

## Chapter Two

### Early Childhood Education at Lesley University: 100 Years

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#### Social Justice and Peace

In May 2008, two Lesley University affiliated early childhood educators were honored by Urban College of Boston for their outstanding contributions to the field of early childhood education. Venitte Burke, a Roxbury, MA Head Start teacher and single parent was honored for her work with low-income children and families. Venitte, a Professional Enrichment in Early Childhood Education (PEECE) Scholar, received her Bachelor of Science degree at Lesley, along with 16 other Head Start teachers, through a grant-funded scholarship secured by Professor Connie Counts of the Adult Learning Division.

Also honored was Nancy Carlsson-Paige, graduate faculty in early childhood education and a pioneer exploring the effects of violence in children's lives and ways to promote more peaceful childhoods. Carlsson-Paige was being honored for her most recent book, *Taking back childhood: Helping your kids thrive in a fast-paced, media-saturated, violence-filled world* (2008).

Almost 100 years earlier, Edith Lesley, an early pioneer in early childhood education, founded the Lesley School to educate young women for careers in early childhood education. The first student at Lesley, Anna Tikkonen, was, like Venitte, unable to afford the tuition at Lesley but similarly dedicated to serving young children and their families. Tikkonen was admitted, despite her inability to pay, and Edith Lesley found her a job in a settlement house. In 1934, Edith Lesley articulated her goals for the school:

A good education for all to develop one's potential and use it to achieve a greater good, a nation at peace and in harmony with the family of nations, a nation in which the good of all shall be the concern of all, a nation in which the enemies...of poverty have been destroyed because their causes have been obliterated. (Edith Lesley papers, 1909).

The values of equity in education, education as a tool for social reform and social justice and the creation of a peaceful, just society have been enduring philosophical underpinnings of early childhood education at Lesley University since its inception.

## Creativity and the Arts

During the 2007/2008 academic year Lella Gandini, teacher, researcher, and Liaison for the Dissemination of the Reggio Emilia Approach in the United States, joined the Lesley community as a visiting scholar. Through the sponsorship of Provost Martha McKenna and in collaboration with early childhood faculty members Mary Mindess, Ben Mardell, Lisa Fiore, and Joanne Szamreta, Gandini led seminars for early childhood, art therapy, and expressive arts faculty and taught a graduate course entitled “Advanced Reflections on the Reggio Emilia Approach.”

Reggio Emilia is a small city in northern Italy where, after World War II, parents and an inspired educator named Loris Malaguzzi created schools where children could pursue their interests through exploration and inquiry and construct knowledge in creative, aesthetically appealing, and engaging environments (Edwards, Gandini, & Foreman, 1998). The Reggio Emilia approach has captivated early childhood educators throughout the world, including the faculty in early childhood education and many students at Lesley University.

Since 1993, under the leadership of Mary Mindess, and since 2004, under the leadership of Joanne Szamreta, Lesley has offered annual conferences and institutes related to the Reggio Emilia Approach. Early childhood faculty Lisa Fiore, Ben Mardell, and Joanne Szamreta participate in a “Democracy Inquiry Group” to study the Reggio Emilia practice of documenting and “making visible” children’s learning. Fiore, current Chair of the Graduate Program in Early Childhood Education, recently co-edited an edition of *Theory into Practice* on using documentation to transform teaching and learning (Fiore & Suarez, 2010). Ben Mardell’s work explores the use of Reggio Emilia-inspired sustained, group inquiry projects with children that emerge from child or adult interests. A video describing one of these projects, the Boston Marathon Project, was selected by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for inclusion in their widely read publication *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs* (Mardell, 2008). Professor Mindess (2008) published an article on Reggio-Emilia inspired curriculum in *Insights and Inspirations from Reggio Emilia: Stories from Teachers and Children from North America* (Gandini, Etheridge, & Hall, 2008). In February 2006, Lesley undergraduate students Leah Valley, Liana Mitman, Katelyn Bull, and Meghan Donahue, along with early childhood professor Mary Beth Lawton, participated in a student-professor study tour to Reggio Emilia, Italy.

One of the core tenets of the Reggio Emilia approach is that creativity is essential to the construction of knowledge. Children learn when they are able to communicate their thinking or understanding in creative ventures, to express and represent their ideas in what Malaguzzi refers to as the “100 languages of children” (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998).

A central feature of the Reggio Emilia schools is the *atelier*, a place where children represent their theories and ideas in creative venues. Gandini (2005) describes the essential features of the atelier: “The atelier is a sort of multiplier of possibilities, of explorations, of knowledge. For the children, this is evident for they continually exercise their creativity, communicating it through objects they produce and through their thought processes” (p. 60). “The atelier makes the relationship between art, emotion, knowledge and creativity more clear” (p. 59).

Joanne Pressman, now Director of the Community Nursery School, a Reggio-Emilia inspired preschool in Lexington, MA and a graduate of Lesley described her deepening understanding of the atelier as a result of Lella's course:

We brought to the class a vast array of papers as materials to use for experimentation and creation as we investigated the role of the atelier in the schools of Reggio Emilia. We spent time working with these papers to explore their properties and discover how our interactions might change them. Next, we joined in small groups and were asked to create something collaboratively. Finally, an idea emerged that generated much excitement- [We would create] an ATELIER! We would construct a model of these special places that hold infinite possibilities for the exploration, sharing, expression and representation of ideas. [Thus] the idea of the atelier as a metaphor for the Reggio [Emilia] way came to life for me. (Pressman, 2008, pp. 11-13).

The link between creativity and intelligence was clearly recognized by Lesley University Founder Edith Lesley. In fact, the early curriculum for prospective kindergarten teachers of the Lesley School was exclusively devoted to the creative arts: Weaving; Clay Modeling; Folk Dance; Art Appreciation; Music; Drawing; Design; Basketry; Nature Studies and Costume Design for Plays (*Lesley School Catalogs, 1915-1935*). In a correspondence from Merl Wolfard, husband of Edith Lesley Wolfard, to the Association of Childhood International Collection at the University of Maryland, Mr. Wolfard writes:

Mrs. Wolfard was a little saddened when the trend in education drifted toward the requirement of a more academic training for kindergarten and elementary teachers. Nonetheless, Mrs. Wolfard did cooperate diligently with educational accrediting committees and with the requirements of the educational authorities in Massachusetts which led to the establishment of Lesley College and its wide accreditation as a college devoted to educational activities. (Wolfard, n.d).

