

Child Care in Two Developing Countries: Kenya and the United States

Just as a child must move from an egocentric "now" view to attain maturity, so must a society see beyond its present crises to influence its future.

Children represent the becoming of a society. The attention, planning, and resources directed toward their benefit reflect that society's development in coming to terms with its own future. A nation that will not address the needs of its children with positive actions will be forced to meet the later more entrenched needs of its juveniles and adults with more costly reactions. Just as a child must move from an egocentric "now" view to attain maturity, so must a society see beyond its present crises to influence its future.

Age, power, and influence are poor indicators of maturity in individuals and in societies as well. Too often people view these three elements as the primary criteria by which "developed" and "developing" countries are differentiated. "Developing," as a description of a country's progress, often lacks specificity for what is being measured as well as for what constitutes an acceptable norm of development.

Kenya is seldom presented as a developed country, likewise the United States is not often described as developing; however, in the specific area of daily, partial, or full day care for young children,

both countries must be considered as "developing." Both are in a developmental state regarding their own lack of clarification of goals, in their ability to provide improved care with available resources, and in comparison to an outside standard such as child care in certain European countries.

Early childhood programs in the United States and Kenya are characterized at the national level by a lack of direction concerning why (or if) such programs are needed, whom they should serve, what their minimal standards should be, how they should be funded or operated, and what their relationship to overall societal goals should be. There is a similar lack of consensus among the programs themselves concerning their own *raison d'être*. Programs in both countries have historically been created as responses to concerns other than the needs of the children themselves. Head Start and day care in the United States represent program responses to concerns arising out of elementary school performances and working parents' needs, respectively. Early childhood programs in Kenya are largely a result of parental concerns about accessibility to and

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success in the Kenyan primary schools (Herzog 1970; Kabiru 1975; Gakuru 1976). These programs reflect the environment of their conception, often by providing us with facsimiles of elementary education on the one hand and warehouses on the other.

Until such time as the affected children and their developmental needs become the *focus* in creating children's programs, child care will continue to be crippled by mixed mission, goal, and priority statements. The externally defined needs statements of working parents and elementary education have produced a disorganized multiplicity of funding sources, unspecified and/or unsupervised standards, insufficient relevant research, and a lack of cooperation and coordination among children's programs themselves.

In 1973 Kenya had more than 5,000 pre-primary programs (daily, partial to full day care of children) reaching approximately 400,000 (16 percent) of its 2.5 million population under age five. These programs are found in both urban and rural settings, and employ approximately 6,000 teachers (Gakuru 1976). The majority of teachers have not finished standard seven (equivalent to a grade eight certificate in the United States) and have had no specific training in early childhood education (Gakuru 1976; Krystall-Maleche 1976). Salaries range from a low of 80 shillings (\$10 a month) for part-time Harambee self-help projects to a high of 1,500 shillings (\$185 a month) for urban programs sponsored by the city council (Gakuru 1976).

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Statistics from 1974 to 1975 indicate the United States has approximately 20 million children under the age of six, with approximately 2.7 million (13.5 percent) in partial or full day care, including nursery school, Head Start, day care, and other early childhood programs (National

Council of Organizations for Children and Youth 1976). The minimum qualification required of day care aides under the Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements is to have attained the age of fifteen.

Statistics concerning the number of staff employed in child care settings, and their training, are sparse. My 1974 survey of nine rural Oregon centers with an approximate total of 75 staff established a range of educational backgrounds of from three to sixteen years with a mean of slightly under twelve years. Less than 50 percent of these programs' personnel had received specific early childhood training of more than six months (Pence 1974). Salary ranges are highly variable in the United States as well, from half-time minimum wage employees earning less than \$150 a month to a high range of approximately \$1,200-1,300 a month for experienced, degreed teachers working in conjunction with larger institutions such as a public school-sponsored Head Start or a university lab program. The National Council of Jewish Women's survey determined that the mean salary for United States child care workers was less than \$430 a month (Keyserling 1972).

Largely because early childhood programs are not a response to children's needs, but rather a reaction to some external situation, there is no consistent philosophy, funding, or enforcement of standards by any one agency. Gakuru states that ". . . there is no overall body to manage, develop, or supervise preschool education . . ." in Kenya (1976, p. 29)—a situation similar to the United States. In Kenya most of the rural early childhood programs are under the general responsibility of the Ministry of Housing and Social Services, and in the urban areas, under the local government or town council. "There is no specific clause in the Education act which either requires the Ministry of Education to assume full responsibility for preschool education or prevents the Ministry from doing so" (Gakuru 1976, p. 29).

In the United States funding and concomitant rules and regulations come from a wide array of federal sources. In 1975 major program funding came from three different titles of the Social Security Act (providing \$625.4 million) and the Office of Child Development (with \$435 million). In addition the United States Department of Agriculture, the Community Services Administration, the Department of Interior under the Snyder and O'Malley Acts, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development all provided additional funding for certain aspects of center operations or for specific groups of children (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare 1976a).

