

MOTHER KNOWS BEST: EARLY EDUCATION IN THE U.S. FOR CHILDREN ZERO TO THREE, 1965-1975

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“Is that *all* they do all day?” asked concerned parents when they realized their infants and toddlers in nursery school spent their days drawing, playing musical instruments, and playing with building blocks. They questioned whether their children were receiving an adequate education. In 1967 Eda Leshan, American child psychologist, educator, and author, challenged contemporary notions of cognitive development and education among infants and toddlers.¹ Published in *Redbook* magazine, Leshan supported the discourses promoting learning for children ages zero to three during the late 1960s and 70s that emphasized nurturing environments, accessible language, and mothers as central to successful development.

Historians have recently started to examine the relationship between children and education. Some scholars have focused on childcare policies and mother’s roles as caretakers, concluding that children’s interests are consist-

¹ Eda Leshan, “What Children Learn When They Play,” *Redbook*, July 1967, 64.

ently prioritized over mothers.² Others have investigated the history of preschool-age children and education.³ Much of the preschool education historiography has focused on the beginning of the federally funded Head Start preschool program during the 1960s.⁴ More recent scholarship has expanded preschool historiography by broadening the scope to include other preschool programs across the United States.⁵ Altogether they have shown a complicated relationship between basic childcare and early childhood education.

While historians shifted their focus to younger children, they have examined childcare, preschool program policy, and parent-child relationships separately. Studying the education of children ages zero to three builds on prior scholarship, applying it to this new population. Researching the history of learning and development for infants and toddlers requires balancing the nuances of childcare, parenting, and development for an especially young category of children. All of these factors meet at the intersection of early learning for children, as expressed by educators and professional psychologists in a public dialogue concerning learning and development during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

² Sonya Michel, *Children's Interests/Mother's Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999);

Elizabeth Rose, *A Mother's Job: The History of Day Care 1890-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

³ Barbara Beatty, *Preschool Education in America: The Culture of Young Children from the Colonial Era to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁴ Maris A. Vinovkis, *The Birth of Head Start: Preschool Education Politics in the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁵ Elizabeth Rose, *The Promise of Preschool: From Head Start to Universal Pre-kindergarten* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

This study utilizes articles from the popular magazine *Redbook*, as well as newspaper articles and curriculum manuals developed for infant/toddler educators. These sources show how educators promoted learning for young children and how information was presented to parents. These sources are comprehensive because they each targeted different audiences. *Redbook* was marketed to young adults starting a new family, and regularly included contemporary research to aide parents. Curriculum manuals written for infant/toddler educators provide insights into the beliefs and priorities held by them about their students. Values promoted in the curriculum manuals, such as warmth and tenderness, demonstrates their importance in working with young children. While the curriculum manuals specialized in providing information to smaller numbers of educators, the magazines and newspaper articles show that the values promoted within the curriculum manuals were also repeated to larger audiences.

The sources used for examining discourses about education for infants and toddlers have of course limitations. Newspaper and *Redbook* articles do not provide indication of readership or how readers understood the content, let alone evidence of whether and how many parents adopted suggested practices towards their young children. The curriculum manuals also present similar weaknesses. They do not show how prescribed practices were put into action or even how widely they were distributed and read. Despite these important unanswered questions, however, these primary sources reveal common themes and strategies for parents to encourage learning and development in their children.

Researcher's interests reflected the emphasis on learning and development of young children during the mid-twentieth century, when growing numbers of families

created a focus on the family unit and structure.⁶ As historian Maris A. Vinovskis explains, child development specialists believed that a child's potential for learning was established at birth.⁷ Since researchers believed potential was fixed, there was a strong push for focusing on educating children. The direction changed with the revolutionary research of J. McVicker Hunt and Benjamin Bloom who argued that a child's intelligence could be improved during their earlier years.⁸ President Johnson's War on Poverty used these findings to support the development of the Head Start preschool program. Head Start was designed to provide comprehensive preschool services for children from families living in poverty. The program's growth coincided with the increasing research work on early intervention in children. The developers attributed their project to a "spin-off" from a larger research grant provided by the National Institute of Mental Health in 1965, after the implementation of the Head Start program. Their research acknowledged "...very little in the literature on the intellectual stimulation of infants."⁹ The field of infant/toddler learning and development opened new avenues for discourse while navigating contemporary societal concerns.