### **School-Family Collaboration**

In spring 2008, Lauren Dodge, an undergraduate senior majoring in early childhood education at Lesley was completing her senior practicum. As a requirement for the course Lauren was asked to participate in and reflect on parent conferences. Lauren approached her first parent conference with some trepidation wondering: "What if they do not see me as a teacher?" "What if they do not recognize my role in their children's lives?" "What if they do not value my opinions?" After the first few conferences, Lauren felt at ease. The parents arrived at the conferences with stories their children had told them of Lauren's importance to them and their love for her. Lauren's perspective on parents shifted: She now saw herself as an equal who could enter into collaborative relationships.

For early childhood educators today, one of the greatest challenges is developing collaborative relationship with parents coming from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and welcoming them into the schools. The research indicates that parent

involvement is the primary variable predicting achievement in school (Henderson, 1987). Often, the early childhood educator is the first communicator of child development information to families and has an important role in parent support and education. An alumna of Lesley College, Joyce Epstein, class of 1963, has been in the forefront of teaching and research on building effective partnerships with children and families. Epstein, Director of the National Network of Partnership Schools and the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships and Principal Research Scientist and Research Professor of Sociology at John Hopkins University, is a leading scholar/practitioner contributing to supporting school-family relationships.

Roopnarine and Johnson (2000) wrote: “The role of the teacher [today] is becoming more complex as it expands to include consultation and support for families in ways reminiscent of...the settlement houses associated with the day nurseries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (p. 29). Slattery (1984/1985) recalling the early days of kindergarten education at the Lesley School noted that in the afternoons, teachers visited children’s homes, counseled mothers on child development and met with mother’s groups connected to the settlement house movement. The importance of the connection between teachers and families and the important role of the early childhood teacher as a child development educator has been a core value of ECE at Lesley University since its inception.

This article is divided into two main parts. The first part provides a history of early childhood education at Lesley since our inception in 1909. In the second part, five current faculty members discuss the four goals of Lesley’s approach to early childhood education today: Developing an image of the child; Developing a theory of learning; Understanding the role of the teacher in engaging children in the learning process; Considering the realities and possibilities of classrooms and schools in a democratic society.

### **Part 1: The History of Early Childhood Education at Lesley 1909-1940: Froebelian Influences**

When Edith Lesley founded the Lesley School in 1909, her vision was the education and training of kindergarten teachers. The fact that Lesley University, like many other teacher-training institutions, began with an early childhood focus underscores “the enormous influence early childhood education has had on the rest of education” (*Lesley College Current*, 1980). Over the next 100 years, the Lesley University Early Childhood Program would become internationally known as a leader in both the preparation and professional development of teachers of young children.

The early leaders of the kindergarten movement in the United States were inspired by the values and ideals of Frederich Froebel, founder of the kindergarten or “children’s garden” in Germany. Led by “politically active and socially concerned” liberals, many of them early feminists, the Froebelian Kindergarten Movement’s goals were to eliminate the evils of poverty and social injustice and to create political- social reform (Ellsworth, 1988, p. 14). Froebelian ideology also included the objectives of civil rights, tolerance and harmony among the social classes and international peace (Ellsworth, 1988).

The pioneers of the Froebelian Kindergarten Movement believed that the proper education of the young child would result in happiness, fulfillment and harmony in adults. “Early Froebelians viewed kindergarten as a seedbed to nurture public-minded

citizens” (Ellsworth, 1988, p. 8). Their belief was that if a child could be educated as a creative, inventive spirit, in harmony with others and the world, then he or she would be a happy, productive citizen who would create a just, democratic society.

Froebel, and the ideals and values of the Froebelian Kindergarten Movement, shaped the thinking of the visionary Edith Lesley and her curriculum for kindergarten teachers at the Lesley School. Central to the Froebelian philosophy were core values: the importance of free, joyful, active learning through play, the development of the whole child (physical, cognitive, social, and emotional), learning connected to real life, child-initiated learning, unity between home and school and the integration of theory and practice (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000; Nourot, 2000; Wortham, 1992).

Under the tutelage of Edith Lesley, prospective kindergarten teachers at the Lesley School studied curriculum to support the developmental needs of young children using free play and the creative arts. Students were also trained with Froebel’s “gifts and occupations,” teacher- directed curriculum materials designed to promote “three forms of knowledge” that Froebel viewed “as the basis of all learning”:

Forms of life such as gardening, care of animals and domestic tasks; forms of mathematics such as geometric forms and their relation to one another... and forms of beauty such as designs with color and shape, or harmonies in music and movement. (Nourot, 2000, p.10).

The curriculum inspired by the Froebelian Kindergarten movement remained as the core course of study at Lesley well into the early 1940s.

### **1940-1960: The Child Study Movement, Dewey and the Lesley Lab Schools**

By the late 1930s and early 1940s two significant movements resulted in major reforms in early childhood education and a shift away from aspects of the Froebelian curriculum. First, the Child Study Movement, a scientific approach to the study of child development, gained prominence in American universities. In 1883 G. Stanley Hall, a lecturer in education at Harvard University wrote *The content of children’s minds on entering school*, a text that precipitated the field of child development. In the mid 1920s child study became recognized “as a distinct research domain” when the National Research Council created a child development committee (McBride & Barbour, 2003, p. 13). G. Stanley Hall went on to conduct numerous child development studies that resulted in a critique of the Froebelian “gifts and occupations” curriculum:

It was learned, for example, that large muscle development preceded small muscle development; therefore, Froebelian materials requiring fine motor skills were inappropriate. Larger building blocks, dolls, a playhouse with kitchen utensils and toy animals were recommended... (Wortham, 1992, p. 19).

