

THE KAISER CHILD SERVICE CENTERS—50 YEARS LATER: SOME MEMORIES AND LESSONS



James L. Hymes, Jr.
Professor of Education (retired), University of Maryland

On November 8 and November 18, 1943, a little more than half a century ago, the Kaiser Company opened two centers for the children of mothers who were working in their shipyards of Portland, Oregon. The centers were located on the Willamette River, one at Swan Island, the other at the Oregon Ship Corporation Building Yard. They eventually served 3,800 young children, with a peak attendance for one daily session of 1,005 children on September 3, 1944. Apart from their size and their unusual location—at the shipyards where women worked rather than in the communities where they lived—the two centers had many other unusual features. It is worthwhile now, 50 years later, to look back to see what memories stand out and what lessons can be drawn for today's situations.

I apologize for beginning with what is a very personal memory. It is, however, a memory that has a generalization built into it. Before working at the Kaiser shipyards, I was employed at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., by the Army Service Forces. On a Wednesday in September, 1943, I received a telephone call from Dr. Lois Meek Stolz, my former major professor at Teachers College Columbia, inviting me to come to Portland to work with her in heading up two new children's centers that were being built by the Kaiser Company. I explained that I was interested, of course, and would be delighted, but I was working for the *Pentagon* and one didn't just resign from the Pentagon. Lois said, "Don't give that a second

thought. We'll work that out." I then pointed out that getting out to Portland from Washington, D.C. was no easy task; one needed special priorities to travel. Again Lois said, "Don't give that a second thought. We will work that out." Then she said, "When can you come?"

I replied, "Oh, I think I could work things out to come in maybe two to three weeks." Lois replied, "You are leaving by plane this Friday, day after tomorrow." And, sure enough, within 24 hours, plane tickets were delivered to my home and I was released from my job at the Pentagon. A note sent by the commanding general, arranging for my release, asked, "Who is this guy?" As I set out by plane to Portland, I wondered how I would get to the shipyards. But when I alighted from the plane, I was met by a uniformed chauffeur who had come to drive me. A uniformed chauffeur! En route to the shipyard, I saw one of the two new centers—a beautiful, stunning, unusual building.

Now, the message to me, as these memories stand out in my mind 50 years later, is how I had leaped from being someone involved in nursery schools into what had to be called "big time"—priority tickets, chauffeured limousine, new buildings, etc. I had spent much of my earlier, professional years explaining what a nursery school was, trying to make it clear that it had nothing to do with trees but with young children. Here, overnight almost, this skill, this background, this interest in young children was considered of great importance.

One of the curses of the nursery school field back in the 1930s and 1940s was the general public assumption that it took no special skill or training to look after a group of young children. The Kaiser Centers were originally planned on that general, widespread, public assumption. Edgar Kaiser, the overall manager of the two shipyards, Swan Island and Oregon Ship, an unusually informed, sensitive and intelligent man, bought into that common assumption: "Anybody can take care of little kids." His plan was to go down the line of women applying for jobs at the shipyard and ask who would like to work with little kids instead of being a riveter or a welder. At that point, the social workers of Portland rose up and said, "Wait a minute. This is a profession. You need trained people to do this job."

Characteristic of Edgar Kaiser, an approach that set the tone for the centers as a whole during their short life, he said, "Okay. I will find the best person in the country to set up these centers." He contacted people at the U. S. Children's Bureau and the U. S. Department of Education, asking the question, "Who knows the most about young children. Who can do the best job?" One answer came through very clearly: Dr. Lois Meek Stolz.

For many years Dr. Stolz had been Director of the Child Development Institute at Columbia University, nationally known in part for her

editorship of the first Yearbook on Preschool and Parent Education of the National Society for the Study of Education. She left the East Coast in 1938 to marry Herbert R. Stolz, the founding director of the Institute of Child Welfare at the University of California at Berkeley. She was much sought after as a speaker and teacher about young children. Early in the war years she had been appointed Assistant to the Governor of California in charge of the Coordination of Child Care.