This article argues that promoting learning and development for children ages zero to three during the late 1960s and early 1970s required using accessible language that nurtured children and emphasized the mother as central to children developing successfully. The discussion occurred during a period of rapid change, characterized by growing numbers of families, more working mothers, and educational theory that embraced environmental influences

⁶ Jessica Weiss, *To Have and to Hold: Marriage, the Baby Boom, and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 17.

⁷ Vinovskis, *Birth of Head Start*, 9.

⁸ Rose, *Promise of Preschool*, 17.

⁹ Catholic University of America, Infant Research Project, *Education of Children Aged One to Three*, iii.

as crucial to children's success. Educators, popular magazines, and newspapers advocated for learning and development by emphasizing the availability of the mother and her ability to provide nurturing environments suitable for learning and development. Promoting the discourse required using accessible language that endorsed proper social and emotional development that could be easily understood by parents. The shift towards promoting education for younger children took place within the context of wider concerns surrounding the appropriateness of childcare for working families, mothers leaving their young children for the workplace, and anxiety about being too focused on children's future.

Advocating early education for children ages three and younger was part of a larger debate over the potential for environmental factors to influence children's learning ability. Educators and print media endorsed early learning as crucial in establishing a strong foundation for future success. They advised that parents should participate in the process by providing safe environments while allowing their children the freedom to explore their surroundings and fostering proper social-emotional development. This allowed children to develop the foundations for future educational success and the ability to form loving relationships with their parents and proper social relationships with their peers. Popular theory suggested that socioeconomic status, home environment, geography, as well as other factors affected a child's ability to learn.

Environmental concerns were also believed to aid intelligence. Edward Zigler, one of the founding members of the Head Start preschool movement described environmentalism as "...if you supplied the right environmental nutrients, especially in the early years of a child's life, you could not only accelerate intellectual growth but also per-

manently increase mental capacity.”¹⁰ One education historian found that, “these efforts contributed to a new awareness that it might be possible to enhance IQ by focusing on improving the learning environment.”¹¹ The interest in solving detrimental environmental factors influenced education for younger children.

Infant-toddler curricula have shown conflicting philosophies surrounding the acceptance of environmental factors critical to learning. The Catholic University of America used a research grant to develop a curriculum manual for home visitors of children 12 to 36 months.¹² The manual included five case studies of the child subjects used during the course of the study. Each case study provided examples of environmental concerns. In one instance, a child’s home had a “constant stream of visitors,” “drinking,” and “no regular meals” that contributed to his speech delays.¹³ Four of the five situations presented children with challenges. The final case study explored a child of the Whitney family, who excelled in the program. The boy was used as a contrast to the four struggling students. Home visitors noted that the child was “very intelligent which was verified by mental test results.”¹⁴ Researchers acknowledged that his “family had entered the middle class.” The Whitney’s example suggests that relatively fewer environmental concerns were the reason for his success.

The *Helping Young Children Learn* manual was developed for teachers in a childcare center-based setting. It acknowledged that, “young children are different from

¹⁰ Edward Ziegler and Susan Munched, *Head Start: The Inside Story of America’s Most Successful Educational Experiment* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 11.

¹¹ Vinovskis, *Birth of Head Start*, 11.

¹² *Education of Children Aged One to Three*, iii.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 195.

children.”¹⁵ However, the curriculum manual did not adopt the belief that environmental factors influenced a child’s learning ability. The writers of the manual argued that, “We increasingly realize that any terms (deprived, disadvantaged, poor) can be applied to any group of children.”¹⁶ Edward Zigler supported the position of this group of educators. In his work on the development of Head Start, Zigler notes, “...no one made a convincing case that the basic problem of poor children was a cognitive deficit.”¹⁷ He argued that the environmental challenges were often based on weak scientific studies. The curriculum manual also challenged the idea of environmental factors becoming significant obstacles. And it also argued that, “Children impoverished in some areas may be strong in others.”¹⁸ This manual differs from the previous manual because it emphasized children’s strengths rather than challenges. It promoted focusing on children as individuals with their own strengths and challenges rather than focusing on environmental concerns.

