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Early Childhood Education during Conflict and Change: Learning from the World War 2 experience of Breslau, Germany/Wroclaw, Poland

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Abstract

This research explores Early Childhood Education (ECE) during an intensely chaotic historical period in one city in Eastern/Central Europe. Breslau, initially a German city, was transferred to Poland and renamed Wroclaw in 1945 after World War 2. Breslau/Wroclaw experienced intense upheaval before, during, and after the war including the almost complete physical devastation of the city and the ensuing massive migration from the expulsion of ethnic Germans and the resettlement of Poles from eastern regions. The impact of war and government policies on the development and continuance of Early Childhood Education as Hitler and National Socialism rose to power, during the months of uncertainty around the end of the war, and on the establishment of a new system of Early Childhood Education in Wroclaw under Soviet domination receive focus in this paper. The results and discussion are applied to contemporary circumstances such as the current crisis in Ukraine, as well as social and political upheaval arising from other emergencies.

Keywords

Education history, education in emergencies, Eastern Europe, Early Childhood Education, young children.

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Educación Infantil durante el Conflicto y el Cambio: Aprendiendo de la Experiencia de la Segunda Guerra Mundial de Breslau, Alemania/Wroclaw, Polonia

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Resumen

Esta investigación explora la Educación Infantil Temprana (ECE, por sus siglas en inglés) durante un período histórico intensamente caótico en una ciudad de Europa Central y del Este. Breslau, inicialmente una ciudad alemana, fue transferida a Polonia y se convirtió en Wroclaw en 1945 después de la Segunda Guerra Mundial. Breslau/Wroclaw experimentó una intensa agitación antes, durante y después de la guerra, incluida la devastación física casi total de la ciudad y la consiguiente migración masiva desde el expulsión de los alemanes étnicos y el reasentamiento de los polacos de las regiones del este. El impacto de la guerra y las políticas gubernamentales en el desarrollo y la continuación de la Educación de la Primera Infancia cuando Hitler y el nacionalsocialismo subieron al poder, durante los meses de incertidumbre en torno al final de la guerra, y en el establecimiento de un nuevo sistema de Educación de la Primera Infancia en Wroclaw bajo la dominación soviética recibe atención en este documento. Los resultados y la discusión se aplican a circunstancias contemporáneas como la actual crisis en Ucrania, así como la convulsión social y política derivada de otras emergencias.

Palabras clave

Historia de la educación, educación en emergencias, Europa del Este, educación infantil, niños pequeños.

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In this paper we report on early childhood education (ECE) in an important historical period: as World War 2 (WW2) approached and ended in Breslau, Germany, and as the new government in the city of Wrocław, People's Republic of Poland emerged. Breslau/Wrocław experienced a host of chaotic events including National Socialism (NS) and Soviet totalitarianism, battles that destroyed 70-80% of the city (Thum, 2011), and one of the largest ethnic expulsions and migrations in documented history (Douglas, 2012).

Historical information about Early Childhood Education, which we define as schooling and care for young children between the ages of approximately three and six, in specific regions during WW2 is sparse. We use the city of Breslau/Wrocław as a case study to provide initial general information for future longer-term study. These initial findings reveal significant impacts on ECE during each of the periods we studied, including 1) from 1933 and the passage of new laws by Germany's NS government through the last battle for Breslau, 2) during the three months before the final government and border changes agreed upon at the Potsdam Conference (Douglas, 2012) and 3) as the new Polish People's Republic gained control of Wrocław under Soviet domination. This history applies to our contemporary world, as our need to better understand how policies impact children and families in times of instability continues, as evidenced most recently by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and subsequent migration of millions of Ukrainian families. Prior to these current events, the United Nations reported on the displacement of tens of millions of families (UNHCR, 2021) and a leading public health journal identified childhood trauma caused by emergencies such as these, as a "global health crisis" (Seddio, 2017).