Let me cite one other example of this searching for the best. It was obvious to Dr. Stolz and to me that the food service for the young children in these two centers was of tremendous importance. Our question, as we then went to fill the position of director of food service, was the same question that Edgar Kaiser had asked when searching for the overall director: "Who is the best person in the country?" Again, the answer came through very clearly, Dr. Miriam Lowenberg, who knew more about young children, their food needs, their food likes and food dislikes, and how to serve food to them, than any other single person. Dr. Lowenberg had for several years been involved in nursery schools at Iowa State College, and had just received her doctorate from the University of Iowa. Now she was "off somewhere," and no one knew where. The search for her illustrates my first point about how nursery schools had somehow leaped into "big time." Using the resources of the Kaiser Company, we were able to find out that Miriam Lowenberg was visiting her mother in a small town in Missouri, whose name I have unfortunately forgotten. We called person-to-person for Miriam at that town and were told by the telephone operator, "Oh, Miriam. I just saw her walk down the street. Hold on a second. I will see if I can catch her. I think she has gone into the grocery store."

So Miriam was found with the help of a small-town telephone operator, in a grocery store. Miriam responded the same way Lois had responded when Edgar Kaiser had called to ask her to direct these two new centers. Miriam couldn't believe the call was for real and kept asking, "Who is calling? Is this a joke? What are you trying to do to me?" When she finally was persuaded that this was a real job, a real offer, in an exciting new setting, she, like myself, got to Portland in a day or two and began her work. But this search for who was the best person in the country, who can do the job the best, who knew the most, was characteristic of what became the Kaiser philosophy about the care of children, although this had not originally been the approach.

We tried to carry on this new philosophy as we hired the staff for the centers. All of the hiring had to be done by mail or by telephone. Travel for interviews during war years was out of the question. But utilizing the

many friendships that Lois and I and Miriam and others had, we were able to get in touch with every college in the country which trained people to understand children and to teach them. Within a very short time, we began to amass a staff. I learned one thing then, which unfortunately has absolutely no usefulness today. We telegraphed to the placement bureaus of colleges, most Colleges of Home Economics, because that was where child development and the care and understanding of young children customarily was taught in those days. We sent two-page telegrams. The great lesson: Always send two-page rather than one-page telegrams! Two years later when I visited many of these colleges, I saw these two-page telegrams still posted prominently on the bulletin boards of the placement bureaus.

We tried to follow these standards in hiring the teachers: Every teacher had to have a degree in child development or whatever the allied field might be called, plus at least two years experience in teaching young children. Along with a senior teacher there were assistant teachers, all of whom also had to have degrees in child development or allied fields, but who had no teaching experience. We were not always able to hold to these standards every single minute of every single day. Occasionally they conflicted with another standard that we held very dear—that we would never turn a mother away. We accepted every mother and child who came and applied to the centers. This meant that occasionally the number of new children would be larger than good class size would dictate. For the most part, however, we were able to hold to the standard of a trained, experienced teacher, with two trained but not yet experienced assistant teachers.

Today one has to smile ruefully at this standard. The old assumption so true as we began our work—one we did our best to end through our demonstration—unfortunately seems even more widely held today than it earlier had been: “Anyone can teach young children, this is not a special field, no special training is required.” The best indication of this attitude is the sad fact that salaries for teachers of the young are as low as they are.

I should at this point say a word about the two buildings that had been built specifically for these young children of the women who were working in the Kaiser shipyards. I hope I have indicated how unusual it was to have new buildings specifically designed for young children. Our two were built like wagon wheels, with 15 classrooms coming out from a central spoke. The inside area was the outdoor space for the children to use, a safe, enclosed one. This safety factor was important because of the location of the centers at the busy entrances to the shipyards. This location was a great convenience for mothers working in the yards, but a great hazard if children ever got outside the wagon wheel.