The second force resulting in a challenge to aspects of the Froebelian curriculum and major reform in early childhood education was the Progressive Movement, fathered by John Dewey. Dewey was highly influenced by aspects of Froebel’s thinking about early education such as the importance of play, active learning with materials, the

importance of the child constructing his own ideas and the connection between home and school. He also believed, like Froebel, that education must be connected to real life and viewed this as the basis of education. However, Dewey questioned the rigidity of Froebel's gifts and occupations and favored free versus teacher-directed play (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2000). Make-believe play, constructive play and thematic learning were highly valued by Dewey. So too was a concern for the physical and social-emotional health of children (Nourot, 2000; Wortham, 1992).

Dewey's educational thought predominated in early childhood curricula from the late 1930s to the 1950s, along with the influence of Freud's thinking. The importance of attending to the child's emotional needs for warmth, affection, security and emotional expression were the Freudian contributions to early childhood curricula (Wortham, 1992).

Around the same time that the Child Study Movement was flourishing in the mid nineteen twenties, Dewey established one of the first laboratory schools at the University of Chicago. On the relationship of the school to the university Dewey said: "The problem is to unify, to organize education, to bring all its various factors together, through putting it as a whole into organic union with everyday life" (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000, p. 20).

Laboratory schools proliferated on college campuses from the late 1920s through the 1950s and served the multiple purposes of modeling best practice, training teachers, educating parents and providing opportunities for observation and research. It was in this philosophical and theoretical context, the rise of the Child Study Movement, the influence of Progressivism and the creation of university lab schools that Lesley College, beginning in 1948, purchased and operated three schools in Cambridge that became known as the Lesley Lab Schools: The Lesley Ellis School served preschoolers and kindergarteners; a remedial school that became known as the Lesley-Dearborn School; and the Carroll-Hall School that served children with special needs (Lesley College Archives).

The Lesley-Ellis School provided the ideal opportunity to integrate theory and practice for prospective early childhood teachers. Lesley College ECE students observed child development and early childhood pedagogy. They also had the opportunity to complete their student teaching practica in a model early childhood setting. Lesley College faculty and students conducted child development and early childhood research at the school.

Dewey, describing his goal for the University of Chicago Lab School wrote: "A school that could become a cooperative community while developing in individuals their own capacities and satisfying their own needs" (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000, p. 220). This goal accurately describes the philosophy of the Lesley-Ellis School according to Barbara Beatty, Director of the Lesley-Ellis School (1972 to 1978) and Nancy Carlsson Paige, a former kindergarten teacher at the school. (Barbara Beatty, Oral History Interview, October 23, 2008 and Nancy Carlsson-Paige, personal communication, December 17, 2008). The pedagogy of the Lesley-Ellis School was modeled after the Dewey progressive laboratory school: Hands-on, experimental learning in a play-centered, project-based curriculum. The classes were small "to promote the free and meaningful growth of the individual student within a democratic climate" (Lesley University Archives). Families were an integral part of the school community, assisting with policy

decisions, fund-raising, planting gardens and building classroom furniture. (Barbara Beatty, Oral History Interview, October 23, 2008 and Nancy Carlsson-Paige, Personal Communication, November 23, 2008).

### **1960-1970: Civil Rights, Head Start, The Ecological Model and the New England Kindergarten Conference**

Numerous forces, both external and internal, converged in the early 1960s that would shape early childhood education at Lesley for years to come. The Civil Rights Movement, achieving full force in the early 1960s, served as a powerful catalyst for change in early childhood education. *Brown vs. Board of Education*, in 1954, had established “the universal right of all children to a decent education” (Ramey & Ramey, 1998, p. 109.) Minority groups across the nation demanded civil rights including social, economic, and educational equality.

A second source of influence was a growing body of research (Bloom 1964; Hunt, 1961) indicating that early experience is critical to the development of intelligence. Hunt (1961) posited that the mothering a child receives, as well as the child’s environment influence intellectual development. Bloom (1964) argued that a child’s IQ at 4 years old could predict the IQ of that adult. Believing that early experience could increase a child’s intelligence, Bloom and Hunt called for early intervention programs.

The work of Urie Bronfenbrenner, Professor of Human Development and Psychology at Syracuse University, was a third force that significantly shaped current thinking about child development and early education in the early 60s. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory postulated that the numerous contexts or systems in which a child participates (family, school, culture) and the connections between them significantly impact a child’s development. He considered the two most important systems, family and school, which he termed “microsystems” and the relationship between them (a “mesosystem”) to be of critical importance to child outcomes, including academic success (Santrock, 2007). Later research by Lesley alumna Joyce Epstein (Epstein, 2001; Epstein, Sanders, Salinas, Simon, Jansorn & Van Vooris, 2002; Epstein and Saunders, 2002) supports Bronfenbrenner’s conviction that parents and school must be integrally connected. Their research provides convincing evidence that parent involvement in education predicts student achievement and healthy development.

The launching of Sputnik by the Russians, in 1957, was a fourth external force that impacted thinking about early childhood education during this time. This feat created a belief, in many, that the American educational system was inferior to that of the Russian’s. Thus, the importance of a child’s emotional life, advocated for by Freud and Dewey, began to give way to an emphasis on cognitive development and the acquisition of academic skills (Roopnarine & Johnson, 2000).

These forces, the Civil Rights Movement, a belief in the importance of early experience to cognitive development and the understanding that parents and schools, and the relationship between them impact children’s educational achievement led to the creation of Head Start, a national, federally-funded program for low-income children, operated by the Office of Economic Opportunity as a key component of the War on Poverty. Like their predecessors in the Froebelian Kindergarten Movement, the creators of Head Start believed that early education was the solution to eliminating poverty and

achieving economic prosperity. A central component in the design of Head Start was parent involvement. Parents participated in policy decisions, parent education, as volunteers in the classroom and were supported in their own educational and economic development.

A dynamic internal force, Professor of Early Childhood Education Mary Mindess, arrived in 1959 as a faculty member in early childhood education at Lesley College. An inspired innovator, mover and shaker, Mindess would shape early childhood education at Lesley for the next 50 years. Founder and Coordinator of the New England Kindergarten Conference, Mary Mindess put Lesley on the map as an international leader in the field of early childhood teacher training and development.