The context for these sources is critical in understanding the conflict over environmental factors on children. In most cases, the only environments for infants and toddlers were their homes. Children from ages three and younger, could not enroll in traditional classroom programs. The home visitors from the Catholic University of America observed that children in most cases rarely left their homes for any extended amount of time. Since the majority of their time was spent in the home, the writers of this manual believed in a more rigid understanding of envi-

¹⁵ Evelyn Goodenough Pitcher, *Helping Young Children Learn* (Columbus: C.E. Merrill, 1966), 1.

¹⁶ Pitcher, *Helping Young Children Learn*, 3.

¹⁷ Zigler and Muenchow, *Head Start: The Inside Story of America’s Most Successful Educational Experiment*, (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 11.

¹⁸ Pitcher, *Helping Young Children Learn*, 3.

ronmental concerns. The writers of *Helping Young Children Learn* argued against the influence of environmental factors based on the possibility of lowering expectations for their success because of broad generalizations from perceived environmental influences. The children and activities mentioned in this curriculum manual also acknowledged that the activities would take place within a childcare setting, outside of the home. Despite the debate over the environment influencing the ability to learn, educators and print media agreed that providing a strong foundation was critical for each child's success.

Promoting learning and development for young children required popularizing the growth of this field of study. During the second half of the 1960s educators and print media promoted education for children ages zero to three. In November 1969, *Redbook* told readers that researchers believed, "...that the critical formative years of a child's life are from birth to the age of five."¹⁹ In 1965 the *Los Angeles Times* noted the movement towards education for the young. The newspaper covered a state conference on education and agreed that, "...a good start may make the difference between success and failure."²⁰ Child development researchers increasingly focused on tracking the developmental milestones of children for insight into child growth. In 1966, a preschool education conference was held for researchers to discuss findings in infant and toddler development and learning. The constant theme of the discussions was the importance of ensuring a proper foundation for development.²¹ Tracking a child's developmental

¹⁹ Victor H. Bernstein, "Five Million Children With Part-Time Mothers- And Nowhere to Go," *Redbook* November 1969, 86.

²⁰ Terrance Mal, "Question: Should Child Begin School at Age 3?" *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 1965, WS1.

²¹ Robert D. Hess and Roberta Meyer Bear ed., Conference on Preschool Education, (1966: Chicago) *Early Education: Current Theory, Research, and Action* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1968).

milestones, such as blinks and smiles, served to prove education and development as a “continuing, long-term process.”²² *Redbook* and the conference on preschool education both agreed that focusing on learning for young children was critical. The key to promoting education for young children relied on educating the public about the ways children learn. This meant challenging the notion that play for children was different than learning.

Successfully promoting education and development for young children demanded changing popular attitudes of what constituted effective learning. To refute the belief that children ages zero to three never spent time actually learning, educators promoted the idea that “learning through play” was the key to fostering a child’s development. The term “learning through play” meant that children learned through informal, or relatively casual, methods. Learning by exploring their surrounding environments was key. The philosophy of “learning through play” was not a new idea. Montessori schools promoted similar approaches. However, one newspaper article acknowledged the exceptionality of the Montessori school: “...the idea of a nursery school for infants is still revolutionary in educational circles.”²³ Magazines and educators stressed the idea of “learning through play” as a way to encourage parents to allow their children to explore.

Dr. Benjamin Spock, one of the most popular figures in child rearing advice for parents, published regular articles for *Redbook* magazine during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In December 1970, Dr. Spock noted, “Play is to help the baby grow in understanding through the exploration of things.”²⁴ All children, including babies could ex-

²² Hess and Bear, Conference on Pre-school Education, *Early Education; Current Theory, Research, and Action*, 168.

²³ Ray Moseley, “Montessori Infants Take to Learning” *Los Angeles Times*, 11 January 1970, E4.