As I look back, I am impressed that only three changes had to be made in those buildings, although there were no books on nursery school construction, no examples of nursery schools in Portland and very few on the West Coast, for that matter. The architect had done an amazing job thinking out the needs of young children.

The three things that had to be done illustrate the earlier point "that anyone can look after young children." One change involved the open space in the center of the wagon wheel. The open space . . . was just open space, the way a public school playground might be clear and open for baseball, football or soccer . . . just open space. We had to fight hard to persuade the authorities of the shipyard that we needed fences so that each group could have its own, smaller, personal playground for its particular group of children. The shipyard people, incidentally, were very beauty-conscious. They fought, not against the general idea of some divisions, but against high fences. They kept asking, "Couldn't you mark the yards off with rows of flowers, or little beds of flowering plants? That would look so much prettier." But we did build fences so that each group had its own playground, ending the assumption that all you did was turn children loose for an "airing" or let them run wild to let off steam or howl or yell.

The second change was more difficult to bring about. Each room, of course, had its own toilet and washroom facilities, but each had doors closing off the cubicles where the children would urinate or defecate. The Portland people were very much into modesty. It was very important to protect children from being seen as they performed their natural functions. We on the other hand were much more concerned with teachers having the opportunity to see the children, to be sure that nothing was going wrong or to be on hand if a teacher's help was required. We did finally win that battle, although some in the administration of the shipyards viewed us as almost nudists for letting children have these open bathrooms and toilets.

The third battle we decided not to fight. Each of the rooms had big lighting fixtures, hanging down from the ceiling. They were decorated with designs of clowns, elephants, and circus creatures. When you looked at them, you had to say, "Isn't that cute?" That expression "Isn't that cute?" sums up the way many people looked at young children in those days: cute little subhuman creatures who somehow liked things that wiser adults could never like. We didn't bother to make any issue of the lighting fixtures. They were very high and didn't interfere at all with the program. I was interested to read that when the Swan Island building finally was closed in March of 1975, after having been used as a Naval and Marine Corps Reservist reception center, the building was still referred to as the

“playpen” because these fixtures still were attached to the ceiling. We hoped that our demonstration at the centers would help some people to see that young children were more than “cute,” that they were capable of thinking, capable of playing, capable of organizing, of working hard.

I mentioned that the teachers of each of the groups came from the colleges and universities across the country that had been doing some work in child development and that had a group of young children for students to observe and to work with. As these teachers came from all over the country, it was interesting to see that they, for the most part, held a common philosophy of education, a common philosophy of approaching young children. I’m not sure I know the best single word to describe this philosophy. I can describe it negatively, saying there was no curriculum imposed from my office, or from any other office, dictating that this is what you must teach, when you must teach it, and these are the goals you must aim to achieve. Despite the absence of this overall guidance (if guidance is the right word), there was a very impressive and very pleasing similarity as one walked around the wagon wheel, looking into group after group after group. What went on could best be described with a word that today does not have a good sound. I have often said that the word is today’s four-letter dirty word. What is it that children did when they came every day? They played. What was the philosophy underlying the approach then? You could call it a respect for play. You could call it a respect for growth and development. You could call it a respect for children’s interests and concerns.

In any event, these richly equipped rooms, with blocks, easels, puzzles, books, dolls, all kinds of equipment, became the children’s world. The children brought with them experiences from their home living, from their drives to the center with their parents. They brought with them ideas that had been percolating in their minds. Then they used the raw materials that were in the rooms—the paints, the crayons, the finger-paints, the blocks, the play equipment, the toy telephones, the toy trucks, the toy boats, the toy ships—in whatever way their backgrounds helped them to think up things that were useful and good to do.

