Book Review in Educational Studies

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In recent decades there has been a heightened push for schools to collaborate with community agencies and organizations that offer social support and services, and/or to offer services directly (Ascher 1988; Davies 1991; Dryfoos 1994; Epstein 1995; Heath and McLaughlin 1987). For example, in 1990 the Kentucky Education Reform Act established a system for statewide coordination of child service agencies through a school-based collaborative arrangement (Smrekar 1996, 5). One of the components of Goals 2000 also is that all children in the United States will start school ready to learn. Kritek (1996) wrote that this conveys an “implicit, if not explicit, acknowledgment that a broad array of agencies will contribute to this realization. Insuring readiness for school will require the active involvement of family, the church, health-care providers and social service agencies” (xvi).

Motivations for these efforts have included dissatisfaction with contemporary educational restructuring initiatives that have focused on pedagogy, curriculum, and structure but have failed to address the needs that many children bring to school related to health, housing, and safety issues that go beyond, but affect, academic performance. Other motivations have focused on the linkages between declining education outcomes and weakened economic productivity in the United States. Government and business leaders have theorized that school collaborations with community agencies and organizations represent hope to supporting children while in school, tendering the promise that these children will graduate, become employed, and live productive lives. As a result the U.S. economy potentially will be revitalized. Still other reasons have focused on the changes that have occurred in the family structure in the United States that have led to increased vulnerability for families. In many cases, family transformations also have resulted in a loss of time for parents and primary care givers to spend with children. In Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century (1995), the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development recommends that schools, community organizations, and other institutions work together to provide opportunities for youth, particularly during the out-of-school hours. Given such arguments, some researchers and practitioners have argued that schools should become a nexus for services.

In Schools of the 21st Century: Linking Child Care and Education, Matia Finn-Stevenson and Edward Zigler extend the movement for school-based/school-linked services by arguing for child care and family support programs that are coordinated out of schools.
It is our contention that if we are to improve educational outcomes and ensure that all children have an opportunity to succeed academically, we must not only make fundamental changes in the way we teach children but also: (1) broaden our understanding of how children learn and what influences their capacity to learn; (2) provide support services to optimize the growth and development of children and their ability to profit from instruction; and (3) begin to provide such support at the birth of the child…. We call for schools to provide support services because children are growing up in circumstances that sometimes damage their ability to succeed in school. (2)

The School of the 21st Century, the design for the particular initiative advocated by Finn-Stevenson and Zigler, is overseen by these authors at the Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University. At the core of this initiative are two child care components. These include all-day child care for children three, four, and five years of age, as well as before- and after-school and vacation care for children from kindergarten through sixth grade, that are coordinated out of schools. School of the 21st Century programs also offer some health and nutrition services, information and referral for families, parent education programs, and outreach to family day care providers.

The School of the 21st Century makes use of existing institutions, schools, in offering quality, but affordable, child care programs and related services to families. The authors note that in addition to the many stresses that families encounter related to changes in household structure and a loss of time to spend with children, the current child care system in the United States is fragmented. There also is a lack of good, affordable child care. Subsequently, many families enroll their children in programs that are substandard, or some children spend time alone. This system has potentially detrimental effects on children that shape not only their subsequent experiences in school but potentially their future life successes as well. To combat these potential detrimental effects, the authors believe that linkages between schools, child care programs, and related services must be fostered. Finn-Stevenson and Zigler, however, contend that such an initiative is not designed to replace existing child care programs. Rather the goal is to increase the access that families have to quality child care programs. Finn-Stevenson and Zigler believe that all families, regardless of economic status, should be eligible for these programs. They stress this point because they believe that though the trend is to provide services to children from economically disadvantaged families, children from working-class and middle-class families experience stressful conditions as well.

A primary purpose of Finn-Stevenson and Zigler’s book is to argue persuasively for the implementation of these programs. Thus, in their book the authors present a review of the literature that forms the foundation for school-based/school-linked child care and family support efforts. They explore re-
search that has looked at the effects of child care environments on children and at
different age levels. In particular, they contend that the early years are extremely
vulnerable. “An extensive review of the research indicates that how individuals
function and how well they do in school and later in life hinges in large portion on
early experience” (43). They note that access to appropriate social support and ser-
vice, as the need arises, helps to ensure the optimal development of children.