²⁴ Spock, “How Much and What Kinds of Play do Babies Need?” 34.

plore their environment. The educators that wrote *Helping Young Children Learn* furthered the same philosophy. "What we need to do is mesh the child's living and play and feeling into the frameworks of conceptualization and problem solving."²⁵ The psychological consultant in the opening anecdote sought to show parents that "learning through play" was as valuable as formal educational activities for older children. Discovery through play was promoted as an aid to development. Allowing children to comfortably test their surroundings also helped to develop social and emotional development.

Proper social and emotional development for children meant establishing the child's ability to show and receive affection, or "love," through play. Educators emphasized that children who felt comfortable in the exploration of their surroundings also grew socially and emotionally. "Love" was used frequently to express how children matured socially. *Redbook* published "How a Baby Learns to Love," to discuss the emotional growth of young children. The article claimed that, "During the first six months, the baby has the rudiments of a love language."²⁶ Adults could show children how to grow socially and emotionally through love and encouragement. Magazines like *Redbook* and educators stressed that the process for children was "not entirely intellectual."²⁷ Educators and magazines promoted nurturing for children. The home visitors from the Catholic University of America were "advised to show affection" for better results.²⁸ The same manual instructed educators to make children feel "wanted and special."²⁹

²⁵ Pitcher, *Helping Young Children Learn*, 5.

²⁶ Selma Fraiberg, "How a Baby Learns to Love," *Redbook*, May 1971, 76.

²⁷ *Education of Children Aged One to Three: A Curriculum Manual*, 3.

²⁸ *Education of Children Aged One to Three: A Curriculum Manual*, 191.

²⁹ *Education of Children Aged One to Three: A Curriculum Manual*, 6.

Other educators emphasized the same methods to parents as they worked with their own children. In 1969, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote a story covering a research project for early intervention designed for infants categorized as “high-risk.” The instructor advised parents to use “...reassuring smiles and words of encouragement” when interacting with their children.³⁰ Educators believed that failing to provide encouragement or love to children harmed their development. In one case study, home visitors attributed one child’s speech delay to a lack of “tender loving care” that was blamed on the child’s mother.³¹ This example shows the emphasis placed on a child’s parents, especially the mother, to foster learning and development for a child. The future success of the child could rest on their ability to perceive “love” and share it with others.

Being too young to enter formal school settings, most of infants’ and toddlers’ environmental influences came from their parents. This resulted in educators and print media emphasizing the importance of parents fostering proper development and learning skills in their children. Mothers, more than anyone else in the family, were treated as the most significant influence on a child. The presence of a loving, nurturing mother was promoted as the key to fostering growth. Fathers were secondary for children at this age range while substitutes for mothers (grandparents, babysitters) were viewed as dangerous to the development of a child.

Educators and print media agreed that the mother was critically important. The article, “How a Baby Learns to Love” in *Redbook* described the bond between infants and their mothers as “ancestral.”³² It meant that the rela-

³⁰ Lynn Lilliston, “Infant Study Seeks to Deter Future Education Hangups,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 July 1969, 2.

³¹ *Education of Children Aged One to Three: A Curriculum Manual*, 185.

³² Freiberg, “How a Baby Learns to Love,” 169.

tionship between mother and child was a hereditary relationship spanning generations. Educators concurred with the importance placed on the role of the mother. The home visitors from the Catholic University of America argued that a child's "...progress toward emotional maturity is very much affected by [the relationship with his mother]." ³³ In one case study, the home visitors attributed a child's slow development to his teenage mother. The researcher observed that, "visiting tutors were not impressed with the job that she did." ³⁴ The ideal mother was present for her child. Similarly, Dr. Howard Hansen of the Children's Hospital of Los Angeles in 1970 stated, "In situations in which the mother may be absent for a period of hours each day, the consequences can be detrimental." ³⁵ Dr. Spock advised parents that a good mother's activities with her child are, "...instinctive expressions of an intense emotional relationship" and promoted the mother as the most important influence on child development. ³⁶

Fathers were mentioned sparingly compared to mothers in aiding a child's development and learning. Judith Walzer Leavitt studied father's attempts to be present for hospital births during the mid-twentieth century and how men fought to be present in the delivery room. Physicians were concerned over "loss of authority" to men. At the same time, nurses often advocated for paternal inclusion. ³⁷ Resistance to the male presence in the delivery room

³³ *Education of Children Aged One to Three: A Curriculum Manual*, 3.