I can say quite categorically that never were children brought together as a total group. Always, as one visited, one would see three, four, sometimes five, small groups of children playing together. Not infrequently an individual child or two or three would be working alone with a book or a puzzle. It was a program in which choice was respected, a program in which self-direction was very much respected.

The teacher’s role was obviously to set the stage so that the children would feel free to use the ideas they had brought with them and to

enhance those ideas. Most of all teachers had to be on the spot with their own words, their own vocabulary, their own support and assistance to help children tease out of the play that was going on the significant learnings that might well be involved, whether those were learnings in arithmetic, reading, or geography, or what have you.

Because this was wartime there was no research person on the staff of either center, free to do nothing except set up records on children or experimental situations. There is no objective evidence on whether this very comfortable, relatively at-ease, seemingly unplanned and yet very carefully planned program by teachers was effective in stimulating the growth of children. As I look back on it, I can say with great confidence that children and parents were thoroughly pleased with what went on. Children and parents, both ages, felt that this was for them a very significant and useful experience. Children came each day with great eagerness and enthusiasm; often, to a mother's distress, they hesitated to leave even at the end of a long day. That there was something useful and significant about respecting the developmental urges going on inside of children, I will have to leave to others to say. I can however report a sharp, clear memory of how glad children were to come, how glad they were to be there, how pleased parents were to know that their youngsters were so busily and happily engaged.

After the war the Kaiser Company received many letters from parents who had returned home to Iowa, to Texas, to Oklahoma, all over the country, thanking the company for the centers. It is possible that one reason for the parents' great enthusiasm was the respect for the work of women and for the working woman that permeated much of what went on at the centers. We all had always cared very deeply for children. We had backgrounds and experiences that helped us understand children's needs and how best they could be met. But the notion of thinking not only of children, but of children and their parents, was for many of us a relatively new idea—an idea that kept growing in all of us, as the centers went on.

One plan that was built into the centers from the very start is an illustration of this point. An infirmary was located at the entrance of the two centers, staffed always by a registered nurse in charge with trained nursery school teachers as her assistants, all under the overall direction of a doctor who was the medical director. The general notion was that there were many children who were sick, in the sense that they were too ill to be with a group of the other children, but yet not really sick enough to require that they be isolated from the world as a whole. The infirmaries were set up so that children recovering from illness, or being touched by

small minor illness, could have pleasing, useful and constructive experiences during the day—one must remember that a war was going on—while their mothers continued their war work, knowing their children were being well cared for. Every day there were 15 to 20, what we called “mildly ill” children in each of the two infirmaries. These had been built into the original plan of buildings, and did not represent a new idea to which we contributed.

One new idea of which we were very proud was offering Home Service Food. Parents who wished to could, when they delivered their child in the morning, order the main course and one other dish to be picked up when they called for their child at the end of the day. We utilized our kitchens, our staff, our equipment. The goal of Home Service Food was obviously to save working mothers the time and energy it took to shop for their food, the strain of preparing it, the work of cleaning up afterwards, etc. It was a great ease to pick up a child who came equipped with food for the family’s next meal. Perhaps because of our demonstration this is an idea that has caught on today. This is what we call Chinese take-out food, Mexican take-out, or food of any kind that one can take home. During these war years, this was a new idea and one clearly appreciated, not by all parents but some found it a tremendous help.

Another service that developed very soon was also much appreciated by a small group of parents. We had originally said, as nursery schools always did, that you would enroll your child for “the duration,” so long as you were working, so long as the war was going on, so long as there was a need for the shipyards. We were not interested in children who would pop in and pop out. But it became very clear that in the lives of many families, a pop-in and pop-out service was of tremendous importance.

I can remember the first time when this issue came up. A father came running into the center, holding by his hand a four-year-old named Marlene, whom we did not know. He said, “Her name is Marlene: her mother is out in the car in labor. I’ll come back to get Marlene later.” He went dashing back to the car. In that set of circumstances, one could hardly say, “Hey, take Marlene with you.” So we kept Marlene for that one day.