For 42 years, the New England Kindergarten Conference (NEKC), sponsored by Lesley University, provided an engaging venue for in-service and pre-service professional development for early educators. The conference had as its motto: "If you can dream it, Lesley is the place where you can make it happen." The same can be said for the visionary Mary Mindess: She made it happen.

The goal of the conference was to bring the most up-to-date research and points of view regarding the most pressing challenges to the attention of early childhood educators in New England and the surrounding states. Over the years, Mary Mindess invited the country's leading researchers, educators, psychologists and practitioners to respond to the critical issues of the time.

In November 1962, Lesley held the first Kindergarten Conference. Mary Mindess, who had no experience organizing conferences, managed to recruit as one of the speakers Jerome Bruner (1960), a renowned Harvard psychologist who had recently published the book *The Process of Education*. In this book, Bruner brought forth the often quoted and at the same time somewhat controversial idea that: "...any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development" (p. 33).

At the second New England Kindergarten Conference, keynote speaker Alice Keliher announced to the absolutely stunned and demoralized audience that President John F. Kennedy had been shot and killed. Keliher then went on to deliver one of the most moving speeches titled: "The Dangerous Vacuums of Today's Programs," referring to the social-emotional domains of a child's development that had been ignored since Sputnik's launching (Keliher, 1963).

In 1979, a segment of the Conference was held in Tenafly, NJ, thus expanding to the Mid-Atlantic States. Of this expansion, Mindess said "We are moving toward our goal of establishing a comprehensive and pervasive Early Childhood Network throughout the United States for the sharing and dissemination of information and research relating to all aspects of early childhood education" (*Lesley College Current*, 1980, p.6).

The implementation of Head Start in 1965 created an immediate and dire need for appropriately trained teachers (Osborn, 1991). The Lesley College Early Childhood Program was ready and eager to participate in this effort on numerous fronts. Since the need for Head Start teacher training was so imminent, funds for the training were provided for six days and the trainees became known as "The Six-Day Wonders." Lesley, one of the colleges selected to provide the training, was assigned a group of thirty teachers from Cape May, New Jersey. These soon-to-be Head Start teachers left Lesley

imbued with a new understanding of child development, some developmentally appropriate strategies for working with young children and some carefully selected materials.

The War on Poverty and the creation of the Head Start Program led to the development of specific models designed to help low-income children “catch-up” to their more financially advantaged peers. In the 1960s and 70s, programs with varied models were developed by the federal government to determine which models correlated with school success. Wortham (1992) wrote:

Never before or since in the history of early childhood education was an era of innovation and change so quickly accomplished and funded. Never before had a variety of philosophies and approaches to early childhood education been developed simultaneously and disseminated so widely (p. 51).

Although there were numerous models, three of the most well-known, the Bereiter-Engleman, High Scope, and Child Study models were based on divergent theoretical assumptions and have remained as competing paradigms in early childhood education to this day.

The Bereiter-Engelmann model, grounded in Behaviorist or Social Learning Theory, is a teacher-directed program in which children are drilled in specific academic skills (Wortham, 1992). Teachers impart knowledge to children in a direct instruction, didactic manner. The assumptions of the behaviorist philosophy are that learning is affected by three main mechanisms, conditioning through reward, conditioning through punishment, and imitation or observation learning (Salkind, 2004). Thus, the child’s on-target, on-task behaviors and responses are rewarded and off-task behaviors or responses are punished or ignored.

The High Scope (Perry Preschool Project) model is based on the constructivist, cognitive development theory of Jean Piaget, who has had wide influence in early childhood education since the early 1960s. In Piaget’s view, children construct knowledge through active, hands-on, experiential learning through play and direct engagement with materials. According to Piaget, the child organizes knowledge into schemes. When presented with new information, the child either integrates the knowledge into existing schemes or adapts his knowledge to accommodate new ideas. Lev Vygotsky, also a constructivist, viewed social interaction as significant in cognitive development as well as make-believe play (Forman & Landry, 2000; Santrock, 2007; Wortham, 1992). In this model, teachers and children are co-constructors of knowledge and the curriculum is both child and teacher directed.

In the Child Study model, the child learns through a carefully prepared environment with engaging areas for exploration such as blocks, a water table, make-believe play area, and a literacy corner that serve as the curriculum. The Child Study model involves a largely child-initiated pedagogy where the “child’s involvement in planning and implementing instruction is considered important” (Wortham, 1992, p. 51).

In 1973, Mary Mindess invited both David Weikart of the High Scope Perry Preschool Project and Bereiter and Engelman to put forth their perspectives on the competing models at the NEKC. Weikart presented a study of the various models with important conclusions. For the models to be successful, he said, they must: 1) represent a

specific model vs. a mixture of models; 2) attend to staff relationships and interactions; 3) provide ample time for planning; and 4) include a system of training and quality assessment (Weikart, 1973).

The appearance of Bereiter and Engleman at the conference was highly controversial. Local early childhood educators with a constructivist, Piagetian, play-based philosophy were troubled by Bereiter and Engelman's narrow focus on academic skills and the use of punishment as a motivator for children. Many opposed his invitation to the conference. However, Mindess believed that it was important for teachers of young children to be exposed to diverse points of view, to think critically about the various perspectives and then make reflective judgments as to the best approach.

Results of two longitudinal studies (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997) concluded that preschool leads to positive child outcomes. Children who participated in the High Scope model were less likely to be arrested as adults, had higher earnings, were more likely to graduate from high school and had higher literacy scores at age nineteen (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993). In the second longitudinal study (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997), the three models were compared in terms of their effectiveness. The most significant finding was that the IQ scores of all three groups rose significantly after one year in preschool. However, children in the High Scope and Child Study models fared better than their Bereiter-Engleman, direct-instruction counterparts in their social-emotional well-being as adults. Thus, the direct-instruction model comes at a cost to social-emotional intelligence. Favorable outcomes occur when children can engage in play and initiate their own learning.

