JAN 7 1981 ILL

Tracy Vineyard, 3, is just about ready to fall asleep at the LaPetite Academy at 130 Taylor Road in Hazelwood. Larry Williams/Post-Dispatch

World Of 2-Year-Olds: Pacifiers Fail At Peace

When a reporter visited the LaPetite Academy at 130 Taylor Road in Hazelwood last June, he recorded these observations:

Bryan walks methodically to his cubbyhole, takes out his pacifier, sticks it squarely in his mouth, pulls out his pillow with the Vera pillowcase and lies down. "Put your pillow away, Bryan," yells the teacher.

Enter the world of twelve 2-year-olds at the LaPetite Academy.

Today, there is only one teacher supervising Bryan and his cohorts. Under state regulations there should be two.

Bradley slugs a girl next to him. "Come over next to me," the teacher says.

"No," says Bradley. Bradley doesn't move. The teacher doesn't have time to enforce her edict.

Bradley slugs the girl again. "No," shouts the teacher.

Darnell hits a child near him with a shoe. "You'll have to sit in a chair if you hit with a shoe," the teacher says.

The teacher is passing out the paper for an art project. Damian and Darnell are fighting. Bradley pulls the hair of the girl next to him.

"Tell her you're sorry Bradley," says the teacher. Bradley says nothing.

The children are wildly swishing the paper around on the table. Justin is standing on the chair hitting the wall. "Justin, no," says the teacher.

Matthew slaps Bryan in the face. "Bryan, no," says the teacher.

Nicole is drawing on Jennifer's paper. "No, Nicole," says the teacher. Nicole continues.

Now Justin dives onto the table and starts marking on Darnell's paper. Darnell screams. The teacher pulls Justin down. She is still trying to pass out crayons.

Justin jumps up on the table again. Damian is trying to horde all of the crayons. Chester wants some. Damian is saying, "No, no, no." Damian and Darnell are fighting over crayons.

A girl turns over a chair. "No," says the teacher.

Now five children are just roaming about the room. Bryan is back to the pillow and pacifier. He is lying in the doorway of the room. "Bryan, no, it's not nap time," says the teacher.

A girl is ripping up a plastic plate. Chester is throwing a plastic lid like a Frisbie. "No, no," says the teacher.

A boy is banging the wall with the steps to the drinking fountain. A girl takes Damian's paper. Damian hits her. The teacher puts Damian in a chair. He pops right up and the teacher says nothing.

Matthew slaps Darnell hard in the stomach. "Matthew, no," says the teacher as she grabs him by the arm.

Darnell is screaming. Damian hits the boy next to him.

Twenty minutes have passed. The art project is over. The teacher frantically snatches up the rumpled drawings which are supposed to be put up on the wall on the next parents night.

The teacher tries to get lunch on the table. A few moments of calm descend on the group as the children eat their lunch, but soon Darnell and Chester are fighting over the last kernels of their corn.

— William Freivogel

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Role

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controls on the purse strings.

On the other hand, the federally supported centers are often better staffed and better equipped than the private centers of suburbia.

The federal involvement in day care, which began in Depression-era Works Progress Administration nurseries, is a lightning rod for criticism from the far right and fundamentalist religious groups. They talk about the concerted effort by the Department of Health and Human Resources to control preschool programs and indoctrinate children.

But far from having a plot to subvert American youth, the federal government seems to be totally without a plan.

One office in the Department of Health and Human Resources disperses Title XX grants to the states to pay for day care. Another office in that agency supervises the Head Start program. The Department of Agriculture administers the child-care food program. The Internal Revenue Service oversees the child-care tax credit. And so on.

The largest federal day-care program involves Title XX grants to the states. Under the program, $800 million was used for day care by the states in 1979. In 1981, Missouri expects to spend $13 million of Title XX funds on day care.

Much of the Title XX money is dispensed through three agencies that contract with the state to provide day-care services — the St. Louis Housing Authority, the Child Day Care Association, and the Early Child Care Development Corp.