We soon discovered that there were countless other families who needed care for their child not for ever and ever but just for today, or just for tomorrow, because of a piling up of shopping that had to be done, or doctor’s appointments that had to be met. In today’s life, these might be minor crises. But in those days, getting around, getting transportation, getting gas, finding time, was so very difficult. So we turned one room in each of our centers into what we called our Special Service Room. We

tried always to staff the room with our very best teachers, those best able to build a relationship quickly with children, best able to be accepting of children of various ages, best able to think on their feet and to feel with their hearts. We never knew from day to day to day how many children would come, their ages, or how long they would stay. This staff had to be prepared to do what needed to be done. These Special Services Rooms, like the infirmaries, never dealt with tremendous numbers of children. An average of 15-20 a day would probably be about the right number. But none were more grateful than the parents of children in these Special Services Rooms. In their words: "You really helped us out of a jam." The general approach of trying to help parents "out of a jam" was one of our great goals.

I can't resist telling about one of our tremendous failures. Given the background we all came from, we thought it would be a great idea to have a parent meeting, so that parents could come together, hear a talk from one of our brilliant staff (probably myself), and talk to each other and discuss problems involved in raising children in time of war. That was to be the theme, "Raising Children in Time of War." We publicized it very widely and went to great efforts to plan a successful meeting. The staff got all dressed up, every teacher was present, *but . . .* not a single parent ever came! Looking back now and even then, it was obvious why not. These were centers located where people worked, not where they *lived*. No one had the gas or the time in those days to venture back to where they had been all day. So our great big parents' meeting turned out to be one of those unusual events. You know the expression, "What if we gave a party and nobody came?" Well, what if we gave a parent meeting and nobody came? Nobody did.

We relied then on other approaches which I think many parents found useful. We developed a series of free booklets discussing children and child-rearing, and a weekly newspaper telling about the things the children did in the various groups. We learned to rely much more on written communication which we could give to parents to take with them.

Another example of trying to be responsive to needs: we were well-equipped and well-staffed to take care of children under age six. There weren't public kindergartens at that point in the state of Oregon, and many parents came from states where there were no public kindergartens, so our youngsters ranged in age from six years on down. One thing that became very apparent was that while we were open all the time, the public schools were closed on every holiday. I sometimes thought they even made up holidays and teased about their celebrating Arbor Day, Flag Day,

and you name the holiday. This approach of closing schools might have been appreciated by many people, but certainly was not by shipyard working mothers who now had to make some plan for the care of their older children, because the public school had closed for the day.

Recognizing the need we opened what we called our School-Age Groups. Because of the limitations of our equipment we served primarily six-, seven-, and eight-year-olds, not feeling capable of venturing into still older ages. We ran these groups on every school holiday, on Saturdays and Sundays when schools obviously were closed, and during the summer months. I came away from that whole experience much more keenly aware of how easy it is to become blind to needs of parents, as well as to the needs of children. I think our School-Age Group was an example of meeting both of those needs.

The same general approach affected the youngest of the children whom we served. We had, of course, assumed that we would serve five-year-olds. We were quite prepared to go down to two-year-olds, because the existence of two-year-old groups was not unheard of in those days. In fact, one of the best and most widely used books at the time was Louise Woodcock's book, *Life and Ways of the Two-Year-Old*, which described a group for that age in great detail. So we opened thinking of serving twos through fives. We almost immediately realized that because most of the women workers were young, one of the biggest age groups was the 18-month to 24-month age group.

Again, we were led into lowering our age limit by the unusual event. A mother came in to see us, in tears, saying she needed help with the care of her 20-month-old. The bellhop in the hotel where she was living had promised to look in on her youngster every now and again, but the bellhop had gotten drunk and didn't look in, and the mother had found her 20-month-old baby uncared for. With this story as the stimulus, we extended our age limits down to 18 months. We soon found the 18-24-month-old groups to be both the most popular in terms of use and also one of the most pleasing in terms of the kinds of experiences—social, intellectual, emotional, physical—that we could offer to young children. Today, of course, 18 months seems like old age, as groups go down to the very early days of infancy.