### **1970-1980: Inclusion, The Women's Movement (Day Care) and Open Education**

Born out of the educational and social issues of the time, major innovations in the areas of special education, day care, and Open Education occurred in the early childhood education programs at Lesley during this decade.

Through the years, major changes have occurred regarding how to best provide educational experience for children with special needs. No aspect of early childhood education has seen such a major shift. At the New England Kindergarten Conferences in the late 1960s and early 1970s, whenever children with special needs were discussed the focus was on the "deficit model" rather than a model that considered the development of the whole child.

In 1975, The Education for all Handicapped Children Act (PL-94-142), later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, stipulated that children with special needs should be educated along with their peers in "the least restrictive environment." This shift occurred as attention was directed toward the benefits of having typically developing children interacting with children with special needs due to the benefits of peer modeling.

From the late 1970s to the present, the Lesley College Early Childhood Program has participated actively in preparing teachers to meet the needs of young children with special needs in the least restrictive environment. There were program changes for early

childhood education students to meet the requirements of the new Massachusetts certification: “Teacher of Young Children with and without Disabilities, (PreK-2).”

In the summers of 1978 and 1979, the Lesley College Early Childhood Program received two “Into the Mainstream Grants,” coordinated by Mary Mindess and Adjunct Faculty member Paula Elitov (Mindess & Elitov, 1979). About thirty early childhood teachers from the Boston-Cambridge areas received intensive one-week training for teachers in the inclusive classroom.

Early childhood education was significantly impacted by the social changes initiated from the Women’s Movement in the 1970s as “women insisted on becoming contributing members of society” (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000, p. 366). Women returned to the work force in massive numbers, necessitating child care programs for young children. Day care centers proliferated in a variety of venues and with a variety of models: Center-based, family day care, corporate-sponsored, university-linked as well as those situated in hospitals and public schools (Lascarides & Hintitz, 2000).

In the mid-nineteen seventies, Lesley undertook a grand experiment that, although short-lived, made important contributions to the early childhood field. Belle Evans, Adjunct Faculty at Lesley and author of many of the first texts in day care programming and administration, designed and operated a day care center for two years in a renovated house on the Lesley campus. The day care center, that served approximately forty-five infants, toddlers, and preschoolers of Lesley employees and community residents, functioned similarly to the Lesley Laboratory Schools, and trained graduate and undergraduate students in exemplary early childhood practice. Evans contributed significantly to the day care field, publishing extensively in the area of day care programming, curriculum and administration (Evans 1973; Evans, Saia, & Evans, 1974).

The issue of day care for infants and toddlers was highly controversial at this time, especially with respect to the effects on their social-emotional development and attachment relationships. Jerome Kagan, Professor of Psychology at Harvard University found in a demonstration program of “high quality care for infants” that there were “no adverse effects of infant care” (Santrock, 2007, p. 262). Of course, the concern was about programs of lower quality.

Kagan also influenced and shaped the “nature-nurture” debate in child psychology and early childhood education: Does nature, or one’s biological inheritance, or nurture, the influence of parents or the environment, shape personality or temperament? Whereas attachment theorists (summarized in Karen, 1998) believe that early relationships are the most important predictor of a child’s social-emotional behaviors, Kagan provided evidence that children were born with temperamental tendencies that influenced their relational abilities. He also believed these tendencies could be changed by the environment (Santrock, 2005). In 1980, Mary Mindess brought Kagan to speak at the New England Kindergarten Conference on the topic of responding to the temperamental differences of children. Kagan invited the early childhood educators assembled to consider the cognitive style, intellectual competence and motivation of each child and how they could accommodate to these sources of variation (Kagan, 1980).

Jay Featherstone (1971) introduced the ideas of the British Infant Schools and Open Education to the United States. The theoretical underpinnings of the Open Education philosophy are found in the work of Dewey, Piaget, and educators John Holt and Herbert Kohl. The core principles of Open Education included child-directed,

thematic learning in engaging environments where children were offered “varied and challenging materials” (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000, p.585). Proponents of Open Education strongly valued preserving the children’s freedom, individuality, independence, and total development while maintaining close connections with their families. Learning environments and centers, set up in hallways and in multi-age classrooms, often without walls, enabled children to explore at will. A high value was placed on respecting children through relating to them in “democratic, nonhierarchical relationships” and involving them in decisions that affected them (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000, p. 585).

In the early 1970s, interest in Open Education grew among early childhood educators at Lesley including Cynthia Cole, Assistant Professor of Education and Director of the Independent Studies Program from 1971-1979. An “innovative educational philosopher” and “progressive spirit,” Cole developed one of the first Masters in Open Education programs (Baig, 1984, p. 7). The program was offered to graduate students for five years and was then absorbed into the regular education curriculum. A noteworthy 1976 graduate of the program was Nancy Carlsson-Paige who went on to become a kindergarten teacher at the Lesley-Ellis Lab School, which operated with the Open Education philosophy.

### **1980-2009: Early Intervention, Bilingual Education, Standards Based Education, and Universal Pre-Kindergarten**

In the last three decades some of the paramount issues that have captured the attention of early childhood educators are bilingual education, early intervention, standards-based education and universal pre-kindergarten.

In 1986, the Education of the Handicapped Act was amended to include comprehensive programs of early intervention for infants and toddlers. This legislation created opportunities to serve children from birth to three who were emotionally or developmentally at risk due to premature birth, low birth weight, diagnosed disabilities or who experienced relational issues such as abuse or attachment disorders. Over the years, there had been a growing realization that while early intervention is necessary, preschool is too late due to the realities of brain development:

The mounting evidence about the significance of early experience in brain development, summarized in *Rethinking the brain: New insights in early Development* (Shore, 1997) provides a stronger than ever impetus for systematic efforts to enhance children’s learning opportunities and development in the first three years of life (Ramey & Ramey, 1998, p. 12).

In 1983, Dr. Joanne Szamreta, former director of two early intervention programs, joined the Lesley College early childhood faculty and, along with Samuel Madoono of the Psychology Department, created an early intervention specialization-certification for Early Childhood Education and Child and Family Study majors, one of the first in Massachusetts on the undergraduate level. Szamreta, a passionate public policy advocate for early intervention and the developmental needs of infants and toddlers, served as a

Schott Fellow in 2005-2006 and co-authored a position paper: “Everybody’s baby: Early education and care for infants and toddlers” (Ellis, Jones, & Szamreta, 2006).