The city of Breslau/Wrocław is located within the historical region of Silesia in contemporary Poland, a region that borders the Czech Republic to the south and Germany to the west. According to Demshuk (2012), German, Austrian, Polish and Czech rulers had long contested these borderlands. Germans were the majority population in the region between the Middle Ages and WW2, but Slavs were likely the first settlers. In 1526, Silesia and Breslau, its largest city, became a possession of the Austrian Hapsburg Empire and in 1740, part of Prussia. While dominated by Germans and Austrians, during that time, lower Silesia was quite multicultural, with Jews and others playing significant roles as relatively integrated members of society especially between 1860 and 1920, as reported by van Rahden (2008).

The region was historically divided into upper Silesia in the east and lower Silesia in the west (Czapliński, et al., 2002) and both World Wars brought significant changes. After the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945, alterations to borders resulted in the German city of Breslau and most of the larger surrounding area of Silesia being transferred to Poland. In this paper, we thus use the name "Breslau" when discussing events before August 1945 and "Wrocław" for events after August 1945. After 1947, Poland was referred to as the Polish People's Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa or PRL).

Materials and Methods

This research utilizes the city of Breslau/Wrocław as a case to learn about our research question: How was ECE impacted during the years from 1933 until shortly after the end of WW2? We agree with Thum (2011), who published a thorough history of this city and time

period, that Breslau/Wroclaw is an excellent city to use as a case because it was the most significant city to ever experience such a profound relocation of people caused by forced migration and population exchange. The current study includes a thorough literature review enhanced with archival research conducted in The State Archive in Wroclaw and The New Files Archive in Warsaw. The documents were in German and Polish language; the first author studied German documents and the second author Polish documents. With the help of trained archivists, we located and studied all files relevant to our research questions. Files were both broadly or narrowly related to the terms, early childhood education, kindergarten, school, etc. Documents from both private and public entities/institutions were included. We documented information using a primary document analysis aid, as recommended by Pojmann, Reeves-Ellington, and Mahar (2016). These aids were both on paper and electronic (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004), had columns related to the research question and space for descriptions of the items, and information to relocate them. We studied hundreds of documents and took photographs of many and implemented advice from McKee and Porter (2012) on ethics for archival research. While we studied every relevant document in the archives, we did not focus on first person accounts so concerns over privacy were minimized. We also applied McKee and Porter's (2012) advice on understanding context, the need for recursive thinking in analysis, and recommendations for evaluating the impacts of our motives/personal training to our data collection, analysis, and writing. We cite documents within this paper with an abbreviation to the collection name used by the archive. More details about the documents can be found in Appendix A.

We approach this work from educational and psychological perspectives, especially from the orientation of the Bio-Ecological Systems Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This "system's model" is especially useful to help us understand how events at home, in school, and government policies impact children. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained that we must study an entire system to understand children's development; that various levels of a system surround a child, like Russian nesting dolls. Variables close to children, such as those in their homes, as well as those further removed, such as government policies act together to shape development. This view was especially useful to help us make sense of how both pre and post war government policies impacted children and their education.

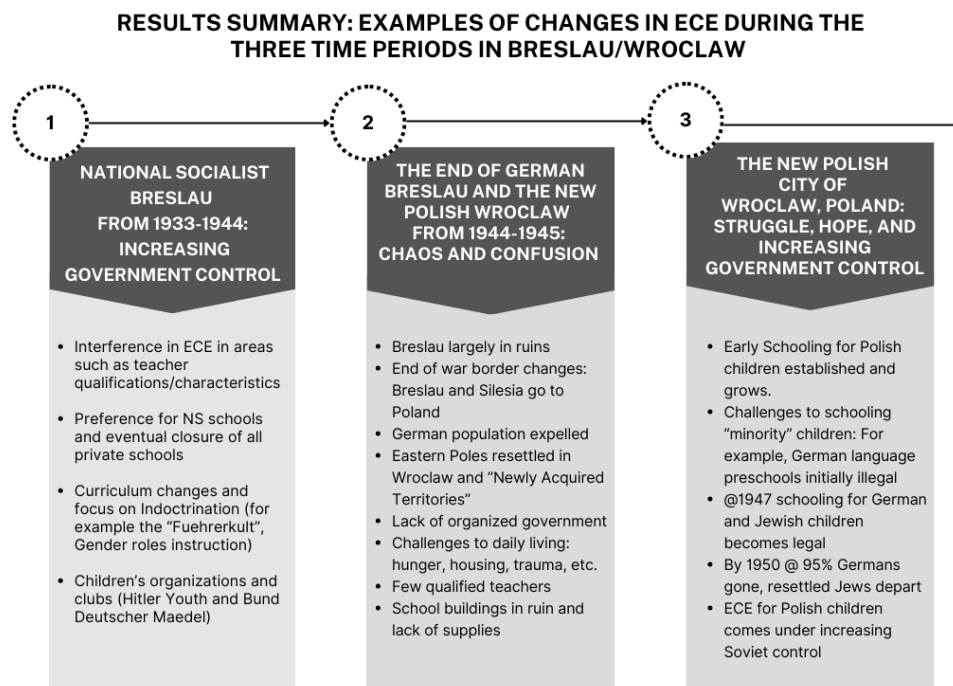
We present findings organised around the three time periods of our research question. In addition, we use "kindergarten" as a general term as well as Early Childhood Education (ECE) to refer to schooling for children between the ages of 3 and the common start of mandatory schooling at age 6.

