1. MAKING CHILDREN READY FOR SCHOOL: AN ISSUE FOR THE 1990s

By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.

—*President Bush, State of the Union Message, 1990 and National Governors' Association, 1990.*

IN THE WINTER of 1990 and for the first time in history, a sitting president and all the governors convened a national education summit and jointly set an education agenda to improve the public schools (Walker, 1990). The very first national goal set at this education summit was "readiness" for school among the nation's children. President Bush announced in his 1990 State of the Union address that, by the turn of the century, every child in America would start school "ready to learn."[1]

Children who start school behind rarely catch up. Mostly, they do not learn to read on schedule[2] with their peers. Schools respond by flunking children in the early grades or by labelling them as "impaired" in some way so that they can qualify for special help (Smith & Shepard, 1987). Children respond by not believing in themselves as learners (Martin, 1988).

As Marilyn Jager Adams writes in *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print* (1990), it is unlikely that first-grade teachers can make up for the vast differences among children's preschool experiences. Among families who routinely read stories to their children, Adams estimates that the children spend from 1,000 to 1,700 hours in one-to-one literacy activities[3] before entering school. Adams suggests that these children experience another 2,000 hours of print "guidance" by watching "Sesame Street" and perhaps another 1,000 or 2,000 hours

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by playing with magnetic alphabet letters, participating in reading and writing activities in playgroup or preschool, exploring with paper and pencils and playing alphabet games on a computer (p. 85).

But for children in many other families,[4] there are no storybook routines, no magnetic letters on the refrigerator, no easy access to paper and pencils for creating messages, and no literacy games to play on a computer. Perhaps there is not even "Sesame Street." Such children will begin first grade without the "thousands of hours of school-like reading experience" (Adams, 1990, p. 90) that other families have the resources to provide.

Adams notes that first-grade teachers typically allocate about 360 hours of classroom instruction to language arts, and any one child must share his first-grade teacher with at least twenty other children. This is not much time at all when compared with the approximately 4,000 to 6,000 hours of literacy activities—including one-to-one tutorials—that more advantaged children receive prior to first grade.

I began this project in the late 1980s. By that time, policy people—education commissioners, mayors, governors—had begun to talk seriously about providing public school to all four-year-olds. At about the same time, a consensus seemed to be developing among researchers that children's experiences with print before first grade were at least as important as their experiences with print after they started school. I wondered what policymakers hoped public schooling for four-year-olds might accomplish. Did they believe—as I did—that entitling all four-year-olds to educational programs could be the first step in entitling all children to literacy?

This book is about beliefs and understandings. It is an account of the historical ties between early childhood education and literacy learning. It is also my account of what contemporary policymakers in one state believe about early childhood education. I describe how these policy participants define readiness for school, who they identify as the child development experts, what they say about preschool and literacy learning, and what even counts as "school" for young children.

This book is also a study of agenda setting. Public school for four-year-olds is an idea that is clearly getting on the agenda. The term *agenda setting* was originally used by anthropologists to describe the way tribal societies brought problems to the attention of their leaders. More recently, its use has been appropriated by political scientists to explain how certain demands by groups in the population actually become "translated into items vying for the serious attention of public officials" (Cobb, Ross & Ross, 1976, p. 126). Borrowing the agenda-setting

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paradigm from anthropology and political science, I describe how contemporary policymakers perceive the issue of "education" for children who are not yet of school age.

A NATIONAL GOAL

The ideal of making all children ready to learn—every child starting off on common ground—has universal appeal, but there is no consensus on what school readiness means or on the best way to achieve it. Do we improve the *parents* of poor children, as some suggest, so that every parent takes an "active role in his or her child's early learning, particularly by reading to them on a daily basis" (NGA, 1990, p. 16), or do we develop school readiness by sending children to *school*? If we send children to school, what should the school teach? Should teachers make it their number-one priority to read every day to the children as parents are urged to do? And should we send only *poor* children? Some would argue that children are born "ready to learn," but that the learning of the preschool years is qualitatively different from that of the school years. Do we actually know the connection between early childhood education and the literate society we envision for the future?

The governors, in fact, initially scrapped an amendment to their proposal that would have called for a national assessment of school readiness, because there was so little agreement about what such an instrument would measure. However, once they are made "ready," American children are expected to read, write, and think at a level that will challenge the best of our global competitors.

