount of time in the quadrant in which they expected or hoped to teach. Exchange times for teachers were also arranged so that intermediate teachers occasionally taught for a morning in an infancy or early childhood classroom, and vice versa. After such exchanges elementary teachers were rarely heard to complain that the early childhood teachers "had it easy" or early childhood teachers to criticize elementary teachers for not understanding and loving the children enough.

### **Natural Enemies**

When people ask me what we learned at Kramer, I usually tell them we learned that it isn't easy. Such an arrangement makes so much sense both socially and educationally that one could logically wonder why schools

are organized any other way. And yet the two domains of child care and education are also natural enemies.

### **Conceptual and Philosophical Differences**

The first basis for the adversarial relationship between day care and education relates to the concepts out of which each service pattern has grown and, if you will, to the way in which proponents of each service want the field to be identified. Having developed largely from a social service orientation, day care has been known as a service that provides "care and protection" for children. Schools, on the other hand, provide "education." Such sharp dichotomies represent a misunderstanding of both services, for it is literally impossible to care for and protect young children without educating them, and vice versa. The domain of education already includes many services that might seem to fit more comfortably under the rubric of care and protection: school nurses, health programs, nutrition programs, hot lunches, vision and hearing screening, requirements for immunization, and so on. Likewise, during a large part of the day, every high-quality day care program will provide educational experiences that are similar if not identical to school "teaching programs" for children of comparable age. Thus it is foolish to try to distinguish between the services in terms of shibboleths such as *care versus education*. In order for either service to be relevant to the needs of children and families, both components must be present.

Another conceptual distinction already mentioned is that day care is believed to be largely for "poor children from problem families," whereas public education is for "all children." There are now more families with young children whose mothers work outside the home than there are families in which the mother is available fulltime as a caregiver. And because all families supplement parental care with *some* extra-family child care, we recognize that the nature of the family situation no longer defines day care—if, indeed, it ever did. There are more commonalities between the fields than there are differences.

### **Both Institutions Held in Low Esteem**

A second reason for the animosity that we sometimes find between representatives of public education and day care is that, unfortunately, both institutions are often held in low esteem. The current clamor for "educational reform" clearly implies that somehow public education has "failed." Likewise, day care has been denounced by conservatives as "weakening the family" and by liberals as being a "wasteland" of poor quality in which children's lives could be ruined. Leaders of the day care movement have often bristled at suggestions that an alliance between the field and education would be beneficial. A typically hostile objection might be, "The schools have already ruined the older kids; let's not help them do the same thing with the little ones." Natural resistance to such a union was increased by media reports of a national surplus of elementary and secondary teachers and by the suggestion that such teachers could be diverted into the burgeoning day care field if it were part of public education and thereby comparably lucrative for teachers. Early childhood and day care personnel were legitimately offended at the implication that no special training was necessary to work with young children. However, such an attitude on the part of professional educators was no different from that often expressed by the general public and given as a reason for failing to provide higher salaries for early childhood personnel.

The important point here is that the two fields, each of which had reason to doubt that it was held in esteem by the general public, took a stance against one another rather than forming what should have been a natural alliance. It was as though each sought to bolster its own self-esteem by asserting its independence from and superiority to the other.

### **Mutual Need—The Bonding Agent**

The demographic realities of modern life have made this separatism and exclusivity on the part of both day care and public education entirely obsolete. Both fields have undergone travail, and both are dealing with increasingly sophisticated consumers who legitimately advocate education that

fits modern urban rather than outdated rural patterns of family living, and day care that accepts its responsibility to provide developmentally appropriate education to young children.

Representatives of both domains must learn to find strengths and assets in one another. The biggest problems many people in the child care field face are low salaries and poor working conditions. Teachers certified in early childhood who work in public schools make, on the average, \$5,000 more per year (often for fewer hours and days) than certified teachers who work in child care. Likewise, the public schools are having to try to withstand the major inroads in their clientele by private schools. It is fascinating to note that the new private academies springing up all over the country are not overlooking the profit potential associated with the provision of child care. Almost without exception, such schools are providing extended day care and summer programs. Unless public schools offer comparable services, they cannot hope to hold a major share of the market. And, though we

might not want to admit it, marketing is as important for public education as it is for other products and services.

The inroads into support for public education made by this increasing network of private schools have weakened the infrastructure of our educational system. Likewise, allegations of sexual abuse and concerns about maintenance of healthful conditions in child care centers have generated increased concern about the quality and benefit of such programs. One might be tempted to suggest that attempts to unite the two domains are too late; the general public now sees both services as inadequate and flawed.

But, of course, it is never too late to develop a service program that is in harmony with patterns of human need. Because a blending of day care and education can meet the needs of children for developmental guidance and the needs of parents for effective supervision of their children more conveniently than any other pattern of service, I predict that the two domains will move ever closer to one another. The resultant merger will be symbiotic

for the two fields and beneficial to children, to their parents, and to society. □

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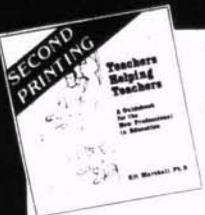
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