

Early Childhood Education: Need and Opportunity, by David P. Weikart, 2000, Paris: Unesco/liep, pp.93, Price: Not mentioned.

This monograph examines early childhood care and education from a variety of perspectives. A brief historical perspective of childcare and education has been presented in its first chapter. It traces the evolution of services for childcare in various countries. It has reported a wealth of information on the changes that have been occurring in the early childhood education scene. This chapter is almost a foundation for the discussions that follow in later chapters.

While tracing the history of early childhood education, the author states how Olmsdted and Weikart brought together the histories of early childhood education and the French and the German reformers began to discuss the process of childhood growth and development. It also discusses how, at the same time, they began to sense that childhood was different from adulthood and children were not miniatures of adulthood. So also, mention has been made about the shift in childcare of the culturally deprived to the economically disadvantaged.

The introduction of Head Start programme in the USA and the studies conducted to assess the impact of such programmes have been presented in detail by the author. The People's Republic of China's experiments of early childhood education programmes have been presented in a nutshell in this chapter besides a review of researches that have been carried out after 1960s.

The second chapter mainly focuses on the imperative need for early childhood education. Eleven countries form the basis for the study as to what extent pre-primary services are offered to fulfil the needs of children in terms of care and education. The discussions centre around the analysis of data from nearly 21,545

families surveyed. Here the context of the IEA Pre-primary Project has been explained clearly. The author sums up the salient features of the study as well as offers comments and raises a few questions, such as: Are the care givers educators? Are children having the kind of childhood experiences that lead to sound child development?

The expectations of parents and teachers about the learning activities organised out of home are described in the third chapter. While discussing their expectations, the author mentions three categories of skills that are considered important and three, which are not. Finally, the author feels that in the era of globalisation, parents and teachers are to be encouraged to get along with each other, to take care of themselves and to use language to better their life.

In the fourth chapter, findings from the High/ Scope Perry pre-school study in the USA (a longitudinal study) are discussed at length. The author says, "early childhood education, when offered as a high quality programme, is a powerful antidote of poverty" (p. 56). How the experiences in early care giving centres and non-early childhood education settings contribute to developmental level of the child forms the theme of the fifth chapter.

The need for making selection/choice of curriculum and capacity building programmes for care givers of children is the highlight of the sixth chapter. The author makes comments that: (1) early childhood years have the power to set in place the foundation for their growth; (2) quality of life is the key and high quality must be realised by building upon the best model and curriculum available (p. 89). The concluding chapter presents the major issues involved in planning effective early childhood programmes.

The monograph is useful for researchers, students and planners. The presentation of ideas is made lucidly. Language used is very simple.

The monograph has been published with the financial assistance from the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency.

Dr. Usha Ramkumar
Education Unit, ISEC
Bangalore-560 072, India
minu@isec.ac.in