

Conceptions of US and Brazilian early childhood care and education: A historical and comparative analysis

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Abstract:

Children's first years of life are fundamental for healthy development. Appropriate care and education in the early years are far more useful than dealing with later problems, and in both the United States and Brazil scholars and public-policy makers have argued that the goal should be an integrated system of care and education. Using a cultural—historical framework to understand early childhood policies in the United States and Brazil, we examine how notions of care and education have changed over time. We show that although the two societies have the same goal, the approaches to realizing that goal have been, for historical reasons, quite different. Moreover, despite a rapid growth in the numbers of children attending preschool institutions, integrated systems have not been accomplished. Our analysis also shows how the legacy of a dichotomous approach in both societies has impeded the integration of care and education into a single system.

Keywords: Brazil | child care | early education | historical changes | preschool | public policy | social class | socioeconomic status | United States of America

Article:

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Children's first years of life are fundamental for healthy development, i.e., the biological, psychological, emotional, and social changes that occur over the life course of human beings. When early problems are found, appropriate care and education can help to overcome or minimize problems of development (OECD, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Simpson, Jivanjee, Koroloff, Doerfler, & García, 2001). Intervention studies also indicate that this period constitutes a powerful opportunity to ameliorate children's development, lessen cognitive and socioemotional problems, and stop early problems becoming more serious (Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Guralnick, 1997; Kellam & Rebok, 1992; Lopez, Tarullo, Forness, & Boyce, 2000; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Raver, 2002).

Investing in early childhood programs is also a good economic development strategy, because of its wide and long-lasting benefits. For example, "in its economic research, the Federal Reserve Bank found that early childhood investments make more sense than spending on venture capital funds, subsidizing new industries such as biotechnology, building new stadiums or providing tax incentives for business" (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003, p. 13). Longitudinal studies on the Perry Preschool program for low-income children estimate that every dollar spent on such a program yields a saving of up to seventeen dollars by the time that the individuals served had reached 40 years of age, based on reducing crime (the major cost benefit), increased earnings, and the lack of need for special education and welfare payments (Schweinhart et al., 2005).

It is thus not surprising that there has been an increase in early childhood care and education programs in many countries. According to UNESCO data, early education had the highest growth rate in the field of education over the past 15 years in Latin America. In most European countries as well as in the United States, large numbers of 3- to 6-year-olds are now in childcare facilities supported primarily or exclusively by public funds, although there has not been an equivalent investment in services for those who are younger than three (OECD, 2001).

What sort of early care and education should a society provide to allow its children the best possible start to life? Answers to this question clearly depend on the society's values, beliefs, and goals, its access to resources, and political decisions about how best to use those resources (OECD, 2001; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989; Tudge et al., 2006).

Different approaches have been taken to examine the similarities and differences across societies. One of the most useful distinctions is the one that has been drawn between methods used in cross-cultural research and those used by cultural psychologists (Shweder, 1990). As Adamopoulos and Lonner (2001) have argued, "cross-cultural psychologists have proposed the adoption of classical scientific methodology to investigate human behavior comparatively" (p. 28). With such a methodology cultures are treated as though they are independent variables, whose effects on practices or policies can be estimated, using the "natural experiment" equivalent of planned experimental studies.

By contrast, cultural psychologists, often building on Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978, 1987, 1997) have taken a different stance on the study of cultural similarities and differences. As Greenfield pointed out: "The procedures and methods of cultural psychology

arise from the culture itself, not from the methodological cupboard of psychology” (Greenfield, 1997, p. 321). A cultural–psychological study is one in which aspects of a culture’s values, beliefs, and practices are examined from an insider’s (or “emic”) point of view (Berry, 1999). When two or more cultures are compared the intention is not to use a “single measuring stick” (LeVine, 1989), or means of ranking, but rather to show how each cultural group, as it developed over historical time, is both the evolving producer and the evolving product of cultural values, beliefs, practices, and policies relevant to prevailing material conditions. In order to understand current practices or policies one must take a historical approach, therefore. As Vygotsky (1978) argued, citing Blonsky (1921), to understand something one needs to understand its history.

In this paper we have therefore adopted a cultural–historical approach to the development of early care and education policies in the United States and Brazil. There are three reasons for this particular choice. First, to the best of our knowledge, such an analysis has not been undertaken. Although policies in the United States have been compared with those of other industrialized nations (see, for example, Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Howard, Williams, Port, & Lepper, 2001; OECD, 2001),¹ Brazil’s policies have only been compared with those of some other Latin American countries (Rosetti-Ferreira, Ramon, & Silva, 2002). These comparisons, moreover, focus on the current situation and recent changes in each country, rather than on providing a historical understanding of how early education and care policies developed.