I have no experience in the group care of infants, but my readings lead me to wonder very much whether or not this is a useful development. I recall when we wondered about our 18-month-old contingent. One of the staff members from the Child Development Clinic at Yale, who was visiting us, said this was an age when children find it easiest to leave their parents because they are so interested in things. She felt this was a good time to begin but warned that you have to keep your fingers crossed

if you start to working with children much younger than that. I am inclined to agree that if one works with children who are very young, you need the most unusual facilities, the best training of staff, the most ideal size of the groups, a lack of pressure, and an abundance of warmth and caring that younger children so much need.

I did mention, I believe, that the shipyard centers were open 24 hours a day. The graveyard shift—the name given to the hours of midnight to 6:00 A.M.—was not in our original plan and never became a very important part of the program. Few parents worked that shift. Most preferred swing shift—4:00 P.M. to midnight—because that way they could be with their children during the daytime hours, and leave them with us during what was a short play time, dinner time, and then sleeping time. The graveyard shift helped about a dozen parents each night—a small number but this may be one of the hallmarks of a good program: Does it work out for everyone, including the handful of people who have some special needs?

I should say just a little more about swing shift, our most popular shift. We always assumed in the beginning that we would operate on day shift and swing shift. As I look around today, I realize how very few places offer care of children during swing shift and how many women I see working in these late afternoon, early evening and nighttime hours, engaged in all kinds of professional and white-collar and blue-collar jobs. I am sure the need is not as great as it had been in wartime, and families probably find it easier today to work out schedules to meet adults' needs and those of children. But I do think that swing-shift service is worth more attention than it seems to be getting. We didn't look on swing shift as a "special service" because we had always planned to offer it. But thinking back at the warm reception it received, it evidently was a very "special service" indeed and I am glad we did it.

I have mentioned how pleased parents were with the Kaiser Child Service Centers. This feeling of satisfaction was, however, acquired by the parents after their children had been with us. One of the very surprising events was the reluctance of mothers initially to use the facilities of the centers. The personnel office of the shipyards had of course complete counts on the numbers of women employed, their ages and the number of children they had. The personnel department knew how desperately they needed good child care. Their studies led to the building of the two centers. For our part we had desperately tried to get staff, so we could open as soon as possible. But as the opening day approached we realized that we had only about 50 teachers on hand, and we expected to be deluged by children.

One side note: *Life* magazine, having heard of the centers, sent a full crew of photographers out for the opening day, anticipating very dramatic pictures of hordes of children charging into these new buildings. We approached these opening days with great feelings of fear and anxiety. We wanted to take all of the children who came but would we have the staff to serve them? To our shock—to our relief—only about 25-30 children entered each of the two centers at their openings. Looking back, and even then, it was apparent why. One reason is that parents who already have a plan for child care tend to stick to whatever plan they have unless that plan works out disastrously. As time went along many of our children came because a parent's plan had completely collapsed. But the second reason was that the whole concept of child care was, in the 1940s, a relatively new idea to what I will call "middle-class" America. The very poor had always turned, if they could, to some community agency or to their extended family for help. But the women working in the shipyards were not the very poor. They had come from farms and homes and small communities all over the country and were relatively well-to-do. They associated in their minds the care of children by those other than themselves with care provided by county orphanages or by the county poorhouse. To turn one's children over to such organizations was regarded as a great disgrace. The result was that many parents looked askance at these child care centers and thought "Oh dear, not for my child," until they discovered later that this was absolutely the very best care possible.