Results

Early childhood education enjoyed early support and rapid growth in Germany, the birthplace of Friedrich Froebel (Gordon & Browne, 2008) and this growth was evident in Breslau. The Breslau Preschool Organization ('Kindergartenverein') dedicated to Froebelian philosophy was established in 1861 (RW:EP1945). In 1853, childcare for impoverished families in Breslau's neighbouring town, Oehls, was established (RW: EP1945). In 1918 after WW1, the Breslau Preschool Organization's annual report identified enrolment increases with over 1,151

children served in kindergartens. Such was the context of ECE in the region of Breslau and Silesia as the German Third Reich approached. It would have been hard to imagine, what significant changes to the region and ECE were ahead. These are summarized for three time periods in Timeline 1, and described in more detail in the text below.

Figure 1
Timeline 1



Early Childhood Education (ECE) in National Socialist (NS) Germany, 1933 – 1944

ECE in Breslau before 1933 was both private and public, and run by religious institutions such as the Lutheran and Catholic churches, the Jewish community, and companies such as Halpaus Cigarette factory (RW: EP1945). By 1934, the number of Breslau kindergartens had grown to 2,764 (ZMW:ASB1). All schools across Germany including Breslau experienced significant changes after the ascension of Adolf Hitler to the Chancellorship in January 1933, his suspension of the constitution in February, and his declaration as Führer in 1934. Without legislative approval, the Hitler regime demanded control over who could attend and teach in schools, favoured Party schools (and eventually closed all private preschools) and demanded strict adherence to NS ideology in all school/youth programs (Pine, 2010; Steinweis & Rachlin, 2013). In Breslau, a 1934 invitation to parents of young children announced, 'The Spirit of the School in the German Reich' (AMW: ZWPDW#5).

Move to National Socialist Party Preschools

In 1933, the NS regime through the People's Welfare Organization began to establish its own preschools with the goals of having less religious instruction, more NS ideology, and to open

new preschools in areas it deemed “distant” from NS philosophy (Pine, 2010). A newspaper advertisement in the November 3rd, Breslau *Schlesische Zeitung* declared the party’s intentions to increase the number of Party preschools and the goal to ‘use all its strength to plant in each child’s soul the love of the Volk and the Führer’ (AMW: ZWPDW#1). The process of closing private schools began in Breslau with the dissolution of the Breslau Preschool Organization in 1933 (RW: EP1945). In 1934, the Department of Churches and Schools notified the mayor of Breslau that government review and approval would be required before opening any new kindergarten (ZMW: ASB). Existing approval of any kindergarten could be suddenly withdrawn or transferred to a NS facility, as happened in 1942 in a town that neighbored Breslau, Oehls (RW: EP1945). The process of closing private kindergartens continued despite resistance to these policies by Pastors, as evidenced in archived letters. Breslau’s pastors were particularly distraught about the lack of religious instruction in NS preschools and the government takeover of church owned buildings for party activities (ŚLKE: AAK). In addition, schools were threatened to lose funding if attitudes of employees, children, or the curriculum itself were seen to be in opposition to NS ideology. An April 4th, 1936, letter from the Ministers for Science and Education to local private schools outlined these rules (AMW: ZWPDW#6).

