Book Review

Andrew Karch. *Early Start: Preschool Politics in the United States*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013. 288 pp. Cloth $60.00.

Andrew Karch has authored a clearly written and detailed review of the political, educational, governmental, and stakeholder roles and stances in preschool politics in the United States from the 1800s to the present time. The book is grounded in three central concepts taken from the developmental perspective on American social policy: "critical junctures," "venue shopping," and "policy feedback." Early in the book Karch defines "critical junctures" as "crucial periods of transition" that "produce durable legacies" and "leave a lasting mark on the political landscape" (p. 24). "Venue shopping" occurs when reformers are frustrated in one institutional setting and attempt to achieve their goals in a different one, in which they believe they will experience success. Karch uses "policy feedback" to refer to "mechanisms of production (that) link (a) critical juncture to its legacy, and mechanisms of reproduction (that) perpetuate the ongoing institutional or political processes" (p. 27). Throughout the volume, Karch returns to these processes as a continuing thread to develop understanding as events, their antecedents, and consequences are reviewed.

The author believes that policy making "is best understood as an 'unfolding historical process'" (p. 31). He therefore begins his study with a historical review of early education practice in the United States from the 1800s through the early 1960s, then focuses on the evolution of early childhood education at multiple governmental levels from the 1960s to the present, in order to comment on "preschool politics" over a sustained period of time. President Richard Nixon's veto of the Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971 is used as a "watershed episode" (pp. 59–85) to explain the fragmentation of U.S. early childhood education policies today. Karch provides a detailed description of the preschool coalition formation, Congressional and Presidential actions, rationales for and against the Act, the veto message, and the aftermath up to the present time.

Extensive archival and statistical data as well as multiple secondary-source publications from the fields of early childhood education, history of education, political science, politics of education, and several levels of law and government provide a firm foundation for the assertions made in this volume. The author has sought out little-known sources as well as major milestone publications. His references include historical classics in several fields, contemporary works, and recent publications by noted and widely respected scholars.

In chapter 2, Karch briefly examines the differentiated histories of U.S. infant schools, day nurseries, and nursery schools. He looks at two sets of federal government programs: the 1930s Depression-era Emergency Nursery Schools sponsored by the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the Lanham Act grants that enabled the Federal Works Agency to provide financial assistance for child care for mothers employed in the war effort during World War II. In a similar fashion to most authors, Karch then skips to the 1960s advent of Head Start, highlighting its comprehensive approach, involving health, social, and educational services.[1] However, it is important to recognize that there were a number of women in leadership positions in federal and state offices of education during the 1950s with experience in early care and education. Additionally, the Eisenhower administration produced both tangible and symbolic policies, including the creation of the Department of Health Education and Welfare (DHEW) in 1953, as well as Public Law 83–591 of Internal Revenue Code Section 214, which provided for tax deductions for selected child-care expenses, in 1954.[2] Karch returns to a discussion of Head Start in chapter 3, when referring to the controversial Comprehensive Child Development Act provision for local flexibility and control. Secondary sources are used to describe the operations of the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM), as an example of parental decision-making authority. Those researching the beginnings of the federal Head Start program would find the first-person account, *The Devil Has Slippery Shoes*, written by Polly Greenberg (who was a participant in the formation of Head Start and was deeply involved with the work of CDGM), of interest.[3] In several chapters, Karch highlights the role of Head Start in transitioning parents and community members from volunteer roles to paraprofessional and professional educators, social service workers, cooks, and later, program administrators. He posits these aspects of the program as a rationale for the political participation highlighted by Greenberg, and cites them as exemplifying "policy feedback," one of the contributing factors in the continuing "fragmentation of the early education policy community" (p. 205).

Turning to the "venue shopping" aspect, Karch looks at the grant-funded Perry Preschool Project, whose high adult-child ratios; quality,

[1]V. C. Lascarides and B. F. Hinitz, *History of Early Childhood Education* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 411–13.

[2]E. R. Ranck, "Early Care and Education in the 1950s: The Thorny Path When Public Issues Confront Passionately-Held Beliefs," in *The Hidden History of Early Childhood Education*, ed. B. F. Hinitz (New York and London: Routledge, 2013) pp. 130–31.

[3]Polly Greenberg, *The Devil Has Slippery Shoes: A Biased Biography of the Child Development Group of Mississippi (CDGM): A Story of Maximum Feasible Poor Parent Participation* (Washington, DC: Youth Policy Institute, 1969/1990).

cognitively oriented, Piaget-based program; and credentialed staff were difficult to replicate at the state level. Karch suggests that the financial implications often led state policy makers to make trade-offs between cost and quality (p. 151). In chapter 8, he cites the difficulties state officials encountered when they "sought to merge existing initiatives into a single program," because of the variety of bureaucratic, programmatic, and fiscal "territories" being defended by the programs currently in existence (p. 181). In his analysis of attempts to change the status quo in the fifty states, Karch returns again to the role of Head Start. Here he looks at the "tension between Head Start supporters and other members of the early childhood policy community," and declares that "the strength of the Head Start community is the key factor" in whether a state dedicates any or all of its public funds to preschool (p. 189). His survey of demographic factors influencing decisions includes the following: the population age profile, state wealth, the formal education levels of the population (possessing a high school diploma or higher), the percentage of racial diversity, and the political environment ("Democrats tend to be more enthusiastic than Republicans about publicly funded preschool," p. 191). Karch contends his analysis demonstrates the following.

The impact of the Head Start community is consistent with the concept of policy feedback. Supporters of policy change often must overcome the opposition of constituencies who benefit from the status quo, and the clout of program beneficiaries can constrain the options that policymakers possess (p. 194).

Staff credentialing is an important long-term issue of "policy feedback" discussed throughout the book. The Child Development Associate (CDA) credential, begun in 1972, was based on documenting competencies rather than formal college-level coursework. It included a Local Assessment Team (LAT) consisting of the candidate, the supervisor, a parent representative, and a CDA Consortium Representative. It did not require college course work, because it was designed to encourage the professional development of all levels of preschool staff members. In 1990 the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition (the Council) made a number of sweeping changes in the credentialing process, including eliminating the LAT and adding a requirement for the completion of 120 clock hours of formal child-care training within a five-year period under the auspices of an organization with expertise in early childhood teacher preparation.[4] In 2013 the Council moved toward computer-based testing and totally revised

[4]V. C. Lascarides and B. F. Hinitz, *History of Early Childhood Education* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 420.

the credentialing process. These changes were designed to better prepare staff members to develop young children's cognitive, social, and emotional skills. However, as alluded to in this volume, competition for individuals with bachelor's degrees and specialized training in early education has led to the diversion of teachers from publicly and privately funded preschools to public school systems.

Early Start is a comprehensive, scholarly volume that should be required reading for all graduate students in early childhood/child development and education policy programs in the United States. The attention to detail and integration of archival documentary and oral history sources is commendable. The author's political and social policy perspectives provide new historically and statistically based insights into the current state of early education politics in U.S. venues and offer reasonable insights into the future dynamics of "the fragmented and decentralized preschool system that ... is the legacy of Nixon's veto of the Comprehensive Child Development Act" (p. 209). To my colleagues, "this volume is a 'must-read'."

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