Second, unlike the approach to getting data in some other culture of interest lampooned by Adamopoulos and Lonner as “sabbatical opportunities” or “jet set research” (2001, p. 13), two of the three authors of this paper have lived in and been involved in research in early care and education in both countries, and are fluent in both English and Portuguese. This clearly helps provide an insider’s approach to the two societies.

Third, and most important, this study is not one that seeks to show cultural variation by choosing societies that are as different as possible (Hallpike, 2004). As Bornstein, Tal, and Tamis-LeMonda (1991) pointed out: “Cross-cultural research is often geared to evaluate the distinctiveness of some phenomenon in a setting that is exotic or unique; frequently, it is undertaken to compare samples from contrastive settings in order to maximize the potential of uncovering differences” (p. 73). Our aim is not to contrast the policies of one large and one small country, or one society that has comparatively recently been populated by immigrants with another whose population has been settled for many generations. The United States and Brazil are similar in that both cover over three million square miles (over 8.5 million square kilometers), and both are populated primarily by the descendents of European immigrants and Africans brought as slaves, with only a small percentage of people whose roots could be traced back to the original native populations. Both countries, too, have a federal system of government incorporating states that are of widely differing sizes and have access to very different resources.

Despite these similarities there are, of course, also major differences between the two societies. The particular historical circumstances that led to the formation of the United States and Brazil

¹ In an update to the OECD report, published after this paper was written, Mexico was included among eight additional countries whose early care and education policies were examined (OECD, 2006). Of the 20 countries compared, 17 are classified by the World Bank as high-income OECD countries and the other three (the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Mexico) as upper-middle-income economies.

are entirely different. Our sole reason for highlighting some of the similarities is to point out that, in accord with Hallpike's (2004) view, we are not contrasting societies that are maximally different.

When considering factors relevant to early care and education, one of the most relevant is that of access to resources to pay for childcare. Whereas the United States is classified by the World Bank as one of the 24 "high-income OECD countries," Brazil is classified as a "developing" country with a "lower-middle-income" economy. This difference is reflected in the fact that although 18.5% of American children aged five years and under are living below the official poverty rate (US Census Bureau, 2003), almost half (48.6%) of Brazilian children of the same age live below Brazil's official poverty line (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2000). A second major relevant difference is that Brazil has a much larger number of young children, both in numerical and percentage terms, than does the United States. In 2000, the United States had a little more than 19 million children of preschool age, or approximately 6.8% of the population (US Census Bureau, 2000), whereas more than 23 million Brazilian children (13.5% of the population) were of the same age (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2000).²

It is not a simple task, in countries with wide regional differences and huge diversities of racial/ethnic groups, to (a) design public policies to serve the needs of *all* young children, (b) implement standards of high quality, and (c) take seriously the diversity that comprises its social fabric. However, in the course of examining the parallels between the policies established in the United States and Brazil, it will become clear that both societies have witnessed increasing calls to treat early care and education as inseparable but have developed different models to try to achieve this goal. Why, if care and education are viewed as inseparable in early childhood, are there separate systems? How has this situation arisen and why has it proven so difficult to resolve? These are the central questions guiding our paper. The answers, we believe, can only be provided by historical analysis.

Early childhood care and education in the United States and Brazil

In this section we will show that both societies developed a two-tier system of education for preschool-aged children, one for those of the poor (that focused first simply on care and then, to an extent, on preparation for school) and another for the children of the wealthy (that aimed more at developing "the whole child"). In both societies, too, from the 1960s onwards, there have been calls for a more integrated system of care and education for all children – that is, a system that focuses on a range of children's needs, from health and safety to children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. However, major differences between the two countries are also clear. In the United States beliefs about the rights of families to educate as they see fit, and that local and state governments should have more say than the federal government in early care and education, have led to a wide variety of policies and relatively few children, particularly in the youngest age group, getting preschool care and education. Brazil, by contrast, has placed preschool education under federal control and has mandated that all children have the right to

² In this paper the term *young children* includes infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. In the United States, children from birth to five years of age are referred to as *young children*. In Brazil, this term is used to describe children from birth to six years of age.

education, starting at birth. As a result, a greater percentage of Brazilian young children are in preschool institutions. However, whereas the United States has witnessed increasing concern with issues of quality (in part because of the wide diversity of types of care and education that are available), Brazil has not tried to assess, in any systematic way, the quality of the care and education that children receive.

