Early Childhood Education System in France, Sweden, Denmark, and Korea

Dongju Shin
Duksung Women's University

Abstract

This study was conducted to explore and compare the early childhood education system of France, Sweden, Denmark, and Korea to understand international phenomenon and trend of early childhood education. The ideology and historical development of early childhood education, administrative and financial responsibility for early childhood educational system, and forms of child care and educational provision of each country were investigated.

The early childhood education system of a nation is related to the direction of national policy based on the sociocultural background and the need of early childhood educational service of the nation, rather than simply represents society's responsibility and organization of educational provision for young children. The direction of early childhood educational policy is formed on the basis of political and economic situation, viewpoint on children and families, and historical and philosophical perspectives on early childhood education of the society. Therefore, it seems meaningful to explore and compare early childhood educational system of France, Sweden, Denmark, and Korea to understand international phenomenon and trend of early childhood education.

*Earlier version of portions of this paper was presented in the book "Early Childhood Educational Systems in the World" (Park, Kim, Shin & Chung, 2000).

Correspondence and requests for reprints should be sent to Dongju Shin, Department of Early Childhood Education, Duksung Women's University, 419 Ssangmoon-dong, Dobong-gu, Seoul, Korea. E-mail: shin3772@hitel.net
1. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN FRANCE

1) The ideology and historical development of early childhood education

In France, since the eighteenth century, feeling of pity at the children who were neglected during their parents' absence initiated charitable people or bodies to gather children together for their protection, safety and health and, most importantly, for their education. The first educational institution for young children, so called knitting school (*La petite école à tricoter*), was established by Oberlin in 1770. In the school, children were provided opportunity to learn French, to study nature, to understand the rudiments of reading and arithmetic, and to acquire good moral and spiritual precepts, as well as to learn the technique of knitting.

In 1825, the first *salles d'asile*, the predecessors of the *école maternelles*, were founded in Paris. From 1829 to 1881, many official documents were published, encouraging the formation of *salles d'asile* in every region, and at the same time, defining their role. In 1881, *salles d'asile* were integrated into the public education system under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, and the name of the institution was officially alternated with *école maternelles* in 1882.

During the 20th century, the gravitation of population toward cities, the changes in family system, the increase of women's participation in labour market, the increasing rate of school failure in primary school, and the research results which were emphasized on the importance of early childhood period resulted in new perspectives and needs on the early childhood education (Chambredon & Prévet, 1973; Plaisance, 1984).

Especially since the mid 1950s, growing pressure from middle class families to expand the programs to include their children as well, led to a substantial expansion. The objective was largely to provide a socialization and educational experience for children from 2 or 3 and older, and to prepare them for primary school. Provision for younger children emerged later, and grew more slowly, designed initially for protective purposes. Subsequently, the focus was on providing care to the children of working parents and the goals broadened.

Recently, the rate of women's employment between the age of 25-49 is over than 80 percent, and 68 percent of married mother and 82 percent of lone mother are employed in France (Rayan & Plaisance, 1998; Kamerman, 1998).