National Socialist Ideology in Preschools

The NS leadership fully understood the value of developing and controlling the attitudes of young people, even children in preschools. Hitler Youth (HY) programs were first formed in 1922, and according to Steinweis and Rachlin (2013), began to incorporate other youth groups until 1936 when HY was the only available youth group. By 1939, all children beyond the age of 10 were required to join HY (boys) or the girls’ equivalent Bund Deutscher Maedel (BDM). Control and indoctrination and preparation of youth, including children as young as kindergarten, was part of the *Law on Hitler Youth* from December 1, 1936, which stated that German youth needed to prepare for their future duties by being ‘educated physically, intellectually, and morally in the spirit of National Socialism’ (Steinweis & Rachlin, 2013, p. 204).

Schleißinger (2008) links this indoctrination with the development of a ‘Fuehrerkult’, described as children’s intense loyalty to the dictator. The teaching of this cult-like behaviour was supported by a curriculum with an increased focus on physical performance, competition, and a purposeful militarization in play. Strict gender roles were enforced, particularly ‘appropriate’ activities and playthings for girls and boys so they could best serve the Reich. Aryan superiority was also prioritized in the curriculum. Photos from Breslau newspapers show the ‘Fuehrerkult’ in action. In the *Schlesische Zeitung* of February 2, 1934, kindergarten children stand before a portrait of Hitler, waving swastika flags, and holding arms high with the “Heil Hitler” salute (AMW: ZWPDW#2). Hitler’s birthday was a day of celebration, and his photo was to be hung in Breslau preschools (AMW: ZWPDW#1). After 1933 the NS controlled press in Breslau printed many examples to highlight the perceived importance of indoctrinating young children. The first line in a February 28th, 1934, article in the *Schlesische Zeitung* declared, ‘They who have the youth, have the future’ (AMW: ZWPDW#3); on April 29th, 1940, a headline in the same paper ran, ‘The teacher is the most important helper of army

officers'. Competitive athletic events were increasingly publicized (AMW: ZWPDW#4) and other articles supported military play, such as a November 3rd, 1944, piece that discussed sandbox playing as an 'excellent aid to military training' (ŚLKE: AAK).

Early Childhood Education (ECE) in 1944 and 1945: The End of WW 2

By October 1944, Breslau had seen its first major bombing (Thum, 2011). While private religious preschools and schools had already been closed, NS kindergartens remained open longer – although archival material for this period is very limited. Hitler decreed that Breslau would become a fortress against advancing Soviet troops and by early winter 1945, its residents were forced to participate in back-breaking preparations (Thum, 2011). Little data exists on the exact times of kindergarten closures leading up to this final battle, which commenced in February and finally ended in May 1945. Delayed evacuation orders resulted in many families remaining in Breslau until January 1945, which resulted in high civilian casualties.

After the capitulation of Germany in May 1945, chaos and uncertainty reigned in Breslau, which ended the war as one of the most damaged cities in Europe (Douglas, 2012). Civilians waited for information about final border changes and both a German administrative unit and a new Polish administration unit organised under the Soviet occupation, governed the city (Thum, 2011). At the Potsdam Conference, the major Allied leaders of Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States finalized border changes, which resulted in most of the previously German region of Silesia, including Breslau being transferred to Poland. This resulted in the transformation of the city of Breslau into the city of Wrocław. German inhabitants from the area were forcibly removed (expelled) and Polish civilians from former Polish regions, which were newly ceded to the Soviet Union were relocated to the area. These migrating Germans and Poles, in combination with liberated concentration camp survivors and former prisoners of war, resulted in the largest migration in documented history (Douglas, 2012).

This period and region are often described as intensely chaotic, initially lacking basic governing, no less governing for educational administration (Douglas, 2012; Halicka, 2020). However, plans to organise a post-war Polish federal government that would oversee education were being formed before war's end by two groups of Polish officials, one in exile in London and one an opposition communist group in Poland. According to Wiśniewska (2019) and Ligarski (2012), by April 1945 the communist government in the Polish territories was making plans for education, including teacher training, and organizing school staff and administrators. By October 1945, oversight of kindergartens was assigned to School Inspectorates in local districts.