Historical developments in the United States. In the United States, the first services devoted to the care of young children appeared at the start of the nineteenth century, as a result of the influx of immigrants and the growing demands of industrialization (Howard et al., 2001; Scarr & Weinberg, 1986). Although children were viewed as “the product of parents’ competence and attention” (Howard et al., 2001, p. 56), immigrants’ need for paid work precluded their spending time with their children. By the late 1820s, the Boston Infant School had been founded to take care of the children of working parents. Following the American Civil War various types of “day-care services” were opened to provide some care and attention for the children of working parents, and by the start of the twentieth century many believed that society had a duty to provide services to prevent the creation of “pathological” families by parents who could not provide their children with adequate care (Howard et al., 2001). Facilities to care for the children of working families were extended during periods of great need, for example during the Great Depression and when mothers entered the workforce in great numbers during the Second World War (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986; Tobin et al., 1989). By and large, however, the prevailing view was that families had both the right and the responsibility to raise their young children as they saw fit; the provision of services to care for or educate the very young was not the responsibility of the state, either at the local or federal level.

The provision of care for young children primarily for economic (not educational) ends was paralleled, during the same historical period, by a different type of concern. The first “kindergartens,” aimed primarily at developing children’s moral and social sensibilities from three years of age, came into being during the middle of the nineteenth century, and were aimed at educating the children of the wealthy. By the mid-1920s these schools were known as “nursery schools” and were designed to augment the education and socialization of young middle- and upper-class children. Given that their mothers did not work outside the home, the sessions were most commonly for half a day only, rather than the full-day care provided by the day-care centers.

The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a shift in beliefs about preschool institutions for the children of poor and working-class parents. One of the reasons for this shift was the launching of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in 1957, in the midst of the Cold War, which was interpreted as a challenge to the United States’ education system. A good deal of research was conducted that showed the impact of social class on individuals’ performance, both in IQ and in school tests. Children from the lower socioeconomic groups arrived in school with cognitive skills far less developed than those whose parents were privileged, and those differences magnified the longer they were in school (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1994; Kerckhoff, 1993). It was the Americans’ perceived educational weakness compared first to the Russians and then to the Japanese that led for the first time for calls for the children of the poor to receive preschool *education* (rather than just care while their parents worked) to overcome their apparent deprivation.

In 1965, as part of the “War on Poverty” instituted by President Lyndon Johnson, Head Start was begun (Public Law 88–452). Head Start programs clearly aimed at educating poor children, but the educational focus was quite different to what was typically provided in preschools for the children of the wealthy. “In contrast to the nursery schools of the 1950s, most Head Start programs emphasized education more than development – or more precisely, learning to learn” (Scarr & Weinberg, 1986, p. 1143). Head Start classrooms prioritized the training of skills required for school, not only in the academic realm (pre-literacy and pre-numeracy) but also in the social arena (such as paying attention, following instructions, and obeying the school norms).

This program, from its inception, has been much debated. Although scholars reported successes in the early school performance of those who attended Head Start versus those who did not, these effects initially seemed to disappear fairly quickly (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Cicirelli, 1969; Datta, 1979). More recent evaluations, however, have shown the positive effects of participation in Head Start, with improvements in both cognitive and socioemotional domains (Zill et al., 2003). Longitudinal analyses indicated that positive effects last over time, since various studies showed better school performance (e.g., lower rates of grade retention, referral to special education, and school drop out) and better socioemotional development (e.g., higher rates of employment, lower rates of teenage pregnancy and criminality) for students who participated in both the Perry Preschool program and Head Start compared with those who did not (Schweinhart et al., 2005; Slaughter-Defoe & Rubin, 2001) and generally better quality than other child-care settings and state prekindergarten programs (Ripple, Gilliam, Chanana, & Zigler, 1999; Zigler & Styfco, 2004).

Since the institution of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (commonly known as the “welfare-to-work program”) in 1996, there have been increased demands for child care from mothers who are now expected to find work rather than receive welfare assistance. One relatively new alternative for mothers with infants and toddlers is the Early Head Start program, which began in 1995 and as of 2004 served more than 60,000 families with young children across the United States (Love et al., 2005). Another rapidly growing source of support has come at the state level, where 55 different statewide prekindergarten programs are currently in existence, five times more than in 1980 (Gilliam & Zigler, 2004).

There has thus been a rapid growth in the numbers of children receiving care and education in various types of preschool institutions. The US Bureau of the Census reported that 3.89 million three-year-olds and 3.99 million four-year-olds attended preschools in 2000. Of this total, approximately 25% of three- and four-year-olds are currently served by publicly funded programs; almost one million children are in state-funded prekindergarten programs (Gilliam & Zigler, 2004) and a little over 900,000 children in Head Start (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). “Nationally, Head Start is only reaching about one-third of eligible families, despite the program’s growth” (Illinois Head Start Association, 2006).