Despite the murkiness of the 'school readiness' concept, the education summit was itself a groundbreaking event. Education is and always has been a function reserved to the states, with individual states and localities exercising considerable autonomy in setting educational standards. Further, the education summit tackled issues not typically under the purview of the educational system. Developing readiness for school is one of these issues. Until now, the development of children prior to school-age has been considered the family's responsibility. In the introduction to its January, 1992 report on readiness, "Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation," the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching acknowledges that the question of who is responsible for children's preschool development has not yet been adequately addressed by government:

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> Surely, America has within its power the means to make the earliest years enriching and productive for all our children. But whose responsibility is it to ensure the school readiness of children? Who should take the lead in seeing to it that every child receives not just food, protection and love, but also the guidance to succeed in school and to proceed confidently in life? (Boyer, 1991, p. M5)

Not since the enactment of Head Start in 1965 as part of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty has the education of preschoolers been the focus of such sustained public attention. Recently Congress reauthorized Chapter 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and, in doing so, earmarked $50 million for Even Start, a new federal program to support parental literacy and early childhood education. In addition to this modest appropriation for Even Start, three major early childhood bills, each with profound fiscal and programmatic implications for the future of preschool programs, were also before Congress. Smart Start (S. 123) proposed that more than $4 billion be allocated over several years to the states for educational programs for low-income four-year-olds; Early Childhood Education and Development Act (H.R. 3) authorized close to $2 billion each year for an array of educational and child-care services, including an expanded Head Start; and the Act for Better Child Care Services (S. 5) authorized about $2.7 billion each year to improve the quality, access to, and affordability of child care, particularly for low-income parents. Each of these bills defines the federal interest in early schooling somewhat differently.

In addition, across the country, many more states are allocating funds to help support preschool programs. At least thiry-one states now contribute either to state-directed preschool programs or to the federal Head Start programs, an increase that quadruples the participation rate of a decade ago (Mitchell, 1989). Public school for four-year-olds is now available in New York City and Los Angeles, with other big city school boards and, increasingly, state boards of education considering at least optional programs for parents who desire them (Morado, 1985; Schweinhart & Mazur, 1987).

Education commissioners in California, New York, and Connecticut have endorsed the concept of universal public school for four-year-olds, and gubernatorial panels in Kentucky, Massachusetts, North Carolina, South Carolina, Connecticut, and Michigan have recommended policy initiatives for the care and schooling of three- and four-year-olds (National Governors' Association, 1986). The California School Readiness Task Force, established by the state superintendent for instruction

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to examine how California might make its children ready for school, has recommended increased state support for the education of four-year-olds (California State Department of Education, 1988). Likewise, Mario Cuomo, governor of the state of New York, has recommended in his State of the State messages (1987, 1988) that New York provide free education for all of the state's four-year-old children.

The highly publicized benefits of the early intervention programs for poor children and the dramatic rise in numbers of mothers of young children in the work force have compelled federal and state policymakers to take a hard look at what is happening to the children. At this juncture, the issue appears to be not whether early schooling is appropriate but rather what form early schooling should take. What do we think four-year-olds should be learning, and what do we want early schooling to accomplish (Fiske, 1986)?

THE ARGUMENT FOR EARLY SCHOOLING

Almost no one is arguing against the need for more programs for preschool-aged children. By the turn of the century, the Bureau of the Census estimates that 80 percent of all mothers of children under the age of six will be in the work force, and half of them will need formal child care (Kamerman, 1984). Between 1970 and 1983 the percentage of four-year-old children in child day care or nursery school programs tripled, so that now more than 48 percent are in such programs. The majority—two-thirds—are in private programs. While half of all four-year-olds are in school now, about 25 percent are actually in kindergarten, not child day care or even preschool (Ambach, 1985). The age for entry into public school is being lowered and raised as state policymakers grapple with issues of readiness. The question for the 1990s is what kind of programs should we be providing?

Parents who can afford to enroll their children in formal preschool educational programs generally do so, according to the sponsors of the Act for Better Child Care Services (Kennedy, 1989). Gordon Ambach, the director of the Council of Chief State School Officers and former New York state education commissioner, also notes that access to educational or school-based programs is a class issue (Ambach, 1985). One distinction he noted between child care and educational programs for four-year-olds was that 70 percent of all four-year-olds from families with incomes above $25,000 were in school, not day care, whereas only