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There is a counterpart tangle of agencies, domains, and regulations at the local level. In Oregon, for example, licensing is accomplished through separate inspections by three agencies: Children's Services, Public Health, and the Fire Marshall. Children's Services is then responsible for issuing the license based on different sets of criteria depending on whether the program is federally or state certified. Following licensing, the center is then obliged to undergo program and/or financial audit by any or all of its myriad public funding sources. An interesting "Catch 22" is that all of the above requirements apply except when none of the above applies—which is the case for programs open less than four hours a day. Again, there is no consistency in monitoring the program regarding the impact on the child. The same young child could be, and often is, in each of these various settings at some time. Depending on the various factors that led to funding a center, any

program may be monitored by as many as eight different agencies or as few as none.

Such a hodgepodge of inadequately funded, externally prompted, directionless programming belies the hypocritical paternalism of the state both in the United States and Kenya. "Nursery school education is the foundation for the development of the person, the community, and the nation . . ." (*The Kenyan Standard*, September 7, 1976, p. 3). "There is no single ideal to which this administration is more firmly committed than to an enriching of a child's first five years of life . . ." (Nixon 1969). Such statements have all the political significance of candidates kissing babies and making campaign promises. The reality is " . . . the easiest people to ignore in American society are the children. . . . They usually accept being cheated with equanimity. They don't strike, they are just there" (Mondale 1974).

The interests of parents and children are not synonymous. Herzog discovered that "Overall, the parents are greatly pleased with their child's nursery . . . all of the forty-eight parents who have younger children plan to send them to nursery school" (1976, p. 43). Similarly 86 percent of all respondents in a United States Child Care Consumer Study agreed with the statement, "I am happy with the person or place who takes care of my child" (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare 1976, p. 18). Yet Kenyan studies show a median ratio of twenty-seven children to one adult with a fifty percent chance of that adult's having less than three to four months training in child care (Krystall and Maleche 1976). Likewise, parental contentment in the United States should be assessed in view of a 1973 HEW audit sample of 552 facilities (mostly centers) in nine states. "Four hundred twenty-five of these facilities did not meet federal requirements, even in basic health and safety areas. . . . Many centers had nineteen or twenty children per adult" (National Council of Organizations for Children and Youth 1976, p. 75).

Such relatively high parent satisfaction in the face of less than optimal child care situations points out the discrepancy between establishing and evaluating programs on a child's needs model as opposed to an external needs model. Parental satisfaction in the United States must be measured relative to the most stated reason for needing child care, which is "To work or to go out casually . . ." (U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare 1976b, p. 17). In Kenya, academic considerations are paramount; all groups of parents are first concerned with assuring their children's educational futures (Herzog 1970; Kabiru 1975; Gakuru 1976).

For a variety of historical and current social factors, the dominant reasons for use of early childhood programs in Kenya and the United States are quite different. Kenyan children represent the family's ticket in the "education/success lottery." Most parents perceive early childhood programs as the first necessary hurdle in a highly competitive, test-oriented, education race. It is a cruel game, not only for the individual, but for the society that cannot employ the inappropriately trained "losers" (Court and Ghai 1974; Pence 1977). Who can say that such ambitions for child and family are any better or worse than those of two United States parents working to better provide for self and family with their ambitions for self-improvement, "to work or to go out casually"? Does a more relevant education await the American student?

The litanies of "the child is father to the man," "children are our most precious resource," and "the leaders of tomorrow are the children of today" ring hollow in the face of our benign neglect of the child's needs. Rhetoric is a pale reflection of action in both Kenya and the United States.

There is no one model or common course for the United States and Kenya in developing early childhood programs. However, there are common actions that each must take to move beyond the current stage of governmental platitudes. Dif-

ficult societal questions must be asked regarding what kind of society the people and leaders of these countries ideally envision for themselves. What will be the people's relationships to tools for production, to others for comfort, to the state for rights? Only after we have begun to question society's goals and directions, can we begin to plan for children's developmental needs in that social context.

With a common focus on the child in care, rather than the parent at work or the performance of elementary children, it will be much easier to consolidate funding, regulations, support services, and monitoring into one child-oriented, professionally-staffed agency.

With a foundation of direction and support levels determined by the government, a framework can be established on which to build purposeful research. Such research should not be the usual ". . . science of the strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time" (Bronfenbrenner 1976, p. 158). Rather it should encompass the ecosystem of the child: the family, the classroom, the village, the pervasive technology, and more. The results of such studies should become a part of a feedback-revision-implementation cycle that includes the government, research, and program participants as a minimum set. Training should link with the cycle to generate realistic training models for child care staff. With a common focus on the child in care, rather than the parent at work or the performance of elementary children, it will be much easier to consolidate funding, regulations, support services, and monitoring into one child-oriented, professionally-staffed agency.

The harmonious integration of government policy, research design, and program delivery has not been achieved in Kenya or in the United States. It will not be achieved until leaders in both countries

come to grips with their own society's becoming. The ever present crises of a "now" view of the universe must give way to planning—planning for the kinds of lives we hope will be lived by the people of the future who are our children.



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