³⁴ *Education of Children Aged One to Three: A Curriculum Manual*, 193.

³⁵ Lou Loper, "Child Care- Handle with Kid Gloves," *Los Angeles Times* 13 November 1970, 18.

³⁶ Benjamin Spock, M.D., "Working Mothers: Some Possible Solutions for Child Care," *Redbook*, September 1970, 38.

³⁷ Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Make Room for Daddy: The Journey from Waiting Room to Birthing Room* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 215.

is also evident in other sources. Initially their participation was limited but set to increase, as their children grew older.

Dr. Spock's article in *Redbook* entitled "How Much and What Kinds of Play do Babies Need?" endorsed the "flavor" of relationships with infants. In promoting nurturing relationships, Dr. Spock indirectly limited fathers by cautioning them to stop playfully tossing their children into the air, tickling them for laughter, or good-humoredly teasing them because this behavior was "over-stimulating and unhealthy."³⁸ The rest of the article advised mothers on how to interact with their children. Spock added in another article, "A father who doesn't ever feel like playing with his sons but does so because he feels he ought to will be a sorry playmate...."³⁹ The advice did not ask fathers to leave their comfort zones to spend time with their children.

The case studies involving home visitors suggest little influence or expectations from fathers, apart from providing a stable economic environment for their families. Of the five case studies presented by home visitors, none offered any information on the relationship between father and child. Each case study described the state of absence or employment for each father.⁴⁰ In one case, the child's father retained primary custody of the son because of the mother's absence.⁴¹ While the father worked, he left the boy with his grandmother, who was an alcoholic. The boy's grandmother was blamed for providing a restrictive environment. The father is not mentioned after describing his employment. Clearly, the father, even without the presence of the mother was discussed as a marginal figure in early

³⁸ Spock, "How Much and What Kinds of Play Do Babies Need?" 31.

³⁹ Benjamin Spock M.D., "What a Father's Role Should Be," *Redbook* February 1967, 22.

⁴⁰ *Education of Children Aged One to Three: A Curriculum Manual*, 185, 187, 190, 193, 195.

⁴¹ *Education of Children Aged One to Three: A Curriculum Manual*, 190.

development for children. Paternal participation was expected as children grew older. Advice for fathers stated that they should develop close relationships with their children by asking to work side by side with their sons on household chores as they became physically capable.⁴²

While mothers, rather than fathers, were encouraged as the primary individuals in charge of fostering learning and development in young children, substitute caretakers were regarded as detrimental to the child. Babysitters, grandparents, or any other caretakers could not provide the same level of care as parents themselves. These substitute caretakers were dangerous to the development of young children because it was suggested they could not initiate the same bonds as a mother with her own child. In the *Redbook* article "How a Baby Learns to Love," the author refers to scientific studies classifying institutionalized babies as "...less developed because they didn't have a constant maternal influence like ones cared by their families."⁴³ The article suggested that the lack of a mother's involvement could hurt the development of the child. Dr. Spock proposed that a substitute for a mother was a critical decision that could affect the rest of a young child's life. He wrote, "...If a child loses their substitute, it will be as if his mother had died."⁴⁴ The weight that Dr. Spock placed on the identity of the substitute caretaker suggests that the presence of a substitute caretaker was to be avoided at all costs in favor of the child's actual mother. The role of the mother and the family in fostering a child's learning and development became more conflicted as the numbers of working mothers rose.

Concerns over the promotion of learning and development for children age three and younger prompted anxie-

⁴² Spock, "What a Father's Role Should Be," 22.

⁴³ Freiberg, "How a Baby Learns to Love," *Redbook* May 1971, 164.

⁴⁴ Spock, "Working Mothers: Some Possible Solutions for Child Care," 38.

ty among the public. Discussions centered on increasing numbers of mothers entering the workplace and the lack of available child care accommodating children from working families. Increasing numbers of working mothers meant that child-care was needed or fathers had to take on a greater role, and at the level required to foster appropriate development. Debates emerged over the appropriateness of women entering the workplace and leaving their children with substitute caretakers. The same promotion of learning and development for young children also created anxiety over whether the pressure to create strong early foundations for children resulted in unfair expectations for them. It also created concern over whether parents were placing exceedingly high expectations for future success that were detrimental to their children.