Along with the growth of services for the children of the poor, the second half of the twentieth century also saw a rise in the number of private facilities offering early education with a focus more on developmental issues than purely the preparation of children for the entry into school. The Women’s Liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the rising divorce rate, and the

growing number of middle-class and upper-middle-class mothers who worked outside the home significantly increased the demand for services for their children during the day. Given the tradition of preschool education for the children of relatively wealthy families, compared to the provision of day care for the children of the poor, it is not surprising that the increased demand from middle- and upper-middle-class parents was reflected in increasing concerns with the quality of care and education that their children were receiving.

It is not only wealthy parents who are concerned with issues of quality; many poor parents are aware that the types of child care they can afford is of lower quality, and they are much less likely to be satisfied with that quality than are wealthier parents with the type of care and education that they can afford (Mitchell, Cooperstein, & Lerner, 1992). In part because of these large differences in types of care and education available there has been a concerted effort to establish criteria for evaluating both structural (for example, caregivers/teachers education and experience, group size, adult-child ratios) and process (for example, staff-child interactions, interactions among the children themselves, and the ways in which children are encouraged to engage in activities) characteristics of quality early childhood programs (Cassidy, Hestenes, Hegde, Hestenes, & Mims, 2005; National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003).

Many scholars have also documented the effects on children of being in a lower- or higher-quality child-care program (Howes, Phillips, & Whitebook, 1992; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2001, 2003; Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, & Abbott-Shim, 2000; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Although there is agreement on the markers of high-quality programs, at least in the United States, the lack of a federal system and insufficient state regulations are important barriers to be overcome in order to guarantee quality services for all children (Brauner, Gordic, & Zigler, 2004; Sawhill, 1999). Some caution is needed, however, when examining issues of quality across different societies. What may be viewed as a marker of a high quality preschool program in one culture may not be associated with higher quality in another (Tobin et al., 1989; Tudge et al., 2006).

Historical developments in Brazil. The same differentiation between preschool institutions for the children of the poor and for those from wealthier families developed in Brazil. The first Brazilian institution for young children was established late in the nineteenth century for those who had been abandoned by or removed from their parents. It was named the “Roda dos Expostos” (literally, “The Circle of those on Display”) but it provided minimal care at best and had an infant mortality rate of about 50% at the end of the nineteenth century (Montenegro, 2001). In 1899 the Institute for the Protection and Assistance of Young Children of Rio de Janeiro became Brazil’s first day nursery³ for the children of Rio’s parents living in poverty. This Institute, which also helped poor pregnant women and their newborn children, served as a model for other institutions established in different parts of the country. By 1929 a total of 22 such institutions had been created, half of which included a day nursery. Also in 1899, the first

³ Portuguese uses the word *creche*, derived from French (Old French: *creche*; Modern French: *crèche*). According to the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, *crèche* means “a day nursery for infants and young children” (Brown, 2003, p. 551). Although one usually uses “nursery school” to translate “creche” from Portuguese into English, we decided to follow the Dictionary, especially because, in this article, it is important to distinguish day nurseries from nursery schools.

Brazilian day nursery for the children of working-class (but not poverty-stricken) parents was founded by the Corcovado Cloth-Making Company in Rio de Janeiro (Kuhlmann, 1998).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Brazil also saw the first kindergartens which, as in the United States, were private institutions for the children of the wealthy, the first to have access to this type of service. Although some people held the view that kindergartens should also be created to serve the children of the poor, no concrete steps were ever taken to put this view into effect. Even when public schools included kindergarten classes, the schools that created them exclusively served the children of the wealthy. An example of this was the kindergarten, founded in 1896 in São Paulo, of the Caetano de Campos school (a school whose main goal was the training of future teachers). In order to differentiate kindergartens from the day nurseries, intended for the children of the poor, it became customary to refer to the kindergartens as pedagogical institutions, rather than those designed simply to take care of children (Kuhlmann, 1998). In other words, the main objective of kindergartens was to educate the children of the wealthy whereas the day nurseries were principally designed to “take care of” poor children.