I might add, parenthetically, that many of the Black parents working in the shipyard never became convinced that these beautiful buildings, excellent staff, and superbly equipped centers could be for their children. In the 1940s these families were, unfortunately, so accustomed to taking whatever was left over---the bad buildings, the bad teachers. Despite many efforts on our part, our enrollment of the Black parents never met their need for services.

At the Kaiser Centers we had the use of amazing facilities for publicizing the programs. There was a loudspeaker system that blared all over the yard. Films were shown and there were tours of the centers organized for the foremen or the leaders of groups of workers and sometimes for individual workers themselves. We also arranged for tours by pediatricians and ministers from the Portland, Oregon, community so that they could help spread the word as to how good we were and how glad we would be to take more children. It took a long time, however, to build up confidence and to become known, despite what was a massive propaganda campaign of a kind that very few centers elsewhere could have possibly had access to.

Many of the parents ultimately became very proud of the centers and pleased with them. Of great significance also was the pride and pleasure that the administration of the shipyards and the people in Washington took in what was going on. It is interesting to note that while we think of education programs from Washington as being under the aegis of the Children's Bureau or the Department of Education, the Kaiser Centers were supported by the U. S. Maritime Commission. I'm not sure how many people on the Maritime Commission knew that they were the overall, official sponsors of these two beautiful centers for young children. But the top people of the Maritime Commission were proud. Hardly a week went by without Admiral Emory Land or other high-ranking officers coming by with visitors to proudly show off the centers.

Similarly, Edgar Kaiser, the director of the two shipyards, who had begun by thinking that anyone could care for young children, ended up being unusually aware of the high quality of the staff and of the program. He showed very great interest and pride in the program at every turn.

One minor benefit of this interest: A ship was launched every single day in each of two shipyards, and the entrance halls of the two buildings were always festooned with flowers from the launching luncheons. Edgar Kaiser was also responsible for the establishment at the entrance of each center an aquarium full of fascinating fish. He used to say, "You want parents when they come in to like this place. This is a way of catching their eye and whetting their interest." Edgar Kaiser had been responsible for changing the colors of the walls of the centers from an oatmeal brown, usual in schools, to bright pastel shades. All of this was based on his notion, "You want people to like it here." In a sense it was a reflection of his own real liking for what went on.

Typical of the sensitivity of this young man who was responsible for these two shipyards, was a happening as the war neared its end in the late spring and summer of 1945. We were aware of the problems teachers would face if the war ended at a time when it would be impossible for them to get other jobs, since most contracts for teachers tend to be signed in the late spring and summer (or before) for September school openings. Kaiser agreed to a most amazing arrangement. He authorized us to hire, and to sign to a firm contract, 12 or 18 (I can't remember which) of our very best teachers. He said he would guarantee them jobs throughout the next school year, even though he couldn't guarantee what they would be doing that far ahead. He promised good jobs and good salaries so we could hold on to those good people. This was one of the most unusual and generous gestures that I've ever known an employer to make.

Actually, when the war did finally end, the parents left the shipyards almost instantaneously, and we went from full operation to zero operation. Even those teachers with contracts left for their home towns or for new jobs as they began to be deluged by telegrams from school systems looking for kindergarten and first grade teachers, so this generous gesture by Kaiser was no longer needed, although it was much appreciated.

Further evidence of Kaiser's commitment to the whole idea of top-quality child care was the fact that in the period from the closing of the centers to Christmas time of 1945, we produced a 36-page color booklet which Kaiser sent to about 250 industries throughout the country. The booklet described what went on, told how well it had worked out for the company and for the parents and their children.

That booklet leads me to the end of the story about the Kaiser Centers and to some effort to sum up its meaning. Here was a program loved by parents, loved by children, loved by business, respected by the Washington authorities, but what did it add up to? Was it a flash in the pan? Was it a one-shot deal? Are there any lessons for the future?

