

## HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN HAITI



On September 3rd, 1912 the Haitian legislature deemed elementary education mandatory. In all of the “all girls” schools, there were sections reserved for elementary school aged students; the elementary sections were divided by two categories: age and the level of intellect.

On September 26, 1932, the Haitian Department of Education changed the program in the Teacher Training School to include kindergarten education. The kindergarten education included developmental activities that involved child’s play, overall technique to understanding the outside world and language acquisition. As a result, the philosophies of both Friedrich Fröbel and Maria Montessori, became part of

the teacher training program, with the assistance of Mrs. Renée Lerebourg in 1934. Thus, the creation of preschool education in Haiti.

In addition to Mrs. Lerebourg’s contribution, we must also recognize the contributions of Mrs. Pauline Kergemard, Mrs. Pape Carpentier and Mrs. Bayardelle. The latter, of French ancestry, taught teacher training courses on Kindergarten Education and also obtained the authorization to start two additional kindergarten classes linked to the Teacher Training program. The first to teach these classes were Mrs. Raymonde Colimon, Mrs. Jeanine Roy, and Mrs. Jacqueline Coicou. An estimated 80 to 100 children benefitted from these classes.

In 1945, a private initiative was introduced thanks to Mrs. Fombrun, Mrs. Bayardelle and Mrs. Dartigue. This initiative did not succeed due to the lack of understanding for the necessity of early childhood education. It took the emancipation of mothers to realize the importance of supporting the child. In addition, credit should go to the Women’s League for Social Action, the first Haitian feminist organization, whose main focus and goals were equal education and equal rights for men and women. Hence, early education was unavoidable for all families.

In 1976, the World Bank financed the construction of national schools. In the same proximity of the schools, a parcel of land was reserved for the construction of the Integrated Community Centers of Nutrition and Education (Centres Intégrés de Nutrition et d’Éducation: CINEC). The CARE foundation financed the educational support for the operating staff. In addition, they provided supplies, equipments, furnitures and fixtures and clothing for children. The children who came to the center were bathed every morning, received a change of clothes and were given tooth brushes.

Moreover, it should be noted that the CINEC centers also welcomed, nearly 200 non-residents to the sites. These individuals were allowed into the centers in groups of fifty and by age group. Parents accompanied their children whose ages ranged from infancy to four years old. Each week dry food was given to the families and the children were able to participate in stimulating activities. It was a continuous cycle where the 4 year olds automatically replaced the 5 year olds entering the first grade. Parents, especially the mothers, were actively engaged in CINEC activities.

CINEC’s positive impact, in 1982, created a unified force at the Department of Education and Professional Development (MENFP) which championed the need for preschools in the country. In 1986, pilot programs were created within the Southeast, Northeast and the Western regions. In 1987, a hierarchical structure of supervisors was developed to oversee the program; this was the first of its kind. The 2003 Census revealed that 443 preschool centers existed, this number has since increased.

Ultimately, the objective is to have proper educational leadership and a holistic view of early childhood that is valued and supported by the Department of National Education and Professional Development (MENFP).

*If you would like more information, please refer to the document titled “Vers la Refondation du Système Éducatif Haïtien (Toward the Rebuilding of a Haitian Educational System).”*