Mary Beth Lawton, Adjunct Faculty in the School Of Education from 1987-2000, joined the Lesley College undergraduate faculty in 2000. In collaboration with the Astra Foundation, Lawton brought a new course to the early intervention curriculum: An Introduction to the DIR (Developmental, Individual, Relationship-based) or “Floortime” approach of Dr. Stanley Greenspan, a competing model with the behaviorist, ABA approach to developmental disorders.

During this time period, educators were also paying increased attention to children’s social-emotional development. Lesley professor Jerome Shultz, founder of the Learning Lab at Lesley and Mary Mindess developed the first online course offered through Lesley: “Children with Behavior Problems: Responding to the Challenge.” Through the years, this course has attracted early childhood educators from India, Japan, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, England, and the US.

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 reversed the previous “English Only” policies in education and led to an effort to realize educational equity for English Language Learners. A growing body of evidence recognized the importance of the child’s first language as a bridge to the second and an important source of identity and self-esteem (Cordasco, 1976).

In November 2000, Lily Wong Fillmore, Professor of Graduate Education at the University of California, Berkeley, presented at the New England Kindergarten Conference at the request of Mary Mindess. Wong-Fillmore’s topic was: “The Educator’s Role in Supporting Dual Language Development in Children.” She encouraged early childhood educators to build on children’s cultural and linguistic heritage and encourage parents of English language learners to maintain the child’s native language in the home (Wong-Fillmore, 2000).

Joanne Szamreta, recognizing the shortage of trained bilingual teachers, applied for and received a five-year federal grant, in partnership with the Boston Public Schools, to train bilingual teachers from 1999-2004. Dr. Maria Serpa, graduate faculty in the School of Education later joined the project. Over the course of the grant, forty Spanish, Haitian Creole, Portuguese, Chinese, and Vietnamese students were trained in bilingual education. In the third year of the grant, the Massachusetts law changed, unfortunately eliminating bilingual education and it was necessary to adapt the grant to the current law.

Characteristic of this period was the emphasis on standards-based education and teacher licensure. The Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 created significant changes in early childhood education at Lesley. New certification regulations, the Massachusetts Teacher Education Licensure Test and the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System for students resulted in important revisions to the early childhood course of study at Lesley. Early childhood courses were aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in all areas while at the same time maintaining sound early childhood practice.

A major issue in the minds of early childhood educators at Lesley and beyond, in 2009, is the issue of universal preschool (UPK), a comprehensive, nationwide system of preschool education for all children. The quest for UPK takes us back to the Froebelian Kindergarten Movement and the forces that shaped Edith Lesley. Beatty (1995) suggests that we can learn from these early education pioneers in our efforts to realize universal

preschool. She writes: “The campaign for public kindergarten was a women’s issue and one of the most successful examples of the political and social power women held in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” (p. 201). She goes on to quote George Stoddard (1933) and suggest “that for preschools to be universalized, ‘millions of people’ will have ‘to rise up and demand’ that access to preschool education in America be provided for all our children” (p. 207).

In March 2009, under the leadership of President Joe Moore, Provost Martha McKenna, and School of Education Dean Mario Borunda, the graduate and undergraduate early childhood faculty at Lesley convened a universal pre-kindergarten conference titled: “Universal Preschool: Myths, Tensions, and Inspirations.” State and local leaders in early childhood education were invited to discuss and inform diverse perspectives on universal pre-kindergarten.

The issues included: Where should preschools be located, in public schools or in diverse child care options; Should the goal of UPK be school readiness or development of the whole child; Should the focus be on “skilling and drilling” versus play-oriented, best practice in early childhood education? It is interesting that many of these tensions have existed since the 1870s when the issue was whether kindergartens should be located in public schools (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). The “inspirations” of the conference were presentations by Amelia Gambetti, Reggio Children International Network Coordinator and Liaison for Consultancy in Schools and Lella Gandini on the Reggio Emilia approach to early education, and Jennifer Marino Rojas on the work and research of Marian Wright-Edelman.

One of the panelists and state leaders at the UPK conference was Hanna Gebrentensae, now the Division Chair of Early Childhood Programs at Urban College in Boston. Gebrentensae, a freedom fighter and early childhood leader in the African nation of Eritrea, created an underground infrastructure to support early childhood education in her country during the war. Connections with an Eritrean Head Start Director in Boston led her to pursue her education in the United States and to a meeting with Mary Mindess, Joanne Szamreta, and Nancy Heims, International Relations Program Director at Lesley. Impressed by the promise of this young woman, Mindess, Szamreta, and Heims approached then President Margaret McKenna, who granted Gebrentensae a full, four-year scholarship. Like her predecessor Edith Lesley, McKenna “walked the talk” in providing financial support for promising, culturally diverse international students who would have otherwise been unable to access a Lesley education.

Gebrentensae recalls: “I remember Nancy Heims calling me to say that I had been granted a scholarship and could come to Lesley. I was speechless! I couldn’t talk!” (H. Gebrentensae personal communication, May 7, 2009). The promise that the early childhood faculty and President McKenna saw in Hanna Gebrentensae was more than fulfilled. After graduating with a B.S. from Lesley, Gebrentensae received a Masters in Educational Policy from Harvard, became Director of Acorn Child Care in Chinatown, served as a consultant in diversity and cultural competence training, as Adjunct Faculty in Lesley’s Bilingual Education Program, and as a Training and Technical Assistance Consultant for Head Start Quality Initiatives before assuming her current position at Urban College. Her contribution to early care and education in Massachusetts has been extensive and she is a tribute to her Lesley College early childhood education.

## **Part II. The Four Goals of Early Childhood Education at Lesley**

Over the course of the past 100 years, despite changes in economic, political, or social climates, the early childhood education programs at Lesley University have sustained innovative content and delivery based on several principles and core beliefs. These ideas are best represented in the four overarching goals.