For a child to qualify for care in a Title XX center, his parents must be receiving welfare assistance or their income must be less than 63 percent of the state's median income. (A single mother with two children would qualify if earning less than $10,200 a year.)

The Child Day Care Association is the largest of the three agencies. It is affiliated with United Way and has more than 21 Title XX centers under contract. United Way provides some matching money for the program; other matching money comes from federal community development grant funds.

The Housing Authority only operates centers in public housing complexes.

The Early Child Care Development Corp., a largely black-run organization, supervises eight centers, most on the city's North Side. It has a history of mismanagement.

When Mayor Jim Conway proposed shutting down the agency in 1977, the black members of the Board of Aldermen blocked the action. In hearings on the agency, officials of the Child Day Care Association estimated that the association could provide the same services as the Early Childhood Development Corp. for about $100,000 less a year by eliminating duplicated services.

From 1975 until a year ago, the corporation was headed by a disbarred lawyer, the late Hugh White. Both supporters and critics of the corporation assailed White for his lack of experience in day care and his failure to push for high quality care.

The state began pressuring the corporation to upgrade the Yeatman's Early Child Care Center, 3160 Dr. Martin Luther King Drive, in 1973, describing employees there as "bored and disinterested" and "cold and matter-of-fact."

Yet in visits in March and April, state inspectors again found the staff "on the sidelines" and the children "doing nothing."

That is what a reporter found, too, in a visit to the center last spring. Thirty-six children were in a large circle singing songs and playing games with four adults. Soon, two of the staff members walked away. One staff member appeared to run out of ideas and motioned to the other for suggestions. She had none.

Another staff member walked off, leaving just one adult with 36 noisy children. The noise became a roar and the remaining teacher yelled, "Shut up."

In the spring, the agency was unable to meet its payroll. An audit found that a $47,000 shortage occurred because the agency did not cut back on staff when the number of pupils in its centers dropped.

Gwen Pennington, who took over as director of the agency last year, acknowledged that the agency had had problems in the past.

But she said her agency is important because it listens closely to the needs of the black community. Both supporters and critics of the agency say Ms. Pennington is well-qualified.

Still, the care in most of the Title XX centers appears to be high quality. For one thing, the federal government requires one adult for every four 2-year-olds and for every eight 3- and 4-year-olds. Missouri regulations require one teacher for every eight 2-year-olds and for every 10 3- and 4-year-olds.

The McElroy center shows that the regulations can pay off.

When a reporter visited the McElroy center, the eighteen 3-year-olds were divided into groups of four and five, each working with a staff member.

One group was identifying parts of the body and walking on a long balance beam. Another was pasting paper flowers. Another was reading a story. Another was pasting glittery bits of paper onto larger sheets to make butterflies. All of the children were attentive.

The other big federal day-care program is Head Start, a survivor of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty.

The Head Start centers appear to be well-equipped and well-staffed. The center at the Bethlehem Lutheran Day Care Center, 2153 Salisbury, in north St. Louis is a bright, cheery basement room.

In a free play period observed by a reporter, the children naturally divided into small groups. Two girls were working with puzzles. Three were building with Lincoln logs. One girl was pushing a doll carriage. Three others were playing with blocks.

In a less well-equipped or well-staffed center, such a free play period would be chaotic.

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Day Care

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centers run by the Montgomery, Ala., concern has mushroomed to 675 from 60 in 1974.

Perry Mendel, a former real estate man who is president of Kinder-Care, predicts that within a decade there will be 2,000 Kinder-Care centers across the country.

Corporate earnings have gone up as fast as the centers and Kinder-Care is now a hot over-the-counter stock.

Kinder-Care centers in the St. Louis area operate from 6 or 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., with an average enrollment of 60 children per center, a regional official told the Post-Dispatch. Full-week tuition for children age 2 and older ranges from a low of $32 to a high of $43 per child.