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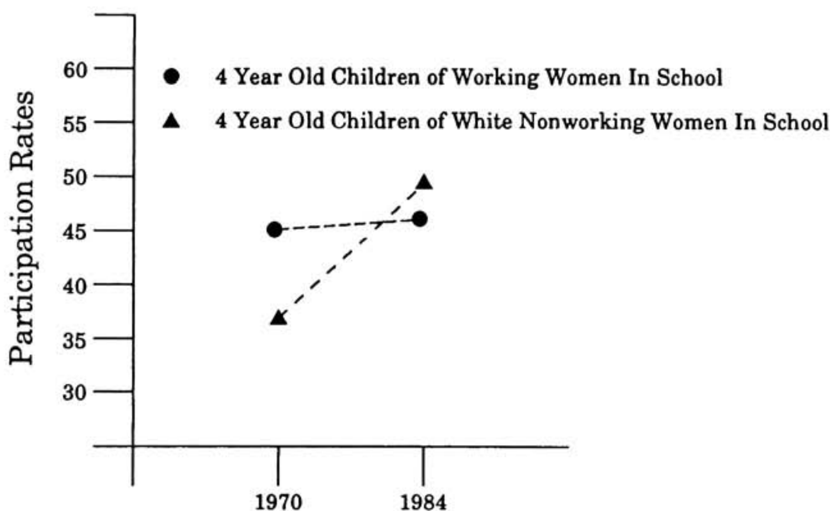
thirty-three percent from families with incomes below $15,000 were in school programs (Ambach, 1985). In fact, census data suggest that it is the preschool enrollment of White four-year-olds whose mothers *do not work* that has dramatically increased the participation rates of this age group in programs across the country. From 1970 through the mid-1980s, a relatively stable percentage of White children with working mothers went to preschool. On the other hand, many more White children of stay-at-home mothers—more than 50 percent of all four-year-olds in this category—attended preschool in the mid-eighties compared to 1970 (Pendleton, 1986). Presumably, these children were not in school because their mothers were working, but rather because their families believed there was an educational benefit to participating in preschool.

FIGURE 1-1
Preprimary School Participation Rates of 4-year-old Children of White Nonworking Women Compared to Participation Rates of 4-year-old Children of Working Women



Note: The data are from Pendleton (1986).

In the view of many policymakers today, including Ambach and Edward Koch, former mayor of New York City, there is a disparity of

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opportunity among four-year-olds that needs redress if equal educational opportunity is to be preserved as a goal of public education (Early Childhood Commission, 1986). The assumption inherent in this point of view is that school programs should offer something different from or beyond that of child care and that this component is beneficial for all children, but especially for the economically disadvantaged.

Several well-reported longitudinal studies of the early Head Start programs have given credibility to the belief that preschool education can change lives. In a fifteen-year study of disadvantaged Black youth, for example, researchers estimated that over the lifetime of the participants there would be an economic benefit of approximately six or seven dollars to every one dollar spent on the Perry Preschool Project (Berrueta-Clement, et al., 1984). Similarly, the national Head Start Evaluation Synthesis and Utilization Project found significant immediate gains in cognitive and emotional development for participating children. While these advantages were not sustained throughout their school careers,[5] participants in the preschool program were more likely to be promoted to the next grade and less likely to require costly special education placement (CSR, 1985).

In the upcoming decades, an increasing proportion of the total school age population will be made up of children who are thought to be more economically disadvantaged and at risk of failure. The problems associated with low-achieving children of poor and minority parents that gave rise to the educational interventions of the 1960s will be exacerbated by the growing numbers of children in poverty (today, for example, 23 percent of all children under the age of six are poor), in single-parent families, and in families whose native language is not English. Demographic trends—the differential birth rate between minority familes and Caucasian families, divorce and other family patterns, immigration, and the wage and economic disparities among these populations—indicate that the public-school clientele of the future will be predominantly "nonmainstream" (Shields & McLaughlin, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1985; National Center for Children in Poverty, 1990).

Given these demographic and social trends, together with the highly publicized results of early intervention studies, one might expect universal agreement on the desirability of publicly funded, school-based, educational programs for four-year olds. Indeed, the American Federation of Teachers has been a longstanding proponent of public school programs for early childhood initiatives, claiming that the public schools are the only national institution with "built-in quality controls" and capability to coordinate and provide continuity between preschool

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and primary school (Glass, 1986). The New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) recently released a position paper that strongly supports public school involvement as a "logical and practical way to increase availability of early educational or child care opportunities." While the NYSSBA does not advocate mandated preschool, it does support full state funding for "prekindergarten programs. . .to reach children all over the state where need is shown" (NYSSBA, 1986).

Early childhood education should be a top national priority and states should consider requiring full-day programs for four-year olds, according to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). Unless emphasis is placed on early childhood programs in particular, the NAESP holds that the country may create a "permanent underclass amounting to 25 per cent of our citizens" (Walton, n.d.). The national Committee for Economic Development (1987) and the regional Southern Growth Policies Board (1990) both see publicly funded preschool education for impoverished four-year-olds as an investment strategy that will yield high dividends for the economy by reducing costs for welfare and increasing the productivity of the work force.

