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

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Today, two-thirds of 4-year-old children in the United States attend preschool, as well as 40% of 3-year-olds. These children may be attending any one of the various programs available, such as Head Start, private child care, or public-school-sponsored pre-kindergarten, and may be receiving very different types of early childhood education. The decisions that policy makers have made within the past five decades have created a patchwork of private and public programs to serve young children of different economic backgrounds and needs. In her book *The Promise of Preschool: From Head Start to Universal Pre-Kindergarten*, Elizabeth Rose provided a historical account of how the policy makers in the United States have shifted from providing the nation's poorest children a "head start" to providing universal pre-kindergarten to all children as part of the public education system. From a historical perspective, Rose revealed how

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previous decisions regarding child care policy can limit social change or make it possible.

The book is composed of eight chapters, divided into two parts with a separate introduction and conclusion.

In Part I, “How We Got Here,” Rose provided a chronological approach to show how preschool education has evolved in the United States. In Part II, she used a thematic approach to explore the unresolved issues of preschool policy. The book also has two appendices to document the increased preschool participation according to maternal employment from 1967 to 2005 and to disclose federal spending on selected programs for young children from 1999 to 2006. This book is intended for multiple audiences: policy makers, researchers, educators, parents, and students. Readers can appreciate the author’s use of narrative form in giving a historical account of the preschool education movement in the United States; and at the same time, Rose has examined the remaining issues that need to be addressed in order for the promise of preschool for all children to be realized. Most appealing is that, although Rose argued for preschool for all children, she has simply drawn attention to the history of preschool and to how it is being supported and implemented. She has only provided details and has not advocated for one preschool program over another.

As the title suggests, in the first part of her book, Elizabeth Rose traced the development of child care policy at the national and state levels from the 1960s to the present to reveal how child care policy decisions were made. In the first chapter, Rose described how federal policy makers based the creation of Head Start, first, on research showing the positive long-term effects of early intervention and, second, on the politics of President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty. The second chapter is an account of how efforts to create a national child care system in the 1970s failed to receive presidential support. Chapter 3 reveals how even though the nation was going through educational reform, preschool was primarily provided by Head Start or private child care providers. Chapters 4 and 5 reveal how universal

pre-kindergarten programs began evolving with the “educational tent” of the public education system.

The author pointed out that from the beginning of the creation of Head Start, the “quick-fix” implementation strategies affected future decisions. While Head Start did place young-child care on the agenda, only the needs of children from disadvantaged homes were federally supported through programs such as Head Start and the Title XX Child Care Supplemental Funds. These programs also bypassed state governments by directly funding local agencies and programs that provided Head Start services. The lack of trained preschool teachers was remedied by provision of a specialized six-day training program and a reduction in the qualifications of teachers in order to employ Head Start parents as teachers. Head Start continued to be politically supported even after it received negative evaluations on its long-term benefits to children.

The momentum continued into 1970, and Rose has described how the possibility of preschool for all surfaced and failed. Federal policy makers adopted a bill that would establish early education and after-school care programs for all children. While participation would not be required, child care tuition would be on a sliding scale based on family income. Even though the bill passed both the House of Representatives and the Senate and garnered much public support, President Nixon vetoed the bill. Nixon’s action “would be far-reaching, making it politically difficult to act on the issue for years to come” (p. 43).

In the 1980s, child care was back on the national agenda due to the education reform movement. Federal legislators set school readiness as an educational goal for the nation and discussed placing preschool under the “educational tent” of the public education system. Several states even launched pre-kindergarten programs for disadvantaged children. Nevertheless, Head Start received increased support, and federal policy makers increased child care tax credits and offered incentives for employer-sponsored child care. Rose expressed hope when she commented that at the end of the decade, “commitments to young children’s care and

educations strengthened the different strands [child care centers, Head Start, and state launched pre-kindergarten] of policy for young children, creating the possibility that they might later be woven together” (p. 99).

Policy makers in four states—Georgia, Oklahoma, New York, and New Jersey—opened the doors to universal preschool (i.e., for all children) in the 1990s. Georgia was the first state to provide universal pre-kindergarten. The program drew on research and had much in common with Head Start: curriculum, community partnerships, health and social services, and minimum requirements for teacher training. Contracts were made with private child care providers and partnerships were established with Head Start to offer pre-kindergarten so that services would be ensured to all 4-year-old children in the state (Rose, 2010). New York and New Jersey also relied on partnerships with child care providers to create universal pre-kindergarten. In Oklahoma, pre-kindergarten was gradually incorporated into the public education system. “The questions leaders in these states faced as they open doors to preschool . . . would find different answers in other states as the pressure to expand pre-kindergarten grew” (p. 130) in the 21st century.

The author began Part II of her book by posing the issues that remain to be resolved: Who needs preschool? How should it be delivered? Who is to pay for it? How will quality be ensured? How can public and political support be obtained? Although Rose did argue for the need for a national child care policy, she simply reported on the status of the issues rather than offering recommendations on which approach to take.

Rose explained that states offering universal pre-kindergarten have encountered mixed success at generating political support and high quality standards. Opponents fear that universal pre-kindergarten would be a subsidy for the middle class and would leave out private providers; and they also advocate for family responsibility for child care rather than governmental intervention. States such as California and Tennessee have sought preschool for all, only preschool for the needy has been realized.

Rose also pointed out that in some states, pre-kindergarten is offered through a combination of private providers, Head Start, and public schools; such arrangements require collaborative attention to the details that can strengthen the partnerships. Because of the lack of stability in funding universal pre-kindergarten, program standards—such as class size, teacher training, staff-to-child ratio, and length of day—vary from state to state and program to program. In order for these different programs to work together, each entity must be familiar with the standards and requirements of each of the programs. Rose urged that “putting the promise of preschool into practice requires attention not only to securing for preschool the professionalism and stability that schools can offer, but also to sustaining the strengths of early childhood programs that grew up outside of schools” (p. 211).

Rose concluded her book about preschool by summarizing five lessons learned. She first emphasized that preschool should be framed in terms of education rather than in terms of child care. She was quick to remind us, however, that children need both care and education to thrive. Next, Rose warned that “the case for preschool should not rest solely on research on experimental preschool programs, which may raise unrealistic expectations for large-scale public programs” (p. 220). She also stressed that even though greater political support is not guaranteed, the focus should be on “preschool for all,” not just for those children from income-challenged families. Next, Rose stated that preschool should be both inside and outside “the education tent” of public education. In the final lesson, Rose revealed the need to pay attention to the strengths of early childhood education as preschool becomes more integrated into the public school sector in order to avoid a “watered-down” first grade.

In *The Promise of Preschool*, Elizabeth Rose has provided a clear and logical argument for a national policy on preschool for all children. Readers who take the time to read this book will familiarize themselves with the history and research-base of universal pre-kindergarten. By knowing the historical

legacies, one will then be better prepared to address the unresolved issues before moving forward with the promise of preschool.

About the Reviewer

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