The process of industrialization during the first half of the twentieth century brought about structural changes in Brazilian society, particularly in the south and south east of the country (Skidmore, 1999), in much the same way as had happened in the United States. Industrialization meant that increasing numbers of workers (both male and female) were required to work in factories, which meant that children were more likely to be left unsupervised. However, for many years the government did not concern itself with the regulation of services for the care of young children. Even though the work-related legislation of the government of President Getulio Vargas (1930–1945) obligated workplaces to provide nurseries so that breast-feeding mothers could care for their infants while at work, this legal advance failed to be implemented, mostly because workplaces were not closely monitored and penalties for non-compliance were extremely low (Rosemberg, 1993). However, during the second half of the twentieth century a transformation occurred in this situation, not only in terms of an increase in the number of services that were offered, but also in terms of changes in the conception of care and education in early childhood and government’s role in it (Xavier, 1992).

In the 1960s, Brazil, as in the United States, witnessed an increased demand for higher quality services for young children because of the entrance of middle- and upper-middle-class women into the work force. These parents were much less likely than their poor and working-class counterparts to be satisfied with their children simply being cared for; they looked for facilities that encouraged activities that would enhance their children’s development. According to Kuhlmann (1998), this demand for better services “also had an impact among working-class parents, who sought educational possibilities for their young children, appropriate to the needs of their working world and life in urban centers” (p. 200). In part to satisfy this new demand, the government, during the years of the military dictatorship (1964–1985) provided more services for young children, including more day nurseries for the children of the poor. As was the case in the United States, this was seen as a way to provide a type of compensatory education. According to the Public Law on the Rights and Bases of Education (LDB, 5.692) of 1971, the goal of preschool education was to ready the children of the poor for learning to read and write, as a way of lowering the high incidence of school failure (Kramer, 1984). The same idea was apparent in other programs of care for young children, designed to compensate for various

deficiencies (nutritional, sanitary, and socio-emotional). As in the United States, this model has been controversial and a good deal of work has been, and continues to be, done to supplant this model with one that builds on strengths rather than apparent deficits (Kramer, 1984; Oliveira, 1996; Rosseti-Ferreira, 1998).

In 1977, a federal department responsible for social security (Legião Brasileira de Assistência, or LBA) started a program called the “Cocoon Project” whose job it was to create and maintain community day nurseries for children of the poor. According to Vasconcellos, Aquino, and Lobo (2003) this program, to the present day, continues to be the major force in the provision of care in the day nurseries. The program “used to believe in rigid and inflexible stages of development and prioritized aspects connected to the health of children (feeding, nutrition, and medication)” (Vasconcellos et al., 2003, p. 244). According to the same authors, in 1981 the Ministry of Welfare and Social Assistance (in which the LBA was situated) published a paper entitled “Let’s Create a Day Nursery!” in which both day nurseries and preschools were to assume, in addition to their function of care, the function of education. In other words, for the first time Brazil witnessed the attempt to bridge the gulf between care and education that had been a feature of the policies involving young children.

The impact of this attempt was not great. Until 1996 day nurseries continued to be under the responsibility of welfare agencies, and usually operated full time. Preschools, by contrast, were more likely to be the responsibility of the education system and to operate part time. But day nurseries and preschools could be either public or private. The following description nicely captures the wide variety of services that existed:

The public programs are usually free, with the family contributing for school supplies and to the Parents and Teachers Association. Among private programs the preschool generally differs from the day care center [day nursery] in that the former is paid for and serves a richer segment of the population, while the latter may be managed by private charitable, philanthropic, or community agencies and is non-profit. When the day care program is free and depends totally or partially on public money, it serves low resource families. However, there are also private day care centers, which are paid for with parent fees and so serve the children of richer families. [. . .] Family day care is rare in Brazil. [. . .] Family-based day care does not seem to have found a place in Brazilian tradition, perhaps because poorer families, who do not use day care centers or preschools, prefer to raise children at home. (Rosemberg, 1993, p. 38)

However, following the country’s re-democratization after the military dictatorship and the promulgation of a new constitution (Brasil, 1988) services for children from birth were recognized, for the first time in Brazil’s history, as a right of the children themselves and of their families. Two years later, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (commonly termed the Children’s Constitution) (Brasil, 1991) reiterated the rights of children as citizens of the country and defined their rights of protection and education. Finally, with the new Public Law on the Rights and Basis of Education (LDB, 9.394) of 1996, the education of children from birth to six years of age was integrated into the general Brazilian educational system (Brasil, 1996).

Public Law LDB of 1996 (Brasil, 1996) defined early childhood education (i.e., from birth to 6 years of age) as the first stage of “basic education” and affirmed that this “has as its goal the integrated development of children in the first six years of life, in their physical, psychological, intellectual, and social aspects” (Article 29). The same article established the fact that services to young children, whether in day nurseries or preschools, had to complement the socialization provided by the family and the community. Article 62 specified, for the first time, that all teachers of young children had to have some minimum requirements – namely a course of early childhood education during high school, although college was preferred.