The authors examine research that has explored the roles of schools in the pro-
vision of nonacademic support services. In reviewing the literature, the authors are
careful to present diverse views and perspectives for school-based and
school-linked services. For example, the authors note that some researchers have
argued that schools do not have the necessary financial and human resources to
tackle the social problems that families encounter in their daily lives. Conversely,
Finn-Stevenson and Zigler also report data drawn from research that suggest that
contemporary circumstances of many students present barriers to learning that
need to be addressed rather than ignored by schools. In this section of their book
and in others, the authors also explore research that has looked at the barriers that
may be encountered in fostering these initiatives, with respect to the existing rela-
tionships between families and schools that often are strained and distant. Al-
though the information provided by the authors is important, there is perhaps a
need for greater depth in this area. For example, how would the coordination of
child care and family support programs out of schools shape a family’s sense of
privacy, particularly for low-income families who receive subsidies for child-care
services? These families typically are asked to report detailed information about
their finances, household information, and personal circumstances to qualify for
these subsidies, which often affects their sense of public notice. Similarly, how
would these programs be shaped by policies such as mandated reporting of child
abuse and neglect, which, too, have consequences for the relationships between
schools and families?

After a review of the literature, Finn-Stevenson and Zigler discuss the pro-
cesses for implementing, funding, and evaluating a School of the 21st Century pro-
gram. To prepare for this discussion, the authors acknowledge that if the School of
the 21st Century program is to be successfully implemented, changes will need to
occur “in the way the school operates and in the relationship between parents and
educators and among educators in the school building” (78). Change, indeed, can
be difficult. However, an implicit assumption of the authors is that if the circum-
stances in which children’s capacity to learn and succeed are to be enhanced,
change will need to be embraced by the necessary constituent groups.

Finn-Stevenson and Zigler provide practical suggestions on how to start the
planning process for a School of the 21st Century program, how to create an action
plan and organizational audit. They also note that it is critical that a coordinator be
appointed to oversee the effort. The coordinator will oversee the conduction of an
initial needs assessment, build support for the program, and possibly work to en-
sure widespread implementation of the effort. These suggestions are not only valuable to educators who plan to start such a program but also to those interested in creating change through school-linked services.

Fund-raising for a School of the 21st Century program is a challenging task, as conceded by the authors. Finn-Stevenson and Zigler recognize that start-up funds will be needed to operate these programs during their first year of implementation. Additional funds also will be needed to make necessary building renovations to accommodate young children and to purchase materials. In a visionary manner, the authors suggest that states play an important role in the implementation of these programs and fund the start-up costs. These start-up costs would be a one-time investment. Though, on an ongoing basis states also would provide support to state departments of education to assist with the evaluation of these programs, as well as support the provision of technical assistance.

Finn-Stevenson and Zigler then suggest that after the programs are prepared for implementation, parents who are able to afford the services would pay for them. Low-income parents would pay a sliding scale fee or be eligible for subsidies. During this phase, School of the 21st Century programs also would be supported by local school districts that would provide funding to sustain every young person in child care. The authors note that “admittedly, schools can operate the program on user fees only, but with a greater number of schools involved, it [fees from local school districts] would be essential to ensure good quality care” (120). In addition to state, local, and private fees, Finn-Stevenson and Zigler also recommend that the federal government play a role in supporting these programs. Primarily, the federal government would help to ensure that states are able to provide child care subsidies to all eligible families, which the authors suggest is not the present case. In addition, the federal government would play a prominent role in promoting the concept of linking child care and education.

The authors concede that this fund-raising strategy is visionary in nature. They also acknowledge that the public, in general, does not believe the government should support social service programs. However, Finn-Stevenson and Zigler regard these investment costs as an investment in human capital. They believe that the long-term benefits of these investments will include improved grade retention rates, a reduction in the usage of special education services, increased rates of college attendance, and decreases in delinquency and social problems. In the long term, the authors believe that these investments will result in savings in the various areas that the public currently supports.

The authors conclude their discussion of delivering a School of the 21st Century program with guidelines about evaluating such an initiative. As the implementation and fund-raising processes are necessary to ensure the success of these programs, Finn-Stevenson and Zigler, likewise, advise that the evaluation procedures are of critical importance. In this section of their book, the authors provide informative points regarding who should be involved in the process, various ap-
proaches to evaluation, when to conduct evaluations, and how to use findings to support programs. Through evaluation, the authors note that programs such as the School of the 21st Century are able to be monitored to ensure that they yield desired outcomes.

*Schools of the 21st Century: Linking Child Care and Education* is a welcome book. Ultimately, it provides a particular vision of how parents, educators, and members of the wider community can work together to support children. The authors suggest that this vision complements other educational restructuring initiatives, such as Reading Recovery or Success for All, which work toward helping children to achieve their potential. As outlined by the authors in their book, the Schools of the 21st Century initiative has an impressive track record in both replication and endurance. At the time of the writing this book, this effort had been in existence for over ten years and had been implemented in six hundred schools in seventeen states. Though this is a striking record, the authors assert that it represents only a small fraction of the program’s potential. It was/is the hope of the authors that these programs will continue to be implemented not only in schools, but across school districts as well. Their book is a vehicle to spread the word about the success of this program. But perhaps more important, through this book we are presented with new possibilities to supporting the development of children.

**References**