The price includes breakfast, lunch, and two snacks for children who stay all day. Some centers offer infant care for children 6 weeks and older at tuitions ranging from $55 to $70 per week.

Kinder-Care has standardized everything from its building with the red schoolhouse tower, to its "Happy Bus" for transporting students, to its weekly Kinder-Kit providing lesson plans for centers.

Image is all-important. In a memo to his directors, Mendel asked: "How many of you have put up the diplomas in your office area? Another request I have of you is that each of you place on your desks some educational reference books, some professional journals, etc.

"We are in turn going to standardize all office areas with identical framed photos showing children getting attention and love of a teacher, showing a child in a learning situation, doing something creative and having fun (a supervised game scene). It is important to create the right impression on the parent from the start."

Sally Morgan, who served as a Kinder-Care director here for more than a year, said in an interview that the public relations and bookkeeping chores interfered with the care she could give the children.

"Their real concern is that the school is clean, that the children are quiet and that you keep your financial records up to date," Ms. Morgan said. "They are mainly interested in making money. What was really important to them was the appearance of the building, not the educational atmosphere."

Another former Kinder-Care director, who asked that her name not be used, said she spent almost all her time taking care of the books, the banking, the shopping and driving the Happy Bus.

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Until this year, the Kinder-Care teacher manual said: "The amount you can pay in salaries is entirely dependent on your earned income. Salaries shall not exceed 35 percent of total income."

Joyce Wolf, regional director for Kinder-Care, said that policy is no longer in effect. For the last six months underenrolled centers have been permitted to go well over the 35 percent figure although fully enrolled centers are generally expected to adhere to it, she said.

Files of the day-care licensing unit include many documented cases of directors who had been under heavy pressure to turn a profit.

Day-care officials received a complaint in 1976 that the center at 2000 Croftdale Drive, Florissant, was understaffed because there was no cook.

A state investigator found the center was "in an uproar and the director was upset."

The director "had not hired a cook . . . because her budgeted amount of gross income for salaries — 35 percent — would be exceeded; so the regional supervisor would not allow a cook to be hired," the investigator said.

On eight of the next 10 visits to the facility — from 1976 through 1979 — state officials found the center understaffed.

Two employees of the Kinder-Care center at 7118 North Hanley Road, Hazelwood, complained to state officials in 1977 that the center was understaffed. After they complained, the two were reprimanded by their superiors for "being non-supportive and exhibiting unprofessional behavior," state records show. Then they were fired.

When the two former employees tried to contact parents, Kinder-Care threatened to sue them for libel, the records show.

State inspections show that the Hanley Road center was understaffed on more than 12 different inspection visits between 1975 and 1980.

In 1977, day-care officials received several complaints about the director of the St. Ann center, 10451 International Plaza. The director of another center told state officials that she had seen the St. Ann director strike a child who was having difficulty sleeping, kick another child and choke another.

When a state official confronted Kinder-Care about the actions, the regional director, Randy Campero, accused the state worker of "unprofessionalism and said she must have a personality conflict with the director," state records show.

Only after the staff of the center threatened mass resignations was the director fired.

But the troubles didn't end. Although the center was found to be understaffed three times in 1978, the director told state officials that she was being "advised by the area manager to reduce staff hours."

The new director soon quit — over staffing. The next three times the center was inspected it was understaffed.

At Kinder-Care's center at 10055 Halls Ferry Road, state officials once found 44 children in the care of one staff member and on another occasion found 70 in the care of four staff members. The Halls Ferry center last May was again found to be understaffed.

When state inspectors find a center understaffed they establish a date by which the center is to comply with regulations, rather than ordering it closed immediately.

But in the spring of 1977, Pauline Adams, then the director of the state day-care unit, thought the understaffing was serious enough to call in top Kinder-Care officials.

Mrs. Wolf, who has been regional director of Kinder-Care since earlier this year, acknowledges past staffing problems. But she said she believes the problem is being solved.