One important consequence of the process of attempting to integrate all the various services for the care and education of young children into the educational system was that in 2000 early childhood education was included for the first time in the school census. This census aims at showing, among other things, the number of children enrolled, the success and dropout rate, and variations across states and in urban and rural regions. However, perhaps because this process of integration has not yet been completed, Brazilian agencies have not evaluated the educational services that the children are receiving. Although they are aware that differences in quality still abound despite the passage of the 1996 law (for example, preschool teachers’ levels of education range from none to college degrees in early childhood education), there is currently no systematic attempt to assess the quality of the children’s educational experiences (Ministério da Educação, 2005).

Greater successes have been achieved in providing more places for children in preschool institutions. In 1979 approximately 1.2 million children were served; a decade later the numbers had tripled to 3.5 million, of whom 15% were in the zero- to three-year-old group. In 1989, public programs were responsible for serving 66% of the children between zero and six, an increase from approximately 50% in the late 1970s (Munerato, 2001), a much higher percentage than is currently served by public programs, both at the Federal and State levels, in the United States. By 2004 the numbers have doubled again, with more than 1.3 million children in day nurseries and another 5.6 million in preschools (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2005). This means that approximately 10% of children from birth to three years of age attended day nurseries and about 56% of children from four to six years of age attended preschools. However, the distribution of preschools is still far from uniform; a large majority of children served are from urban areas (92.4% of children from birth to three and 86.5% of four- to six-year-olds). Most of the children (62.6% of the younger group and 73.3% of the older group) are in public programs.

Similarities and differences. This brief historical overview of the policies dealing with the care and education of young children in the United States and Brazil allows us to see several similarities as well as differences between the two countries, both with regard to their historical roots and their current situations. To explain all of the reasons for these various similarities and differences is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we would like to draw attention to some of them.

From their beginnings, we can see a difference in both societies in the types of services deemed appropriate for the children of the poor and for those of wealthy families. For the former, the services were primarily those of “taking care” (feeding, protecting, keeping young children off

the streets, and so on); for the latter, they were above all concerned with the development and education of children, both understood as a part of the process of appropriate socialization. When the educational aspect was introduced to the children of the poor (almost simultaneously in the United States and Brazil) it was done primarily with the character of a “compensatory” process and was viewed primarily as a way of preparing children for school. In other words, early education for these children was not viewed as a means to develop the “whole child,” but was more narrowly defined as teaching them specific school-related skills, such as learning the alphabet, numbers, colors, and so on.

In the two societies, the care and education of young children was, initially, seen as the family’s basic duty. Thus when both parents had to work in order to provide enough for themselves and their children, the parents were considered either incapable of raising their children or in some way pathological. (Needless to say, this was not the view taken of wealthy parents who placed their children into private kindergartens.) During the course of the twentieth century a transformation occurred in the conceptions of care and education in early childhood. This transformation was neither rapid nor homogeneous; in the course of the last 100 years different visions of caring for the young co-existed. Nowadays, services for young children are increasingly considered as a complement to the socialization provided by the family. Partial evidence for this is the fact that most American children spend time in a preschool prior to five years of age regardless of the labor-force status of their mothers (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003) and 56% of Brazilian children from four to six years of age attend preschools (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2005).

Regarding the recent differences between the two countries, in Brazil the care and education of children from birth to six has been integrated, by law, into the education system. This stems from the belief that, from birth, all children have the right to be educated (even if, in practice, the right exists only on paper at this time). An acceptance of that belief led Brazil to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990. In the United States, by contrast, only kindergarten has been completely incorporated into the formal education system, although many states have greatly increased the extent of their involvement in prekindergarten programs (Gilliam & Zigler, 2004), and a few states have legislated universal prekindergarten access to 4-year-olds (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2005). Multiple federal, state, and local programs from different agencies focus on the care and education of children from birth to five years of age, and there are different models of governance in the United States (National Prekindergarten Center, 2004).

One of the reasons for this difference between the two countries stems from a clear difference in values. As Bronfenbrenner (1992) pointed out, De Toqueville was the first to note Americans’ emphasis on individualism early in the nineteenth century. Bronfenbrenner continued by noting that, at least at the time of writing, “Americans are mostly descendants of those who could not stand authority, or whom authority could not stand” (p. 288) and that the belief is still strong that government should be kept from interfering with the family whenever possible. Sawhill recognized the prevailing trends, but pointed out the opposing point of view:

There is considerable sentiment in this country for keeping education, including preschool education, as a state and local responsibility. But only the federal government

can ensure that all children have equal access to a good education, regardless of where they live. (Sawhill, 1999, p. 5)

Historically, however, the right of families to raise their young children as they see fit has taken precedence over the rights of children, and the United States is one of only two countries (the other being Somalia) that has not ratified the UNCRC.

