"Sometimes when I get home at night in Washington, I feel as though I had been in a great traffic jam. The jam is moving toward the Hill where Congress sits in judgement on all the administrative agencies of the Government. In that traffic jam there are all kinds of vehicles moving up into the street — tanks, gun carriers, trucks.... There are the hayricks and the binders and the ploughs and all the other things that the Department of Agriculture manages to put into the streets.... the handsome limousines in which the Department of Commerce rides.... the barouches in which the Department of State rides in such dignity. It seems so to me as I stand on the sidewalk watching it become more congested and more difficult, and then because the responsibility is mine and I must, I take a very firm hold on the handles of the baby carriage and I wheel it into the traffic."

Grace Abbot's statement is as appropriate for 1976 as when she made it 40 years ago. However, the competition for funds is not only between the "baby carriage," the guns, the tractors, etc., but also between those who would provide services for children. Tremendous conflict exists among the people pushing the "baby carriage" about the purpose and design of the "carriage." These conflicts often help to negate attempts to win support for services to assist young children and their families.

Many people who identify with the field of early childhood education may not readily identify with the "baby carriage" analogy, thereby preventing advocates for children from presenting a united front on behalf of children. We are splintered into many competitive subgroups focusing on specific children and specific approaches. Such specialization is essential for delivery of a variety of services to children and their families, but it also generates problems when early childhood educators try to represent the needs of children to America's decisionmakers and citizens. In their eyes, we educators appear very confused and in conflict about what needs to be done on behalf of children.

It would be difficult to find one person working with or for children and their families in the United States who feels her program has ample resources. If this fact is ever to change, each of us must grasp the larger picture and clearly articulate a comprehensive plan for facilitating the growth and development of all children in this nation.

The primary focus of our efforts must always be on the children riding in America's baby carriages. They will determine this nation's tomorrow. As members of the human race, children have the right to health, intelligence, communication, and dignity, but they are often denied these rights. Many of this nation's children are victims — victims of:

- inadequate health care;
- inadequate child care;
- inadequate education;
- inadequate parenting, and
- inadequate nutrition.

Children have no control over these factors which impact so negatively on their development. America is called the "land of opportunity." Consider the "opportunities" you would have if you were born in the United States in the 1970s:

- the "opportunity" to be one of the one million poor children under age four who have stunted brain growth caused by malnutrition;
- the "opportunity" to be one of the two out of every five young children who are not immunized against early childhood diseases;
- the "opportunity" to be one of the 12 percent of the children who suffer from handicapping conditions and, most likely, this condition will not be identified early enough in life for highly effective intervention;
• the "opportunity" to be different from the majority (for example, speaking a language other than English or having skin pigment other than white) and to have these differences treated as deficits;
• the "opportunity" to be one of this nation's children under six years of age who spends eight to ten hours a day away from your family (there is one chance in three that a preschool age child's mother will work outside the home);
• the "opportunity" for your value and progress to be judged primarily by your capacity to do well on standardized tests, and
• the "opportunity" to grow up having little involvement with people both older and younger than you.

Can children exert any effective control over these factors that impact on their lives? As an adult, what can you offer that could paint a more positive projection of opportunity for some of this nation's children?

We are not starting from ground-zero. Early childhood education in the United States currently encompasses a broad variety of programs designed for the varied needs of America's young children and their families. The degree to which any of these programs are successfully accomplishing their purposes is probably linked to program implementation based on the following early childhood education principles.

• Any planned learning experience must give attention to all parts of a child's development — social, intellectual, physical, and emotional. If any aspect is ignored, the child's overall development will be hampered.
• Young children need many firsthand experiences in order for new and abstract ideas to make sense. For example, words are abstract symbols which only have meaning if the child can associate them with personally understood experiences.
• Children need many opportunities to practice using objects, words, behaviors, people, and their bodies in order to develop skills.
• The younger the child, the more individualized and personal the learning experiences need to be. It is difficult for very young children to have good and meaningful learning experiences in large groups.

Therefore, quality early childhood education programs offer a variety of activities and enough adults to interact with small groups of children.

What are some of the "carriages" (programs) now serving America's young children and their families?

Education for Parenthood
Parent education programs for parents, and potential parents, acknowledge the fact that children's first and longest-lasting teachers are their families. Providing opportunities for families to gain better understandings about how children grow and develop, and how they can promote their children's development, can greatly facilitate children's opportunities.

Full-Day Programs for Young Children
For many working adults it is essential that their infants, toddlers, preschool and/or school age children be cared for outside the home. Day-care centers and day-care homes serve this function. The goal of these programs is to ensure that children come in contact with people and events that positively influence their development.

Part-Day Programs for Young Children
Nursery schools, parent cooperative schools, Head Start programs, and kindergartens constitute the major part-day programs (two to six hours) for young children (typically, ages three to six). Nursery schools and parent cooperatives have been used for years by families who want their young children to have an adult-supervised, planned group experience with other children for a few hours a week. Head Start programs, initiated by the federal government in 1965, represent the first major effort to provide early group learning experiences to children from low-income families. Head Start programs also provide direct nutrition, health, and psychological services. Kindergarten programs are designed for five-year-old children, and in most communities are a part of the public school system.

Early Childhood Education Programs in the Primary School
Principles of early childhood education are
increasingly being used as guidelines for the experiences available to six-, seven-, and eight-year-old children in primary schools.

**Health and Nutrition Services**

A variety of approaches have been designed to assist families in providing healthy environmental opportunities for their children, including Maternal and Infant Care Projects; Supplemental Food Programs for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT), and Medicaid.

**Children's Television Programs**

There is increasing recognition of the power of television as a learning tool; therefore, people are attempting to use television to provide positive educational experiences for children.

*All* young children and their families do not need *all* of these services. Each family is unique; requiring the option of services particular to the needs and goals for its children. The tragedy is that for the majority of families in the United States there is only one readily available option in the above list — children's television programs.

Most of the described programs are not accessible to a large number of America's families. Thus, the potential impact of families choosing varied child development services as an integrated part of childrearing cannot be predicted.

The "smear campaign" that began in October of 1975, and continued into 1976, has alleged that federally-funded programs for young children and their families were designed for only one purpose — for the federal government to take over the rearing of children. To the majority of Americans, it is still an unknown fact that the proposed Child and Family Services Act, to which the "smear campaign" was directed, was designed to provide communities the opportunity to expand services available to children and their families so that families would have the option of participating in and selecting services.

Most Americans have little knowledge of the services described in this article and how they can benefit children's growth and development. Early childhood educators must blame themselves for this fact. We have been negligent in finding and using effective means for articulating and demonstrating ways of enhancing the development of young children.

The responsibilities of early childhood educators and advocates for children are clear. We have chosen a profession that focuses on the development of young children and their families and must perform our tasks with excellence. Our daily activities constitute the most powerful and visible definition of early childhood programs. We must create opportunities to stimulate Americans to give serious thought to the avenues available to this nation's children for growth and development, enabling all children to become competent and humane adults.

Many of you who read this article know of the need for comprehensive quality services for young children. If this article is to have its greatest impact, it is incumbent upon you to share your knowledge — not only with your colleagues and others who feel as you do, but also with parents and decisionmakers whose responsibility it is to provide the kinds of options for children which will best enhance their chances for positive growth and development.

**References**


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