Wrocław archives contain few documents related to ECE between May and September 1945. Some information exists in the literature and archives about private Catholic schools, such as the German Catholic Ursulines, who report on the care of refugees, orphans, sick, and dying children during the first post-war months (Klich, 2017). Censuses from district administrators (ZMW: ASB; ZMW: GUS) are available, but it is uncertain the extent to which these documents provide complete information. They show about 200 German children attending kindergarten classes in Breslau/Wrocław in 1945. Polish documents reveal about five kindergartens serving about 710 children by the end of 1945 (see Table 1). Related documents from this early post-war period reveal a myriad of difficulties including lack of food, unsanitary

and dangerous conditions in damaged buildings, difficulties finding trained teachers, and children who were undernourished, ill, and traumatized (Halicka, 2017; KOSW:WO; KOSW:WSP; ZDL 1945. Textbooks, chalk, and teaching aids were often unavailable (Ligarski, 2012).

Early Childhood Education (ECE) Post War – in the New City of Wrocław

Polish authorities under Soviet control referred to Wrocław and Silesia as the “newly acquired territories”, the “recovered territories” and as the “Wild West” (Halicka, 2020; Tyszkiewicz, 2000). These names communicated Polish hopes for a new life, but also propaganda efforts intended to attract Polish settlers to the region (Kaszuba, 2021). The term “wild west” communicated the chaos of the political, socio-cultural, and economic situation, which impacted every facet of life including ECE.

Children’s education was an integral part of the Soviet indoctrination plan as the Soviet-dominated government exerted steady efforts to control ECE, management became more centralized, and party and government authorities deliberately weakened the autonomy of local school authorities (Smolański, 1970; Wiśniewska, 2019). Such was the situation, when the newly established Wrocław school administration was charged with quickly establishing a system of kindergartens (ZMW: DSP).

The focus of Wrocław school administration was to create kindergartens for Polish children. However, Silesia between 1945 and 1950 was quite diverse. German families were still the most sizable minority, although due to forced expulsion their numbers were quickly decreasing. Census documents and various secondary sources show that from February 1946 the total Wrocław population was 168,500 including 57,900 Poles and 110, 600 Germans, By March 1947 the total population was 214,310 with only 17,496 Germans (Davies and Moorhouse, 2002; Statistics of the City of Wrocław (SMW), 1966) . By 1950, only 5 years after the end of WW2, slightly over 95% of the Wrocław population was Polish, and the remaining 5% consisted of minorities such as Germans, Jews, Lemkos and Ukrainians (Damurski, 2006).

In 1945 minority children could not universally attend the new Polish preschools and there were two primary models for educating them, which required children to have special administrative permission (Ławniczak & Juchniewicz, 2017). First, it was technically possible for some non-Polish children to be legally educated in segregated special schools with instruction in their own language and culture. Documents show that in January 1946, two such German kindergartens existed legally in Wrocław and were attended by 180 children (Ligarski, 2012). The second option was separate classes within Polish-speaking schools. Evidence exists that feelings of mistrust between Poles and Germans often made this option undesirable for both (Techmańska, 2011; KOSW: WSP). In fact, most children of the German minority were not legally able to attend German language preschools until 1950, after the completion of the expulsions. As a result, between 1945 and 1950, most German children participated in illegal classes run by private individuals or churches (Techmanska, 2011; KOSW: WO) Eventually, after 1946, kindergartens for the few remaining German children were legal, but the Polish government required them to be staffed by Polish teachers (KOSW: WSP).

The Jewish community initially after the war successfully and legally ran private schools. In 1947, 23 Jewish schools including kindergartens, existed in Lower Silesia. However, in 1948/9 the Ministry of Education no longer allowed private Jewish schools, and Jewish

families were forced to send their children to Polish public schools, albeit to schools with options for Jewish language and culture instruction (Techmańska, 2011). By the mid-1950s, large numbers of Jews, who had initially returned after WW2 had left Wroclaw and Silesia, likely for a variety of reasons including such unwelcomed government policies related to schooling (Douglas, 2012; Kijek, 2018).

