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THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION publishes articles concerned with a variety of topics pertinent to Adventist education. Opinions expressed by our writers do not necessarily represent the views of the staff or the official position of the Department of Education of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION (ISSN 0021-8480) is published bimonthly, October through May, plus a single summer issue for June, July, August, and September by the Department of Education, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600. TELEPHONE (301) 680-5075; FAX (301) 622-9627; E-mail: rumbleb@gc.adventist.org. Subscription price, U.S. \$18.25. Add \$1.00 for postage outside the U.S. Single copy, U.S. \$3.75. Periodical postage paid at Silver Spring, Maryland, and additional mailing office. Please send all changes of address to P.O. Box 5, Keene, TX 76059, including both old and new address. Address all editorial and advertising correspondence to the Editor. Copyright 2005 General Conference of SDA, POSTMASTER: Send address changes to THE JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION, P.O. Box 5, Keene, TX 76059.

Early Childhood Education

The true test of civilization is, not the census, nor the size of the cities, nor the crops, but the kind of [person] that the country turns out" (Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1870). This is an awesome responsibility for parents and educators. To nurture a mind is to mold the future.

This issue of the JOURNAL looks at education's endeavors to set young children on a course for success. It considers a number of issues relating to early child development, such as: the current move toward universal preschool, the need to ensure safe learning environments, and wholistic development in formal and informal preschool settings.

Even a cursory review of educational literature reveals the importance of focusing on early child development. Too many youngsters are not performing well on high-stakes tests. Politicians and educators struggle with how to produce well-educated citizens from an increasingly diverse population. Dire warnings are issued about at-risk 3-year-olds falling behind academically, never to catch up. Many view universal preschool as a potential solution to these problems.

Meanwhile, kindergarten teachers demand more classroom time to advance students to expected levels of proficiency. Preschool dropout rates top dropout rates at all other grade levels. And child development specialists warn that a toxic society is taking its toll on children's brains.

Perhaps now more vulnerable than ever, children need advocates. Overworked parents, inadequate or unconnected caregivers, lack of discipline, irregular routines, sensory overload, pressure to learn before developmentally ready—these influences and more can rob children of foundational strengths they need to thrive.

This issue provides information and perspective to help educators and parents as they prepare children for formal academics—when the time is right. Many of our readers are involved in preschool/kindergarten programs—directly or indirectly. Whatever your role, we have tried to provide current, relevant information to help guide early childcare and education. Some of the articles included here may be shared with parents trying to determine the best educational setting for their children.

Philosophically, this issue was prepared with the assumption that the mother is the best caregiver (the father, of course, also plays an important role), and that children should not be rushed into academics prematurely. Despite reports in the popular press, science does not conclusively support the idea that formal preschool is best for optimal child development. However, the authors are aware that societal pressures and family circumstances often lead parents to choose the next best options.

How should Adventist educators respond to growing demand for Christian preschools? When the mother is unable or unwilling to act as primary caretaker, other types of care must be considered. In this issue, we have tried to provide information to aid in these situations, as well as to promote the importance of maintaining respect and support for more ideal nurture of children. Because of this dual aim, the reader may sense a divided focus.

Ultimately, the most important thing to keep in mind is the welfare of the younger members of the family of God. The church, through its educational system, as well as family and children's ministries, has a moral responsibility to support and help parents, especially those who cannot or do not want to provide care themselves. This means a number of things, potentially, such as offering parenting classes, information about child development, preschools, kindergartens, etc. Also, in locations that mandate preschool enrollment by a certain age, the church may want to consider offering a religious alternative to secular care.

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LINDA B. CAVINESS

child a chance to succeed and to play" (p. 564). ✍

Joan Moyer is Professor, College of Education, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona. Reprinted from ACEI / J. Moyer (2001) ("The Child-Centered Kindergarten: A Position Paper," *Childhood Education* pp. 161–166) by permission of Joan Moyer and the Association for Childhood Education International, 17904 Georgia Avenue, Suite 215, Olney, MD. Copyright © by the Association.

**An earlier version of this paper was published in *Childhood Education* 63:4 (April 1987), pp. 235–242.

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Guest Editorial

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Such situations offer an evangelistic opportunity and a means for channeling children into the church's elementary schools.

One journal issue is wholly inadequate to cover the topic of early childhood development. Limited space does not allow us to cover a number of relevant topics. However, the JOURNAL welcomes reader responses to the articles and invites the submission of additional manuscripts.

Readers wishing to read more about this topic can refer to sources listed at the end of many of the articles or search the CIRCLE Website for additional resources: <http://circle.adventist.org/>.—Linda Bryant Cavinness.

The coordinator for this special issue on early childhood education, **Linda Bryant Cavinness, Ph.D.**, is Associate Professor of Education at La Sierra University in Riverside, California. Her areas of specialization are Language and Literacy and Educational Neuroscience. The editors express their appreciation for her dedication, enthusiasm, assistance, and attention to detail in soliciting articles and producing the issue.