### **An Image of the Child**

Fundamental to good teaching is a deep understanding of children. An image of the child is based on an awareness of young children's cultural contexts, competencies, development, and emotional milestones. Teachers know that from birth, children are capable of making social connections, expressing emotions, and building mental models of how the world works. Young children operate as poets, philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, artists, and actors - questioning, investigating, exploring, and making sense of their world. As active participants in their learning, children bring their unique perspectives and backgrounds to bear on educational experiences.

The notion of the "image of the child" has been evolving for early childhood faculty members at Lesley as they have become increasingly immersed in the Reggio Emilia approach to ECE. The importance of the teacher's image of the child is expressed in the words of Carla Rinaldi, executive consultant for Reggio Children, and a professor at the University of Modena and Reggio:

In substance, the child is defined by our way of looking at and seeing him. But since we see what we know, the image of the child is what we know and accept about children. This image will determine our way of relating with children, our way of forming our expectations for them and the world that we are able to build for them (Rinaldi, 2006, p.91).

The first eight years of life is a time of tremendous growth, with important cognitive, linguistic, physical, social, and emotional milestones influencing how children should be taught. Three-year-olds often have similar ways of relating to peers, parents, and materials. Certain materials, songs, games, and subject matter capture the interest of many five-year-olds. There are typical seven-year-old approaches to academic challenges. At the same time, each child is unique-with gender, culture, family constellation, and personality influencing their approaches to learning. These are the understandings that a Lesley early childhood education student must develop.

Children possess the innate desire to make sense of their world and communicate their understandings to others. They can do so using multiple strategies or "languages," such as facial expressions, words, acting, dancing, drawing, singing, storytelling, and writing. Children also learn a great deal from observing. Teachers are champions of these endeavors, extending and enhancing the learning of each student and their entire group.

## **Developing a Theory of Learning**

Piaget (1969), Dewey (1916), Vygotsky (1978) and others have written about the importance of children being socially engaged and active in the learning process and through their activity, building their own knowledge, knowledge that has personal meaning for them. One may ask whether children will learn the critical literacy, numeracy and other skills in first grade to move on in their education with a firm foundation for later learning if the teacher isn't telling them exactly what they need to learn and what they need to do. Those who favor the active dialogue, questioning, and critical thinking that are key aspects of constructivism would respond that children can and do learn critical foundational skills in first grade through this approach to teaching. Children also learn how to collaborate, to engage in debate and dialogue with others over disagreements, and to question and become thoughtful about the ambiguities of life. If the constructivist teacher develops a curriculum direction that she has observed has significant interest for the children and then creates activities that meet the standards within that direction, children will be curious, engaged and active learners who will build learning that has lasting meaning for them AND meets the standards. Because of this meaning-making, however, the chances are very good that the children will remember what they've learned far longer than any memorized information required for a test.

Piaget (1969) and Vygotsky (1978) write about the critical nature of direct experience in learning, especially for young children. Piaget describes the notion of schema, or patterns of learning and behavior, developed through these direct experiences, schema that help to facilitate children's understanding of the world. Vygotsky has added the idea of Zone of Proximal Development, or the place of learning opportunity for a child, in which a more experienced learner, often the teacher but possibly more experienced peers, can build upon the child's existing knowledge and support the child to reach new skills, new knowledge, and new understandings through relationships. Dewey's work (1916) focused on relationships in the context of the school community, which he believed should provide children with the opportunity to develop democratic principles in the group living of classroom life and the larger school. Children need to learn to question and to find out how to answer these questions. They also need to learn to contribute to the larger society through asking questions and contributing what they know and can do for that society. For Dewey, school was not a holding place for children where teachers transmit knowledge to passive learners for the sake of getting right answers on tests but rather a dynamic community in which all the joys, tensions, issues and concerns of the individuals in the community were addressed mainly through dialogue and discussion. Children learned actively with the support of teachers and all contributed to the larger school.

Erikson (1963) describes the early childhood years as an important time for developing autonomy, initiative and trust. Earlier Piaget (1951) also wrote about the inseparability of cognitive and affective development in learning. Gardner (1993) discusses the many intelligences with which we are born and develop over time if we are given the opportunity to do so.

In the early childhood program at Lesley, we strive to support students to examine their own educational experience and its influence on their ideas about teaching and to discover the inquiring minds of the children they encounter in their pre-practicum and

practicum placements. Faculty work to scaffold students' understanding of the critical place of curiosity, questioning, and inquiry in the teaching and learning process. We hope that students will come to see themselves as teachers who not only scaffold their students' learning but also continue to learn along side them and with them. Everyone has a fund of knowledge to share.

### **The Role of the Teacher**

These two quotes from the Lesley University Early Childhood Education Mission Statement embody strong influences from the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education.

Teachers have multiple roles and responsibilities in early childhood classrooms. They support children's efforts to make meaning, foster connections to classmates and content, help individuals develop their potential, and see learning possibilities in ordinary moments.

Based on careful observation and assessment of their students, along with knowledge of child development and content, teachers organize curricula (creative and prescribed) that engage children in ongoing investigations. Teachers embody the memory of the group in their acts and the artifacts they encourage their students to create, helping students learn about learning.

One of the key concepts in the Reggio Emilia approach and also in Lesley's vision of the teacher's role in engaging children in the learning process is the notion of intellectual vibrancy. The teacher herself needs to be deeply interested about a topic. Only when the teacher feels excited about learning can she involve children in a similar process. This excitement about learning coupled with children's natural curiosity is the heart of the co-construction of knowledge that takes place in the early childhood classroom. Teacher and children work together. They collaborate in identifying problems and conducting investigations. This collaboration is the crux of the learning process.

The teacher's role in engaging children in the learning process is indeed complex. The process requires an intellectually vibrant teacher, one who is a careful listener and a keen observer, one who is able to foster connections to classmates and content, who views group learning as an avenue for developing individual potential, and who is able to see the learning potential in ordinary moments.

