

The Historical Background of the Family and the Meaning of Childhood Prior to the 1900s

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ABSTRACT

Although the legislative, political, social, and pedagogical perspectives of primary school history were extensively examined during the 20th century, resulting in several global digests, the history of early childhood education and care lacks comprehensive coverage (Luc, 1999). However, the ongoing research at the International Standing Working Group for the History of Early Childhood Education, a division of the International Standing Conference for the History of Education (ISCHE), offers a promising solution to this issue.

Introduction. The topic of child-rearing and early childhood has been extensively discussed, especially since the publication of Philippe Ariès' controversial book, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*. Originally published in 1960 and translated into various languages, including English, Italian, and German, the book has become a "classic" and sparked a historic debate. According to Ariès, it was only in modern times that children were given a separate identity from adults and a "notion of childhood" emerged with emotional investment from families. This shift coincided with the introduction of institutions for children, such as colleges for the privileged and charitable schools for the poor, as well as the first attempts at birth control. As a result, the traditional family structure based on inheritance, filiation, or marriage gave way to the modern nuclear family that emphasizes emotional bonds.

Research methods. Intentionally limiting the number of offspring allows parents to invest socially in their future and emotionally in their character. David Hunt (*Parents and Children in History, The Psychology of Family Life in Early Modern France*, 1970) argues that Ariès discusses children but fails to mention the period of "early childhood" (before the age of seven), resulting in a distorted view of the relationship between parents and children. Additionally, Hunt criticizes Ariès for disregarding psychology, which emphasizes the critical importance of a person's first few years of life, despite the existence of rare yet significant historical documents that reconstruct the development stages of very young children going back to ancient times.

Hunt bases his argument on the daily observations recorded in the diary of Héroard (physician to

Louis XIII when he was a child), which he interprets in light of Erikson's psychological theories (Childhood and Society, 1963). Lloyd de Mause (Foundations of Psychohistory, 1982) believes that children's situation has steadily improved and Ariès underplays the abuse that children used to experience, such as being "murdered, beaten, terrorized, or sexually abused." French historians' criticism delves more into the role of institutions (Snyders, 1965) and the mismatch between representations and realities. There may have been a notion of childhood in the Middle Ages, but it may not have been articulated as a discourse or may have derived from other forms of discourse (such as religious rather than secular). A society cannot be described solely based on its self-awareness or the image it wishes to project of itself (for a summary of the criticism, Julia, in Becchi and Julia, dir. 1998).

Nevertheless, this groundbreaking book paved the way for new research on childhood and early childhood. Between 1970 and 2000, historical issues were significantly influenced by contemporary changes in the temporal factors that structure the life stages. These include earlier care in collective structures, following the schooling model of age-based classes; later puberty and entry into adulthood; longer studies, economic dependence; juvenile cohabitation, lower marriage rates, delayed family formation, and the medicalization of procreation. It has become even more challenging not to project contemporary perspectives onto past eras. Just as others compare different countries' approaches to the family education, historians are attempting to "date" and interpret the many cultural changes that directly or indirectly impact early childhood status.

Throughout the 20th century, the European countries where early childhood education was first introduced appear to have maintained loyalty to two distinct models. The social welfare model, prevalent in England and post-war Federal Germany, established free institutions for working-class children. On the other hand, countries such as Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands created kindergartens open to all, while Italy, France, and Belgium established free and open-to-all salles d'asile or nursery schools. The varying rates of early attendance and levels of investment in such care can be attributed to the dominant family models in each country, such as working mothers or housewives, and the fluctuating economic conditions, such as high or low demand for labor. However, by the end of the 20th century, the state nursery school model, providing comprehensive education and requiring highly qualified professionals, had become the norm across all countries, with allowances for national specificities such as timetables, levels of state intervention, and activity organization. In other words, the emphasis on fundamental learning was more pronounced when under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, as seen in France and Belgium, while play and games took precedence when these institutions were historically viewed as separate from school, as is the case in Nordic countries and Germany.

Conclusion. At present, historians are focusing their attention on nations that are implementing various types of "integrated" healthcare, ranging from infancy to the completion of elementary education. Denmark and Sweden, in particular, are the subjects of study, as researchers seek to understand the "customs" that may explain these unique Nordic characteristics.

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