

# Head Start Models for Day Care

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The door is ajar. It may remain that way. It may be closed again. Or it may open wide. Day Care is waiting to see what happens to the door, since its own fate is at stake. What will happen to the new interest in Day Care as a viable social institution?

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No definitive answer will appear until new federal legislation is passed providing increased opportunities for Day Care. Day Care is already possible under numerous legislative authorizations, including full-day Head Start, but has received neither the focus and interest, nor the intent of the extensive support which is now evident. Most states support Day Care in various forms, but the support is generally minimal, the services limited, and the clientele confined to families regarded as being incapable of functioning without societal intervention.

The generally low involvement of states in Day Care and the tendency to regard families needing Day Care as approaching family disorganization, breakdown, or pathology is not restricted to states. The federal agencies tended to take the same line and reflect the same thinking. The significant study published in 1968 (*Child Care and Working Mothers: A Study of Arrangements Made for Daytime Care of Children*, Florence Ruderman, Child Welfare League of America, Inc.) summarized the national attitude toward Day Care in this way: "Day Care is for the inadequate family, unable to function without community assistance and in constant danger of dissolution." (p. 14)

The present federal concern for Day Care shows no signs of subscribing to the notion that Day Care is for families in crisis. The reasons for this probably include economics and

politics, but there can be little doubt about the contributions the federally legislated Head Start has made, which lead inevitably to new attitudes and concepts concerning Day Care. These contributions include: (1) comprehensive programs rather than custodial care; (2) parent involvement rather than institutional casework; and (3) child development emphasis rather than parent convenience. While these are not intended to be sharp dichotomies, they do reflect major shifts of emphasis to which Head Start contributed. These contributions merit examination. Then, a look at special problems, questions, and inevitably, research needs relating to Day Care will be examined.

## Comprehensive Program rather than Custodial Care

The Head Start program holds as a basic tenet the need for "comprehensive programs of health, nutrition, education, social, and community services." No Head Start may ignore any part of the comprehensive program without doing violence to the legislation authorizing the establishment of Head Start. This breadth of program makes it possible to bring services to children which affect their total development rather than splintering delivery of services or focusing only on health, for example, or cognitive development. Day Care tended to provide custodial care for children, which meant that the children were given physical care or made safe. The success of Head Start as a comprehensive program is recognized, and there seems little likelihood of retreating to a custodial position for Day Care. Indeed, the *Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements 1968* set minimum standards for any kind of child

care where federal funds are involved. These standards are essentially Head Start standards, including comprehensive programs, parent involvement, and child development.

#### **Parent Involvement rather than Institutional Casework**

Head Start mandates "parent involvement at all levels of program development and participation." This is a clear invitation for parents to help make decisions, set policy, help select staff, and to sit on formalized councils or committees concerned with Head Start programs. Parents may also become teachers, teacher aides, community aides, or other types of staff members. And parents may be involved in special training programs in child development to work with their own children at home or to gain knowledge about child development.

Parents are regarded as critical agents in the development of programs affecting their children and, indeed, in the development of their children. They are not seen as needing social welfare assistance under the assumption that these families cannot function adequately without community assistance, i.e., as passive recipients of services.

#### **Child Development Emphasis rather than Parent Convenience**

Head Start, like traditional nursery schools, places the emphasis on the needs of the child rather than the convenience of the parents. Day Care, because of the influence of Head Start, will most likely place similar emphasis on the needs of children rather than parents. Day Care will serve parents who are working all day, or who are in training, but will not operate on the premise that the

Centers are conveniences. Further, to the extent that Day Care is used by working or in-training parents, children younger than those usually attending Head Start as well as children of Head Start age and older may well be in Day Care Centers.

The Follow-Through programs (after Head Start through Grade Three) and the Parent Child Centers (birth through age three, or pre-Head Start) use the same guidelines and standards as Head Start. To the degree, then, that Day Care programs parallel the age structure of Parent Child Centers, Head Start, and Follow-Through, the programs will probably be influenced by the same guidelines and standards.

#### **Research Aids to Day Care**

The research and demonstration efforts of Head Start have, since 1965, contributed important information about young children and programs for them that will be useful to Day Care Centers. Some major, pertinent findings may be summarized in the following brief statements:

- Children must develop attachment to adults to stimulate growth.
- Children must develop dependency and trust relationships with adults in order to learn from them.
- Children develop independence when adults encourage independent behavior while providing emotional support.
- Cognitive and language programs developed for children who are from families with low-incomes and minority ethnic groups enhance the development of the children.

- Children need a continuity of program experiences over a period of years to promote development.
- Parent involvement in the education of their children enhances the child's development.

No research has been conducted in the Parent Child Centers, and evaluation results from the Follow-Through programs are not yet available. Thus, most of the information helpful to Day Care Centers will have to come from Head Start and other research in early childhood conducted under other auspices.

#### Day Care has Unique Research Needs

Day Care, however, is not just the same as these other programs. It has some unique aspects that require special considerations, particularly research considerations. The unique aspects are these: (1) increased length of separation time from family; (2) wider age span of children during various hours of the day and seasons of the year; (3) greater variation in location of Center; (4) decreased direct parent involvement; and (5) increased involvement with parent surrogate or care-giver.

The unique aspects of Day Care lead to the formulation of questions requiring answers from research. Thus, research efforts in early childhood may well include consideration of these questions relating specifically to Day Care programs:

1. Is the development of children adversely affected by varying lengths of separation time from the parents? Under what conditions and during what age periods is such development affected?
2. What amount of parent involvement enhances the development of children at different ages?
3. What kind of parent involvement enhances the development of children at different ages?
4. What effect on child development does the location of the Day Care Center have? Do industry-based Centers provide more opportunity for parent involvement than Centers remote from the parent's work? Do industry-based Centers broaden the child's "home" environment boundaries?
5. What effect does the wider age range in the Day Care Center have on child development? Do older children develop a greater sense of significance, etc., by being with the younger children? Do the younger children increase the rate of development by interacting with children of other ages?
6. Do Day Care Center staff need different kinds of training and knowledge to interact with children over longer periods of time?

These are some of the questions requiring answers from research. No other country has examined its Day Care efforts from a research perspective. This nation makes such an approach not only possible but imperative. Careful research will contribute to knowledge and information to provide a base for improving whatever Day Care programs are launched. The model of Head Start, which has benefited greatly from research evidence, is a good beginning.



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