In 1970, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that 3.7 million mothers in the workforce aged 20 to 44 had children younger than five years old.⁴⁵ The number of mothers entering the workforce was gradually increasing. In 1948 there were 1.2 million working mothers, increasing to 3.1 million in 1965.⁴⁶ The debate over childcare coincided with the growth of the women's liberation movement and the growing presence of women in the labor force. Historian Lauri Umanski describes popular media articles on the movement as focusing on the "most controversial and theatrical examples of feminists activism."⁴⁷ An article in *Redbook* used similar statistics and argued for the solution to this particular "social ill," as "making the day-care center for the preschool child as much part of our educational experience as the public school."⁴⁸ These figures supported

⁴⁵ Reva Berger, "Working Mothers and the Void Left in the Home," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1970, F1.

⁴⁶ Rose, *Promise of Preschool*, 45.

⁴⁷ Umansky, *Motherhood Reconceived*, 37.

⁴⁸ Bernstein, "Five Million Children With Part-Time Mothers- And Nowhere to Go," 86.

the growing need for appropriate childcare for working families. The same article even quoted Richard Nixon endorsing "... a national commitment to provide all American children an opportunity for healthy and stimulating development during the first five years of life."⁴⁹ Despite growing numbers of mothers entering the workplace and the demand for appropriate childcare, conflict arose over the appropriateness of mothers entering the workforce.

Opponents of childcare settings ranged in the degree of disapproval, from strict to hesitant opposition. Disapproval of childcare coincided with 1940s and 1950s studies surrounding the "deleterious effects of maternal employment".⁵⁰ Studies at the time presented working mothers with more antisocial children at risk of delinquency. Milder opposition like Spock advised parents, "If a young couple cares about how he turns out, they can't talk casually about turning him over to a nursery school."⁵¹ He proposed that parents carefully make a decision together. When compared with other articles published in *Redbook*, utilizing childcare settings was a serious decision, especially with the emphasis on the role of the mother in nurturing the child. According to Spock, "To a great degree, he [the child] will mirror, for the rest of his life, the lovingness or coolness of his mother or substitute."⁵² In this case, mothers should not have risked leaving their children with someone else.

Those hostile to institutional childcare often blamed parents. In May 1970, the *Los Angeles Times* devoted a seven-article series to the changing culture of child rearing. The headline for the fourth article in the series stated,

⁴⁹ Bernstein, "Five Million Children with Part-Time Mothers-And Nowhere to Go," 86.

⁵⁰ Michel, *Children's Interests/Mother's Rights*, 155.

⁵¹ Spock, "Working Mothers: Some Possible Solutions for Child Care," 40.

⁵² Spock, "Working Mothers: Some Possible Solutions for Child Care," 38.

“Mothers are less willing to stay home and care [for their children]” and continued to describe women as searching for their identity outside of the home.⁵³ It also quotes a childcare worker as saying, “Now women feel it’s for today and tomorrow can take care of itself. And so can the children.”⁵⁴ While avoiding the economic need for employment, the writer attributes mothers’ personal selfishness to the demand for childcare. Despite arguments from opponents of childcare settings “[Mothers] have regarded the financial support of their children as an essential part of their self-definition as parents.”⁵⁵ Parents’ voices are rarely found in the primary sources, but when they are present, they confirm that parents equated caring for their children with providing for them financially.

Proponents for placing children in appropriate childcare programs did so based for practical and economic reasons. Mothers’ opinions are nearly invisible in the sources. One rare instance appeared in a “Letters to the Editor” section of *Redbook*. A mother wrote in response to an article titled “Five Million Children with Part-Time Mothers- and Nowhere to Go.” She insisted that, “By working since my children were born, I have endowed them with a sense of responsibility that will be invaluable to them the rest of their lives.”⁵⁶ This mother opposed the notion that entering the workforce would negatively affect her children or that she sought selfish satisfaction.