The Growth of Polish preschools in Wroclaw

Table 1 outlines the number kindergartens in the greater Wroclaw School District and a subset of that district, the City of Wroclaw. In both districts, the number of kindergartens increased each school year from 1945/1946 through 1949/1950. One exception was in 1949/1950, when there was a decrease, possibly due to the greater control exerted by the Soviet-dominated government in matters discussed above and the gradual elimination of non-aligning kindergartens (Ligarski, 2012; Wisniewska, 2019). The result was that while kindergartens after 1945 were initially public and private, run by organizations such as churches, government, and workers' groups, by 1950 most preschools were again public and government run (Ligarski, 2012; Wisniewska, 2019).

Table 1

Number of Preschools, children and teachers in Wroclaw Area

School Year	All Preschools in the Greater Wroclaw District			Preschools only within the city of Wroclaw		
	preschools	children	teachers	preschools	children	teachers
1945/46	50	1,640	72	5	710	31
1946/47	187	6,566	235	24	1,124	35
1947/48	320	13,475	462	31	1,989	58
1948/49	425	17,044	601	32	2,145	78
1949/50	417	20,953	705	56	4,112	144

Source. Based on: Ligarski 2012; Wisniewska 2019, 2019; Statistics of the City of Wroclaw (SMW), 1966; ZMW: DSP.

Shortages of qualified preschool teachers presented serious problems during this time as well (KOSW: WO). In the Wroclaw Regional School District in 1945-1946, only 48 qualified teachers were employed. Some 187 (79.57%) were in training or lacking ECE teaching qualifications altogether (Wisniewska, 2019; ZMW: PPWP). Teachers were hard to find for a variety of reasons. These included low pay and a simple lack of capable individuals (KOSW: WO). In addition, existing schools were reorganized to meet the needs of the planned economy, new policies focused on the indoctrination of teachers, and private initiatives to establish preschools were prohibited (Ligarski, 2012). Even if teachers were found, they often lacked the skills to work with the severely traumatized children in their care. These factors impacted the entirety of preschool teachers' jobs and lives (Wisniewska, 2019).

Establishing ECE in the newly acquired Polish western lands was a complex task and impacted by Soviet domination and indoctrination, lack of support for minority populations,

the physical damage from WW2, and the dearth of qualified teaching staff and supplies. However, a new system of ECE was established and began to grow.

Discussion and Implications

Several themes emerged from this study, which have contemporary applications for Early Childhood Education (ECE) in all countries, whether they experience conflict or chaos caused by war or environmental degradation. These include the continued relevance of the bio-ecological model to understanding children's experiences, the importance of qualified open-minded and unbiased preschool teachers in a healthy democracy, the impact of the preschool teacher on young children's developing political orientation, and the increased need to include ECE in disaster planning, to support its safe maintenance before, during, and after catastrophes.

System's perspectives (such as [Bronfenbrenner 1979](#); [Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006](#)) help us understand how children's experiences are influenced by many layers of variables. Our results from this city in the three periods show that ECE services were quickly and directly impacted by outside forces. Government policies based on ideologies during the NS, initial post-war, and early Polish government eras directly impacted young children's education and care. For example, NS racist/anti-Jewish laws influenced children's ECE starting in 1933, by changing how schools were organized, administered, and who could teach and attend. In the early post-1945 era, the ideology of the communist totalitarian government also influenced the development of preschools and the lives of preschool children by creating unfavourable policies toward Jews and other "minorities". Policies of 'polanisation/degermanisation' impacted all children, and propaganda and ideology formed the backbone of curriculums even at the Early Childhood Education level ([Wiśniewska, 2019](#)).

Our research showed that both the German National Socialist (NS) and Polish/Soviet regimes emphasized ideologically influencing very young children. They were correct about the important impact of early education, despite lacking our current evidence regarding the influence of this period to human development ([UNESCO,2019](#)). For the stability of current and future democratic systems, schools, educators, and governments must recommit to developing a fully professional ECE workforce. Teachers must be credentialed, and trained to be open-minded, unbiased, and understand the impact of their roles. This workforce needs to be dedicated to teaching young children without bias and discrimination and be willing to speak up and disagree with government policies when necessary.