She acknowledges that the problem of staff turnover remains. Mrs. Wolf says that 90 percent of Kinder-Care employees — from cooks to teachers — are receiving the minimum wage. The low salaries, together with the strain of the job, make it difficult to keep staff members, she said.

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LaPetite centers in the area charge $43 per week for a 2-year-old and $41 for older children, a spokesman said. The weekly charge is $78 for two children from the same family.

LaPetite centers operate five days a week from 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Average enrollment is 90 children per center. Tuition includes hot lunch and two snacks. Breakfast is available for another 50 cents a day.

The Kansas City corporate headquarters of LaPetite also has put pressure on its directors to turn a profit, state day-care files show.

In June 1978, Jerry Held, the regional director of LaPetite, fired the director of the Hazelwood center at 130 Taylor Road. She candidly told state day-care officials that her sole reason for the firing was that the center was not making money, even though its care was then rated good.

Ms. Held's successor was Peggy Georgevitch, who had only a few weeks earlier become a director of one of the centers here. She quickly promised day-care officials to correct recurrent problems at some centers, particularly the one at 940 Union Road, Affton.

Three times in three months state officials had found the facility badly understaffed, once with only two employees watching 40 children where four or five were required by law.

But before Ms. Georgevitch could correct the situation, she was abruptly fired. The home office in Kansas City questioned her expenditures to upgrade centers. A state day-care official wrote in a memo after talking to Ms. Georgevitch: "She was obviously shocked, but stated that she did not regret making what she felt were absolutely necessary expenditures at some of the facilities."

Three times in the next two months the Affton center was again found to be understaffed by state inspectors. On one visit, the bathroom sinks were stopped up, the carpet and toilet dirty and the water fountain broken, inspection records show.

On April 23, 1979, LaPetite President R.F. Brozman went to Jefferson City to discuss the "consistent areas of non-compliance" with the Day Care Licensing Unit.

State officials said there were "undue pressures from the Kansas City office for (financial) performance." Brozman said he would set out policies demonstrating that LaPetite had agreed to meet the state's child-staff ratio.

New policies were promulgated, but improvement was not swift. Not long after the meeting between Brozman and the licensing officials, the state found three of the centers understaffed.

At the facility at 2303 Chambers Road, Moline Acres, there were 72 children with three staff members early in the afternoon and 66 with only two later, a situation which Miss Adams described as "extremely hazardous."

Miss Adams wrote Brozman saying that the new policies were too vague and calling for immediate action. State officials say that there has been some improvement since, but that the centers still do not consistently provide high quality care.

Jack Brozman, vice president of the company and son of the president, said operations of the firm's day-care centers in St. Louis had improved in the last year. He acknowledged that the firm wanted full enrollment at the centers so that they could remain close to the 37-percent-of-center-income figure for salaries. But he said that was not a hard and fast rule. "Quality comes before money," he said.

TOMORROW: Peril or promise in day-care homes.

May Change Tactics On Admiral Bonds

By Phil Sutin
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

The St. Louis Port Authority may change its tactics in selling revenue bonds to finance the Admiral's return to the riverfront — even though such a change would add substantially to the cost of the $5 million project.

The standard approach is to sell such bonds to an investment firm, which then resells them to investors. But the Port Commission has been trying to persuade major banks and businesses here to buy the bonds directly from the port authority as a civic investment.

That approach would save $750,000 and ensure buyers for the bonds. Revenue bonds are paid off with the money generated by the facilities they finance. But sources in City Hall note that the Admiral would be a unique sort of investment and say that bond buyers tend to shy away from unconventional ventures.

Response to the city's approach has been lukewarm at best. Five banks and some miscellaneous businesses and individuals have agreed to buy just more than half of the $5 million bond issue. Few additional commitments are in sight, city officials have indicated.

Time is running out to schedule repairs for the Admiral before the tourist season begins in May. The city Port Commission reviewed the situation Tuesday but decided after a two-hour closed session to delay until next week a decision on changing its approach.