One basic goal and two different models

In common with their counterparts in many parts of the world (OECD, 2001), scholars in the United States (Brauner et al., 2004; Campbell, 2002; Knitzer, 1993; Raver, 2002; Scarr & Weinberg, 1986; Shelton et al., 2000; Simpson et al., 2001; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000) have made a strong, research-based, case that the integration of care and education in services for young children is essential. Indeed, one of the strengths of the United States, when it comes to issues of care and education, is its research tradition. Innumerable researchers from different disciplines have focused on early childhood issues and have produced a wealth of knowledge (Bowman et al., 2001). Much of this research has led to the view that a more interdisciplinary and trans-agency approach is required to provide for the varying needs of young children and their families (Campbell, 2002; Knitzer, 1993; Raver, 2002; Shelton et al., 2000; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000; Simpson et al., 2001).

Bowman and her colleagues thus argued, in their report from the Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy in the United States:

A central premise of this report, one that grows directly from the research literature, is that care and education cannot be thought of as separate entities in dealing with young children. Adequate care involves providing quality cognitive stimulation, rich language environments, and the facilitation of social, emotional, and motor development. Likewise, adequate education for young children can only occur in the context of good physical care and of warm affective relationships. (Bowman et al., 2001, p. 2)

In Brazil, too, scholars have made precisely the same case that care and education need to be integrated into a single system (Cerisara, 1999; Corsino, Nunes, & Kramer, 2003; Rosseti-Ferreira, 1998; Scarr & Weinberg, 1986; Vasconcellos et al., 2003). This idea of inseparability of care and education is also a basic principle that is stated clearly in the guidelines laid out for the education and care of children from birth to six by Brazil's Ministry of Education (Brasil, 1998a).

The pedagogical proposals for institutions of Early Childhood Education should promote in its practices of education and care the integration of physical, emotional, affective, cognitive/linguistic, and social aspects of the child, understanding that the child is a whole being, complete and indivisible. (Brasil, 1998a, p. 12)

However, these types of statements about what scholars feel might be in the best interests of children have to face historically constructed realities. First, as we have shown, the separation between care and education was historically forged in the different conceptions of services

designed for children of the poor and those for wealthy children, found both in the United States and in Brazil.

Second, because of the long-standing American belief that central government should not “interfere” in the ways in which families raise their young children except in extraordinary circumstances (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Cohen, 1996; Sawhill, 1999), the United States has not developed a single childcare or preschool system, but a wide variety of types of services (Bowman et al., 2001; Cohen, 1996; Lerner, Rothbaum, Boulos, & Castellino et al., 2002; National Institute for Early Education Research, 2005; National Prekindergarten Center, 2004).

This trend is increasing with the “new federalism – widespread pressure to devolve programs from federal to state control” (Ripple & Zigler, 2003, p. 482), pressure that fits well with the country’s long history of states’ rights. What this means in practice is that different programs serve children of different ages and have different objectives: to allow parents to work, to protect “at risk” children, to promote school readiness, to socialize children, and so on. In other words, each program has different criteria of eligibility. As Ripple and Zigler pointed out, “the result has been to treat each problem in isolation and to marginalize target populations, namely the poor and ethnic minorities” (p. 483).

In Brazil, by contrast, there is no such antipathy to the role of central government setting policy that will affect all children. Services for children have thus been recognized as their right, from birth, and have been incorporated directly into the overall system of education. All children, in other words, regardless of their social, economic, or family situation have the right to attend the same kind of early childhood program, a “universal” early preschool model (Kuhlmann, 1998; Montenegro, 2001; Vasconcellos et al., 2003). However, there is not yet clarity about how to conceptualize those rights.

[The] dichotomy between activities with a school-related profile and activities related to care reveal that we still do not have a clear conception of a child as a subject of rights, rights that require education and care, because he or she depends on adults to survive. (Cerisara, 1999, p. 16)

Even with clarity at the conceptual level, statements of general principle do not necessarily translate into practice. Though a legal requirement, there are far too few child-care centers to satisfy the need and the large majority of centers exist in urban areas. The fact that only 10% of children younger than four and just over half of 4- to 6-year-olds are currently in any type of preschool institution (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira, 2005) suggests that such a right is a long way from being a reality in Brazilian society.