Related to the need for highly educated preschool teachers, the current study reinforces the value to society of a variety of private and public preschools that practice from different philosophies or orientations. In both National Socialist (NS) Germany and the early Polish post war period, only one philosophy was permitted. In NS Germany, private preschools were replaced with NS Party preschools. In the PRL, our archival research indicated that there was a steady closing of non-public institutions as well. Such curtailment of philosophies was a sign, during both times, of over-reaching government policies that endangered each society.

Finally, this work has implications for communities forming disaster plans, particularly for the need to include planning specifically for ECE. Important work for education in emergencies was completed by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergency (INNE) in 2004. Our

study provides further support for INNE guidelines. Essential elements for disaster plans should include community participation, access to the learning environment, quality curriculum and teachers, as well as policy planning (INNE, 2004). Not surprisingly, we found little evidence for specific planning of ECE services for children and families as WW2, migration/resettlement and expulsion approached. If such plans had existed and if they were made accessible to civilians, efforts to re-establish ECE may have been bolstered. We also suggest civilian access to such plans because we saw evidence of ad-hoc “grassroot” or parent/community efforts to re-establish ECE during the period between May and August 1945, which are also discussed by Halicka (2017). While planning for events as catastrophic as WW2 might be close to impossible, this current research reinforces that ECE can play a critical role in disaster planning. We need only look to events in our current period, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the migration it spurred, to see this potential.

Future Research and Limitations

This research concerned the impact of WW2 and its aftermath on ECE in one city. Future research should continue to study historical periods and apply results to improvements in our contemporary context with the goal of decreasing the impact of catastrophic events on children. Millions of children and families continue to be subject to major disruptions. The recent emergency in Ukraine has displaced many children and stressed schools in Ukraine and in countries like Poland, which have absorbed large numbers of refugees. Additional research is needed about such contemporary events on societies’ ability to provide, sustain, and re-establish ECE both in the countries experiencing war and those offering support to refugees and migrants.

Environmental events are also increasingly disrupting ECE. These have impacts on children and families similar to war, particularly related to trauma and stress. Recent research on Adverse Child Experiences shows the importance of mitigating stress for children and emphasizes the key role of early experience in healthy development (Hughes, et al., 2017). War, migration, displacement, expulsion, and refugee status are intensely stressful experiences (Muhtz, 2011) and stable, well-planned ECE could alleviate or moderate the impact of trauma. These areas deserve intense attention.

We offer an initial overview of ECE during a historical period of upheaval in one city, a city whose inhabitants faced the full scope of negative impacts from war: violence, totalitarian governance, migration, expulsion, and resettlement. Our main goal was to begin the study of what happened to children during this specific historical time and place, with the hope that future research can more extensively study how to mitigate negative impacts on children. Unfortunately, studying one city limits our conclusions by seriously limiting generalizability. However, this study provides important historical information and future researchers can develop and test more specific hypotheses related to the effectiveness of ECE during chaotic times.

Due to space limitations, this paper is not able to focus in detail on the impact of policies on specific groups of children, such as Jewish children, or on the different trauma experienced by either Jewish, Polish, German, or other “minority” children of the time. Clearly all these

civilian children experienced the war differently and all experienced different trauma. Finally, this paper presents information on how government policies impacted ECE. A discussion of diverse groups of children, issues of diversity, or how schools should create effective instruction for non-majority children in ECE is essential, but beyond its scope.

Conclusion

The United Nations Refugee Agency reported that at the end of 2019, before the current crisis in Ukraine, 79.5 million people were forcibly displaced (UNHCR, 2021). A call to action in the *American Journal of Public Health* identified issues related to migrants' health as a "global public health issue" and identified children as most vulnerable to the trauma caused by emergencies (Seddio, 2017). Results of the current study offer a literature review with new archival historical information that can inform contemporary ECE. We can and should do more to improve children's and families lives by providing and planning for high quality and stable ECE before, during, and after uncertain and volatile times.

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Ethics Statement

This study is based on publicly available archival documents and the Research Ethics Representative from the State University of New York at New Paltz has confirmed that no ethical approval is required.

Disclosure Statement

The authors report that there are no competing interests to declare.

