Book Review

Elizabeth Rose. *The Promise of Preschool: From Head Start to Universal Pre-Kindergarten*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 288 pp. Hardback $35.00.

Eleven years ago, this reviewer had the pleasure of reviewing for this journal Elizabeth Rose's *A Mother's Job: The History of Day Care 1890-1960* (1999). That work offered a fascinating 70-year study of day care in the United States, with particular foci on mothers' experiences and on barriers to the acceptance and provision of day care on the local level. In that highly commendable work, Rose charted "the gradual transformation of day care from a charity for poor single mothers to a socially legitimate need of 'normal' families, and even a potential responsibility of the state" (p. 5). Rose's latest monograph, *The Promise of Preschool*, focuses on the history of preschool education in the United States since 1965 and tells a story with a similar arc. Here, Rose focuses more on policy than on the experiences of individuals, and the resulting analysis charts the transformation of preschool from a program for the poorest children to a pedagogically legitimate need of "normal" families, and, ultimately, a responsibility of the state.

This exhaustively researched and well-written work is divided into two main sections, the first five chapters explaining "how we got here" and the remaining three describing "where we are going," in terms of twenty-first century early childhood education policy (p. vi). Rose adopts a path-dependency framework, underscoring incidences in which she sees prior policy decisions having constrained the range of options available to policymakers at any given point in time.

The study begins with an examination of the circumstances surrounding the foundation of the federal government's Head Start compensatory health, education, and welfare program, launched in 1965 as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty. Here, Rose's analysis differs little from those of other scholars (most notably Maris Vinovskis's *The Birth of Head Start*, 2005), concluding that Head Start was born of a heady mix of burgeoning social science, antipoverty and Civil Rights activism, political expediency, and seemingly misplaced—yet enduring—hope in early education as "an antidote to poverty" (p. 42).

Similarly, the topic of Rose's second chapter, the hopeful rise and crushing defeat of the 1971 Child Development Act, has been examined well and in depth elsewhere (especially Sonya Michel's *Children's Interests/Mothers' Rights*, 1999), but it is Rose's tightly woven examination of *both* preschool and child care as intertwined policy themes and public

(and private) practical and ideological concerns that makes this study both meaningful and important. This becomes increasingly evident by the book's third chapter, which details the parallel development of separate strands of early education and child care in U.S. federal policy after President Nixon's veto of the 1971 act. Having lost all hope for the type of universal child care services that the 1971 act would have provided, child care advocates in the 1980s campaigned for federal child care funding targeted to low-income families only. Even though their main legislation failed to pass, lobbying efforts on the part of a massive coalition of labor unions, women's organizations, early childhood professionals, civic and religious groups, and public officials helped to keep child care on the agenda of both major political parties on a national scale.

Rose delineates how, in an increasingly politically polarized America, proposals for government regulation of child care and/or universal child care provisions were rejected out of hand as part of the strengthening 1980s Republican "family values" platform. The short-term result was a patchwork of minimally regulated, categorical care programs for some of the poor (in addition to Head Start for some others) and tax deductions subsidizing the costs of private care options for the middle- and upper-class families who could afford them. Low-income parents' access to child care would be improved upon by the 1990 Child Care and Development Block Grant and the At-Risk Child Care Program, which were described "as both a giant leap in acknowledging a public responsibility for child care and a baby step in its actual impact on the problem" (p. 80). By giving vouchers to low-income parents to participate in the private child care market, this legislation underscored the results of conservative 1970s policies, which gave the market itself "a decisive role in child care, producing a great variety of child care arrangements (private nonprofit and for profit child care centers, family day care, care by relatives and 'nannies,' nursery schools or preschools) but no way to ensure their quality or accessibility" (p. 70).

While the 1980s was a period of continued and considerable debate regarding the provision of federal funds for child care, it was also a time of intense reform in primary and secondary (K-12) education. Policymakers focused attention on children below school age, fearing kindergarten may be too late to put children on the path to academic success. With "school readiness" as a focus of the national education reform agenda, many states began public school pre-kindergarten (pre-K) initiatives to serve at least those three- and four-year olds deemed likely to be at risk of educational failure. In chapter four of this volume, Rose offers four case studies to demonstrate how individual states, "inspired in different ways by research findings, educational priorities, and opportunities in their states," (p. 129) sought to offer pre-kindergarten

either to all (Georgia, New York, and Oklahoma) or to the most needy (New Jersey). Here, Rose identifies the context-specific economic, demographic, political, and social factors that shaped the decisions made, the paths taken, and the programs that resulted. The mixed results attained by these pre-K pioneer states set the stage for Rose's account of the national movement for universal, public pre-K in chapter five. The massive expansion of the universal pre-K movement in the late 1990s and 2000s was inspired by the groundbreaking universal pre-K programs in states such as Georgia, spurred by comparisons with France and other nations, driven by business and economic interests, and enabled by funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts and other nongovernmental organizations. Analyzing the complicated results of this movement, Rose shows how the expansion of services was neither easy nor straightforward, even in places where it seemed to be welcome.

In the second part of the book, focused on the question of "where we are going," Rose raises key questions drawn directly from the deftly composed narrative in part one. Many of these rest on the differences between what makes pedagogical or practical sense and what is politically defensible, at any given time and over the long term. For example, should pre-K be a universal entitlement or are limited funds best utilized by programs targeted to the neediest children? Is preschooling best kept separate from or integrated into the public schools? Moving beyond questions of basic provision and responsibility, Rose asks how policy makers and educators should shape the quality and content of preschool programs, given that experts and their research findings seem to disagree about everything from teacher training requirements to the inclusion of academic instruction and parental participation in program design and execution. Each of these themes has deep historical roots in discourses and practices of early childhood care and education in the United States, and each theme has practical and ideological components. These are highlighted in Rose's conclusion, which identifies lessons for pre-K advocates drawn from her analysis. Interestingly, these lessons are the same ones to be drawn from the experience of the U.S. public kindergarten movement a century ago: (1) that preschool should be framed as education in policy terms, but the separation of child care and education may be counterproductive to the interests of children and families; (2) that universal programs are most desirable but not always politically supportable; (3) that research results based on experimental models tell us little about what is possible in large-scale public provision; (4) that preschool (such as kindergartens) should be integrated into a larger system of extant education (and other) services; and (5) that early childhood education faces a loss of its traditional strengths and child-centered, hands-on focus once placed under the aegis of academically focused, results-driven systems of public schooling.

Although Rose laments some policy paths not taken, this work is neither a finger-pointing exercise nor a manifesto. Instead, it is a clear-eyed and even-handed analysis of policies in changing sociopolitical and research contexts and an exploration of what options appear possible now and in the near future. This work illuminates the complexity of the issues, processes, and personages involved in early childhood policy in a way that is thoughtful, readable, and sensitive to the contradictory demands and competing concerns with which policy makers, educators, and parents have to contend. It greatly expands our understanding of early childhood policy over the last 45 years and should top reading lists for stakeholders and students alike. In framing the current pre-K policy context as a "set of dilemmas" (p. x), Rose demonstrates how universal pre-K programs necessarily promise different things to different people, thus decreasing the likelihood that such promises are ever wholly fulfilled. This should not, however, stop us from trying, especially since universal child care remains unpromised in the United States, let alone a promise unfulfilled.

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