One fact stands out: The 250 industries did *not* pick up on Kaiser's beautiful booklet. Only hospitals began to run their own child care centers for their nurses and other staff members who needed child care. They became, so far as I know, the one industry that responded positively, and almost immediately, to the notion of child care based where mothers work instead of back in their communities. There were several reasons for this isolated response. One was that very few industries were desperately in need of the labor of women. Hospitals met that standard; wartime industries met that standard because they needed everyone's labor. But as peacetime came along, the labor of mothers was not so urgently required as to push employers into super-special efforts to attract women workers.

On the other hand, although I have no concrete proof, it is my impression that the existence of the centers and the nationwide publicity that they received did a great deal to build in the country a greater acceptance of the notion of group child care as a needed and valuable social service. During the war, the pressure was on the employers who very much needed women. As the postwar years came along the pressure was felt by women, rather than by employers—women who had become educated; women whose homes had become more mechanized and less challenging and less in need of their personal day-by-day and minute-by-minute attention; women who were eager, as the Kaiser women were, to get out into the wider world and meet more people. These factors plus the increasing cost of living fed into the pressure. Child care had been an *employer's* need during the wartime years; child care became a *mother's*

need in the postwar years. Looking back on the period, I think the Kaiser centers surely played some part in the growth of chains of child care centers, the growth of smaller, privately owned centers, and I think in the growth of Head Start in 1965—almost 20 years after the war. It takes a long time for ideas to percolate.

One has to quickly add that the growth of Head Start, in turn, contributed to the tremendous spurt in the development of public kindergartens throughout the country, beginning in about 1965. I grew up in New York. I just assumed that everybody had public kindergartens. It was a very great shock to realize that very few states did until 1965. Then, all of a sudden, there was a move to make kindergartens a part of school.

This slow but steady growth opens up the whole question of who should run child care centers? Are they the public's responsibility?

We saw in the Kaiser Centers examples of truly superb programs, but these centers closed the day industry's need ended. There was good reason for them to close, because the war had ended. The fact of the matter is that when the particular industry no longer existed, the child care program no longer existed. But for many parents, the need for child care still existed. I think one has to puzzle a little bit about industry-sponsored child care centers. Do they offer any guarantee of permanence? Parents can always assume that if a business shuts down, a first grade will always be available. Will there always be a child care center? Probably not, if industry is the sponsor.

The basic problem, of course, is the problem that bedevils so many social programs. They cost money! I've often said that the most basic characteristic of young children is that they are expensive creatures. Good group care is a costly operation. We tried very hard at Kaiser to hold to what we thought of as good class size: roughly 20 as the maximum for fives; 16 the maximum for fours; 12 the maximum for threes; 8 for two and younger, always with a trained teacher and assistants. Good child care is very expensive because of its high labor costs. To these must be added the cost of food, insurance, heat and light, and equipment. I cannot be persuaded that good child care can ever be a money-making proposition. I am biased by my experience having been a director in the prewar years of a good private school for children, from age two on through junior high school. My job as director was for the most part ensuring that we had enough money to keep going. When I think back to those years, I think of the rummage sales, the book sales, the theater parties, the dances, all the techniques to raise money. Our tuition was very high but tuition can not begin to cover the cost of good education. That is the same problem Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and every other good university in the coun-

try faces. During the Kaiser years this fact was somewhat hidden, because the cost above what parents paid was borne by the company and then very quickly passed on to the cost of building ships. But this conflict between the high cost of good programs for children and the financial limitations of working parents is brutal, and probably unsolvable by private approaches.

I therefore look back on the Kaiser Centers as an example of superb care that once did happen, a very beautiful experience for everyone involved. It perhaps raised the country's sights a bit in the direction of doing something very good for children and parents but it obviously did not have a very direct or immediate impact. The time may well come when we will be willing as a community---whether it is our federal community or our state or local community---to pay what it costs so that children can get off to the best possible start. Even though many today complain about the terrible drain of high taxes on their lives, it seems to me that we are unwilling to tax ourselves enough to do what needs to be done for many of our children.