Other sources recognized the practicality of having appropriate childcare for young children. In describing the challenge surrounding the lack of childcare in 1970, a *Los Angeles Times* article stated, “...we’ve got to recognize that inflation is not going to stop, and that there are very few

⁵³ Berger, “Working Mothers and the Void Left in the Home,” F1.

⁵⁴ Berger, “Working Mothers and the Void Left in the Home,” 8.

⁵⁵ Michel, *Children’s Interests/Mother’s Rights*, 3.

⁵⁶ “Letters to the Editor,” *Redbook*, February 1970, 160.

families that can live on one income.”⁵⁷ Economic conditions made it clear that childcare was necessary for increasing numbers of working families. Another newspaper article put the decision to place children in childcare in a simpler perspective: “They [working mothers] must, or go on welfare.”⁵⁸ The *Los Angeles Times* child rearing series concluded that working mothers “should stop feeling guilty about it” and “A contented woman who mothers on a part-time basis is far better for her child than a resentful woman on a full-time basis.”⁵⁹ In the decision to place young children in childcare, practical considerations proved a higher priority over specialists’ advocacy for mothers to act as the primary guide for child development.

Encouraging early education for children three years and younger ignited concerns about whether parents were creating undue anxiety and pressure by stressing unrealistic expectations for success for their children. The *Los Angeles Times* discussed the advertisement of a manual that tried to show parents how to teach their babies to read. Its success was described as “...so great that the newspaper had to print up hundreds of booklets for free distribution.”⁶⁰ This instance exemplifies the parental demand to provide early advantages for children. The problem lay in parents setting unrealistic expectations for children. In terms of rushing young children to read too early, Dr. Spock advised parents, “There is no point in hastening a child’s ability to recognize or sound words unless he is ready at that earlier

⁵⁷ Loper, “Child Care- Handle with Kid Gloves,” 142.

⁵⁸ Scheibe, Donna, “Lack of Suitable Child Day Care Labeled as Crisis: Superior State Programs Serve Only Fraction of Area’s Working Mothers,” *Los Angeles Times* 13 September 1970, 9.

⁵⁹ Reva Berger, “Family Stands as an Island in the Sea of Social Storm,” *Los Angeles Times* May 24, 1970, D3.

⁶⁰ Reva Berger, “Acceleration of Activities in Childhood,” *Los Angeles Times* 21 May, 1970, 7.

age to profit from what the words say.”⁶¹ The advice connected learning with social and emotional growth. A child’s rate of learning needed to match their development to be beneficial. Spock also questioned, “Will there be a higher incidence of nervous tension” from children placed under exceedingly strong pressure from their parents to succeed?⁶² The *Los Angeles Times* childrearing article echoed the sentiment: “Parents have turned games into lessons and lessons into schedules [for their children].”⁶³ As educators and other media sources endorsed setting strong foundations for children through providing nurturing environments for future success, some parents prioritized future success more than fostering proper development.

Discussion surrounding learning and development for children ages zero to three during the late 1960s and early 1970s occurred as part of larger debates over the role of women as mothers, the appropriateness of childcare, mothers entering the workforce, and the possibility of these factors affecting a child’s future success. It required language that acknowledged the unique circumstances of children this young. Children of this age group spent the majority of the time with their parents or caretakers instead of entering formal educational institutions. This meant that educators, magazines, and newspapers emphasized the role of the mother over other family members or caretakers. The mother was the key to providing a nurturing environment for young children to explore. A nurturing environment allowed a child to “learn through play.” A child could explore and experiment, and in the process guide his or her own development and learning. The successful provision of nurturing environments for children was regarded as essen-

⁶¹ Benjamin Spock, M.D., “Why I Don’t Believe in Speeding Up Primary Education,” *Redbook*, October 1965, 28.

⁶² Spock, “Why I don’t Believe in Speeding up Primary Education?” 28.

⁶³ Berger, “Acceleration of Activities in Childhood,” 6.

tial to establishing a solid foundation for future success. The promotion of early education for children ages three and younger also created anxiety about placing undue pressure that could stunt children's development in order to expedite formal learning.