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Annex

APPENDIX A

Summary of archival documents/files

The abbreviation used in this manuscript	The name of the document/ file	The name of the item and/or the reference code	The name of the archive where the document was retrieved
AMW: ZWPDW#1	Akta Miasta Wrocławia [Files of the city of Wrocław]: Zbiór wycinków prasowych dawnego Wrocławia [A collection of press clippings from the old Wrocław].	Schlesische Zeitung 1933, the November 3rd, Breslau 82/28/0/102	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
AMW: ZWPDW#2	Akta Miasta Wrocławia [Files of the city of Wrocław]: Zbiór wycinków prasowych dawnego Wrocławia [A collection of press clippings from the old Wrocław].	Schlesische Zeitung, 1934, February 2 82/28/0/102	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
AMW: ZWPDW#3	Akta Miasta Wrocławia [Files of the city of Wrocław]: Zbiór wycinków prasowych dawnego Wrocławia [A collection of press clippings from the old Wrocław].	Schlesische Zeitung 1934, February 28th 82/28/0/102	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
AMW: ZWPDW#4	Akta Miasta Wrocławia [Files of the city of Wrocław]: Zbiór wycinków prasowych dawnego Wrocławia [A collection of press clippings from the old Wrocław].	Schlesische Zeitung 1940, April 29th 82/28/0/102	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
AMW: ZWPDW#5	Akta Miasta Wrocławia [Files of the city of Wrocław]: Zbiór wycinków prasowych dawnego Wrocławia [A collection of press clippings from the old Wrocław].	Communication from Schools to Parents, 1934	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
AMW: ZWPDW#6	Akta Miasta Wrocławia [Files of the city of Wrocław]: Zbiór wycinków prasowych dawnego Wrocławia [A collection of press clippings from the old Wrocław].	Letter Misters of Science and Education to Private Schools	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
KOSW:WO	Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego Wrocław [The Board of the Wrocław School District]: Wydział Ogólny 1945-1951	82/339/0/2/1 - 82/339/0/2/15	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in

	[General Department 1945-1951]		Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
KOSW:WSP	Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego Wrocław [The Board of the Wrocław School District]: Wydział Szkolnictwa Powszechnego [Faculty of General Education]	82/339/0/2/38, 82/339/0/2/39, 82/339/0/2/40	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
MO: SWP	Ministerstwo Oświaty [Ministry of Education]: Sprawozdania z rozwoju wychowania przedszkolnego na terenie KOS Wrocław [Reports on the development of preschool education in Wrocław School District]	1455	Archiwum Akt Nowych (AAN) [The New Files Archive], Warszawa, Poland,
RW: EP 1945	Rejencja Wrocławska: Edukacja przedszkolna do 1945, [Preschool Education 1945].	82/172/0/2	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
ŚLKE:AAK	Śląski Konsystorz Ewangelicki Prowincji Śląskiej we Wrocławiu [Silesian Evangelical Consistory of the Silesian Province in Wrocław]: Akten betreffend der Auflösung der Kindergarten [Documents related to the dissolution of preschools].	82/118/0	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
ZDL 1945	Kuratorium Okręgu Szkolnego Wrocław [The Board of the Wrocław School District]: Zbiór dokumentów luźnych 1945 [Collection of loose documents 1945]	82/2562/0	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
ZMW:ASB	Zarząd Miejski Miasta Wrocławia, [Management Board of the city of Wrocław]: Akten der Stadverwaltung zu Breslau	82/334/0/8	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
ZMW: DSP	Zarząd Miejski Miasta Wrocławia [Wrocław City Council]: Dane Statystyczne Przedszkoli [Statistical Data of the Preschools]	82/334/0/8/242 - 82/334/0/8/245	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.
ZMW:GUS	Zarząd Miasta Wrocławia [Wrocław City Council]: Główny Urząd Statystyczny 1945-1946 [The Central Statistical Office 1945-1946]	82/334/0/7	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.

ZMW: PPWP	Zarząd Miejski Miasta Wrocławia [Wrocław City Council]: Protokoły z posiedzeń wychowawczyń przedszkoli [Protocols of meetings with kindergarten teachers]	82/334/0/8/221	Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu (AP Wr) [The State Archive in Wrocław], Wrocław, Poland.