Its members said the current effort should continue while the staffs of the port authority and Mayor Jim Conway try to determine whether the conventional method would attract investors.

The Admiral, an attraction on the riverfront since 1940, made its last cruise in 1979. After that, the Coast Guard ordered repairs on its hull to meet safety requirements.

The vessel is in a shipyard near New Orleans awaiting a new hull and other costly repairs. The vessel's owner, Streckfus Steamers Inc., says it cannot afford the repairs.

So the revenue bonds would be used to buy the vessel from Streckfus, make necessary repairs, build up a financial reserve and contract with a private firm to operate the Admiral.

In addition to the Admiral, the port authority would purchase three small excursion boats — the Tom Sawyer, the Huck Finn and the Samuel Clemens — and three barges from Streckfus.

The amount now being talked about in revenue bonds is $5 million. A conventional bond sale would mean raising the amount to $5.75 million and increasing the interest rate by 2 percent to 12 percent, said Alderman Milton F. Svetanics Jr., chairman of the Port Commission.

Svetanics said about $300,000 of the extra money would be needed for financial and engineering studies that could be sidestepped if the bonds were sold without going through an investment firm.

In addition, the port authority would also be forced to put about $450,000 into a reserve fund for bond payments in case the boats generate too little income, Svetanics said.

Mercy Pilot Takes Gift Of Planes To Honduras

By Victor Volland
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Guy Gervais
"To the Promised Land"

No soldier of fortune is Guy Gervais, although his credentials certainly qualify him. The strapping 6-foot-3, ruggedly handsome French Canadian is one of the world's most experienced bush pilots.

With well over 15,000 hours logged in the wilds of Central and South America, the South Pacific and northern Canada, he speaks French, Spanish, Portuguese, English and several New Guinea dialects.

He was also for 20 years a missionary priest with the Montfort Fathers in New Guinea, Peru, Surinam and Guatemala. Before leaving for New Guinea in 1958, he took flying lessons because, he said, there was no other way to get around the island, one of the world's most primitive. He was dispensed from his priestly vows in 1973 when he married a Peruvian woman.

Gervais was in St. Louis today to help ferry two newly donated planes to Honduras in Central America to carry food, medicine and other vital supplies to isolated settlers. Since 1967, Gervais has been associated with Wings of Hope, a St. Louis-based international humanitarian organization that supplies modern airplanes and pilots to underdeveloped areas on four continents.

The single-engine planes — a Cessna 206 with short take-off and landing equipment donated by Margaretha C. Jordan of Webster Groves and a Cessna 205 donated by Mr. and Mrs. Richard Kliefoth of St. Louis County, will supplement a Cessna 185 that Gervais has been using to serve the 6,000-square-mile Patuca Valley of southern Honduras.

The rugged but fertile jungle area is being settled by the Honduran government, which has given each settler family 10 acres of land to farm. Since 1978, about 6,000 people have been organized into six farming cooperatives in the previously unpopulated valley, but there is still no permanent road into the area, which receives up to 350 inches of rain a year, Gervais said.

"It's rough, but for many it is like Abraham going to the Promised Land," said Gervais, who has kept the promise alive by providing vital supply and communications links with the outside. His plane regularly transports nurses, doctors, medicines, livestock and machine spare parts into the area and hospital cases and surplus farm produce out.

The new Cessna 206 that Gervais will be ferrying to his Honduran base has been named in memory of a friend, the late Ed Mack Miller, an aviation writer and veteran United Airlines pilot who had contributed volunteer services to Wings of Hope, which has offices at 2319 Hampton Avenue. The non-denominational organization, which was founded in 19?, is supported by United and many associates of Miller.

It was Miller, Gervais recalled, who, after accompanying him on a flying mercy mission across the perilous mountains of southwestern Guatemala after the devastating earthquake in 1976, adopted his motto in Spanish, "El espiritu santo mantiene el helice rotando." ("The Holy Spirit keeps the propeller going.")