Furthermore, although many Brazilian scholars may agree with their American counterparts that the best system for children would be one that integrated care and education, without any assessment of quality and with wide differences between the types of centers that have traditionally catered to the children of the wealthy and those that serve poor children, merely increasing the numbers of centers will not be sufficient. Brazilian researchers have also criticized the Ministry of Education’s “A national model curriculum for early childhood education” (Brasil, 1998b), a curriculum that propagates the view that the education of young children is

basically to compensate for children's "deficits" and to prepare children for school entry (Cerisara, 1999; Rocha, 1999; Vasconcellos et al., 2003). It is ironic that this curriculum appeared at precisely the same time that the Ministry of Education (1998a) provided the holistic guidelines for children's care and education, as quoted earlier.

In fact, the integration of early care and education into the educational system in Brazil poses additional risks. As both American and Brazilian scholars have noted, early childhood education differs from the process of schooling; schools, whose goals are scholastic, are not prepared to look after the needs of the very young (Cerisara, 1999; Goldberg, Schultz, & Piel, 1996; Scarr & Weinberg, 1986). Corsino et al. have argued that the "failure of the Federal Government to define coordinated early childhood policies" (2003, p. 286) constitutes a major obstacle to eliminate the dichotomy between care and education.

To summarize, the United States has a strong research tradition that has established the fact that children have multiple and differentiated needs, but has failed to establish a system to integrate the care and educational services that these needs require. Brazil, despite the general acceptance of the idea of integrating care and education, has simply stipulated that all children have the right to care and education without either describing what such an integrated system would look like or providing enough resources to accomplish that goal.

Final considerations

The last century has seen the rapid growth of policies designed to support young children's care and education around the world, and increasingly scholars in various countries have called for an integrated system of care and education for young children (OECD, 2001). In this paper we have examined the history of early childhood ideas and policies in just two countries, the United States and Brazil. Their similar size, history of immigration, and diversity of population make for a useful contrast of these societies' early childhood policies. Although there are clear differences, particularly in terms of economic strength and level of industrialization, we are not comparing societies that are maximally different, as often is the case in cross-cultural research.

Our central argument is that a historical-comparative approach allows us to understand the reasons for the development of different sets of policies regarding young children even when there are shared goals across the societies being compared. Our historical overview of policies dealing with the care and education of young children in these two societies indicates that the difference of conception between services designed for children of low-income families and those for wealthy children forged the early separation between care and education. Both societies have a legacy of this dichotomous approach, with children for the poor requiring care because their parents are deemed either unwilling or unable to look after them and children of wealthier parents being provided an enhancement to their socialization. This separation between systems of care and systems of education has remained largely in place, although in both societies systems of care have partly given way to an educational focus, although this aims simply at school preparation from a position of deficit. The separation has continued despite the fact that, as we have shown, scholars and governmental agencies in both societies have argued strongly that care and education should be integrated into a single system.

Why has an integrated system not developed in either society? The legacy of the dichotomy is of course important. But so too are other factors. In Brazil's case it is relatively easy for the government to adopt a human-rights position, passing legislation to the effect that all preschool-aged children have the right to receive an appropriate education. However, the gap between the ideology and reality is huge, in part because the corresponding efforts have not been made to provide sufficient preschool institutions, particularly for the youngest children (zero to three) and for children living in the rural areas. This is perhaps not surprising, given that Brazil is not only a far poorer society than is the United States but also has a far larger proportion of families with preschool-aged children living in poverty (almost 50% vs. 17%) and a far greater proportion of young children.

In the United States, by contrast, efforts have been made to provide better quality care for at least some of the poor, using "eligibility" criteria to determine which children will be served. However, the implementation of a uniform and combined system for the care and education of young children is going to be severely hampered by another historical factor. For close to 200 years commentators have noted the prevailing ideology of individualism and freedom that has made it difficult for the federal government to implement the types of policies that the American research tradition has increasingly called for. The notion that the government has no business interfering in the rights of families to raise their children as they see fit has made it difficult for people to accept federally mandated programs. When governmental policies are accepted, the additional legacy of states' rights has made it more likely that states and communities, rather than the federal government, are in the business of providing child care. This, of course, is likely to hamper significantly the development of an integrated, society-wide, system.

To end on a more positive note, change is constant. As our historical analysis has shown, both societies have changed dramatically in their views and policies about early childhood care and education over the past 200 years, and they will continue to change. Comparisons with other societies' ways of arranging care and education for the very young will always be helpful in providing alternative conceptions of what could be done. However, an understanding of a society's history is essential, for the changes that that society will make will necessarily be influenced by the legacy of its past.

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