### **Exploring the Realities and Possibilities of Schools**

The Early Childhood Education program at Lesley believes that schools are places that promote peaceful communities and prepare children for participation in a democracy. We want our future teachers to help children respect diversity, create equity and social justice, and develop the social-emotional skills to work harmoniously and cooperatively with others. In addition, we believe that it is essential for new teachers to know that many children arrive at school lacking essential needs and bearing the burden of families stressed by poverty.

**Multiculturalism.** The philosophy of multiculturalism evolved in the 1960s from changing demographics and the demands of various groups (racial, cultural, women, gays, and lesbians) for fairness, justice, equity and equality (Grant, 1994).

In a multicultural classroom all children construct a positive identity and self-concept as an individual and member of a group. Erik Erikson (1968) provides theoretical support for the importance of developing a positive identity. Referring to his work, Beverly Tatum (1997) writes that a child's identity is based on "who the world says I am... Am I represented in the cultural images around me? Or, am I missing from the picture altogether" (p. 18)? When children see their race, ethnicity, language, gender, abilities, and family composition represented in the school curriculum, their identities are validated and affirmed.

In a multicultural classroom, children learn to be socially conscious, critically thinking citizens, to take a stand against injustice, and to work towards equality. Grant (1994) describes the multicultural school:

It demands a school staff that is multiracial and multiculturally literate, and that includes staff members who are fluent in more than one language. It demands a curriculum that organizes concepts and content around the contributions, perspectives and experiences of the myriad of groups that are a part of the United States society. It confronts and seeks to bring about change of current social issues involving race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, gender and disability. (p. 191).

In the early childhood education courses at Lesley, students develop an appreciation of bilingualism, an understanding that a child's first language is a bridge to the second and positively affects second language acquisition. Equally important, is the importance of including children's native languages in the curriculum.

Miller-Endo (2004) acknowledged the high stress of English language learners, the importance of reducing their anxiety and increasing their motivation and self-esteem.

**The social-emotional lives of children: Education for participation in a democracy.** Children bring their emotional selves to the classroom, the stress and trauma of coping with violence, alcoholism, emotional abandonment, neglect, and loss. Their emotional traumas significantly impact their chance for academic success as well as the climate of the classroom.

Helfat (1973) writes:

When we try to learn more about the children who cause problems in our classrooms, we find that they are for the most part youngsters who are expressing a great deal of anger and hurt feelings. These are the children who are so preoccupied with psychic needs, who have so many emotional battles to fight, that it is almost impossible for them to devote themselves to learning. (p. 31).

The early childhood education program at Lesley has long recognized the critical importance of attending to the emotional lives of children in schools, to their emotional traumas, near and far. Sondra Langer, former Chair of the Graduate program in Early Childhood Education (1979 to 2006) developed a course to help teachers support children

with the emotional issues in their lives. In the wake of the September 11, 2001 tragedy, Professor Mary Mindess invited early childhood educators Nancy Carlsson Paige, Mary Beth Lawton and others to the New England Kindergarten Conference to dialogue with teachers and generate strategies for helping children cope with the trauma of our national tragedy. Professor Lisa Fiore, current Chair of the Graduate Program in Early Childhood Education, co-authored the book *Your Anxious Child: How Parents and Teachers Can Relieve Anxiety in Children* (Dacey & Fiore, 2000). Dacey and Fiore's work helps adults cope with children's anxiety and stress through teaching children self-comforting strategies, breathing techniques, meditation, and problem-solving strategies. In "The Case of Miss D," in his book *From Basketball to the Beatles: In Search of Compelling Early Childhood Curriculum*, Lesley professor Ben Mardell encourages teachers to meet the emotional and relational (attachment) needs of children with problematic behaviors instead of resorting to rewards and punishment (Mardell, 1999).

In the early 1980s, there was growing concern over the impact of societal changes on children and families: The rise of poverty, the loss of family and neighborhood supports, and the high divorce rate (Krasnow, Seigle, & Kelly, 1994). Recognizing that many children were entering schools without the ability to emotionally communicate and relate to others, the National Institute of Mental Health encouraged schools to develop social-emotional curricula to address problematic behavior in the classroom. Through affective (social-emotional) curriculum, children learn how to: participate in a group; develop codes of conduct for group and classroom participation; develop respect for similarities and differences; learn democratic principles such as cooperation, problem solving and cooperation and specific social-emotional skills such as how to listen or express anger in appropriate ways (NAEYC, 2001).

A growing body of research indicates that social competency skills are linked to social and academic success and success in life (Seigle, Lange, & Macklem, 1997). Academic success is impacted when children feel that they are an accepted, welcomed part of a classroom community (Goleman, 1995; Goleman, 1998; Hennessey, 2007; Krasnow, et al., 1994).

Lesley University's response to the growing concerns of teachers about children's social-emotional skills and the rise of violence in schools was the creation of the Center for Peaceable Schools founded, in 1991, by Lesley faculty members Nancy Carlsson-Paige and Linda Brion-Meisels. Recognizing that the social-emotional climate of schools impacts learning, their articulated goal for the Center was "a vision...of peaceable schools, places where the ideals of democracy and diversity would be put into practice in the curriculum, social life and governance of schools" (Center for Peaceable Schools Website). Over the years, the Center, "rooted in the values of equity and social justice" has supported the growth of educators and community leaders through professional development, consultation and research. In 1993, Lesley offered the First Annual Summer Institute of Peaceable Schools. That same year, Nancy Carlsson-Paige, in partnership with Educators for Social Responsibility, co-founded the nation's first Master of Education in Conflict Resolution and Peaceable Schools.

## Conclusion

Lesley early childhood students, responding to the needs of immigrant, English language learners, supporting children to create peaceful, respectful communities in which the “good of all is the concern of all” and in which they can realize their potential, brings us back full circle to the dream of Edith Lesley. Although much has changed in early childhood education since Edith Lesley’s time, due to the influence of major thinkers and major socio-political movements, many of the values of Edith Lesley, education as a tool for social justice, the importance of creativity, the arts and play and the importance of home-school collaboration, have stayed constant at Lesley over the past 100 years. Although there have been challenges to these values, early childhood education at Lesley has stayed constant throughout the challenges, integrating the best of the forces from the outside with these core ideals.

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