While virtually every major professional organization affiliated with public schools has issued statements in favor of universal schooling for four-year-olds (Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 1987; New York State United Teachers, 1986; NYSSBA, 1986; NAESP, n.d.), interest groups that represent child care providers and minority children have not generally sought an expanded public school role in the education of preschoolers. In other words, organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1985, 1986) and the National Black Child Development Institute (1985) have long advocated more child-care programs and expanded funding and more appropriate oversight at state and federal levels, but not necessarily under the aegis of the public school bureaucracy. At the heart of this issue is the perceived incompatibility of traditional child care with traditional kindergarten or first-grade education as practiced in the public schools.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION, LITERACY INSTRUCTION, AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOL

In an historical analysis of ideas shaping early childhood education, Weber (1984) cites the bureaucratization of the public schools as the

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major force inhibiting any restructuring of primary-grade curriculum. At the time kindergarten programs were incorporated into public schools—in the 1920s—kindergarten teachers believed that they would be able to effect a more child-centered approach throughout the primary grades. Change did occur, Weber states, but in the opposite direction.

Pressured to align their work more closely with that of the rest of the school, Weber says that kindergarten teachers found themselves caught up with the age and grade testing standards of the schools and began to devote more and more attention to preparation for first grade. Whereas the previous goal of kindergarten programs involved the development of attitudes, the new goal—literacy—dominated all other concerns, and reading readiness exercises subsumed ever larger parts of the curriculum (Weber, 1984; Sommerville, 1982).

As Weber sees it, what was important in the early kindergarten programs—the ability to respond to changing notions of how children learn and commitment to the individuality of human growth—was lost with the absorption of kindergarten within the public school system. She believes that preschools have been able to maintain more of a match between the curriculum and the young child's interests and needs, but only because there is not yet a bureaucratic hierarchy to impose its standard. Weber does allow, however, that even preschools have not been "untouched by the American fetish for early literacy. . . [in] the form of parents' anxiety and zeal for their children to have a head start in reading" (Weber, 1984, p. 200).

The Curriculum Issue

Participants in this policy discussion have often dichotomized child care and education, with some educators claiming that traditional child care arrangements lack an educational component, and some child-development specialists cautioning that the typical four-year-old is not ready for the public school primary grade curriculum.

On the one hand, it is not clear what an appropriate "educational component" is or should be for early schooling—be it called preschool, child day care, nursery school, or Head Start. The selection of a curriculum has been the central issue in early childhood education for a long time (Schweinhart, Weikart & Larner, 1986; Spodek, 1986). With the influx of federal money to develop Head Start during the 1960s, researchers created various models of preschool curricula, implemented them in demonstration projects, and tested the effectiveness of these curricular variations by measuring later school achievement.

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The goal of the sixties preschool programs was to help disadvantaged children be more successful in school. Early on, measures of school success and, by implication, program effectiveness were based primarily on improved reading and cognitive ability test scores. In the later longitudinal studies published on these data, however, researchers broadly defined success to mean fewer children flunking grades, fewer placements in special education, fewer children dropping out of school, fewer pregnant teens, and fewer delinquents, as well as test scores.

On the other hand, relatively little ambiguity exists about the job of the primary grades: to teach children to read. As former Education Secretary William Bennett proclaimed in *First Lessons* (1986), "the elementary school must assume as its sublime and most solemn responsibility the task of teaching every child in it to read"(p. 21). Historically, few have challenged the appropriateness of this mission, and, in recent years, the importance of early grade success in reading has actually been highlighted. First-grade children who are "behind" their peers in reading are most likely to fail one or two grades in the years ahead, to be assigned to special education classes, and to drop out of school. Girls who consistently score in the bottom quartile of their classes in basic skills are more likely to become pregnant and bear children as teenagers. Poor children are the ones most often caught in the "gridlock" of low achievement and academic failure (McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1991; Edelman, 1990; Slavin, 1989). But clearly, children from families at all income levels who cannot read well will find it very difficult to participate fully in the literate culture of the school and community. The issue—still unresolved—is what should early childhood programs do.

A controversial study conducted by the High/Scope Research Foundation has intensified the debate about what is appropriate learning for preschoolers. In follow-up studies of former preschool participants, High/Scope researchers linked children's participation in particular preschool curricula with their later reported social adjustment or delinquency. Schweinhart, Weikart, and Larner (1986) compared three preschool curriculum models[6] for their social and behavioral effects on the original participants as 15-year-olds. As the authors point out, the highly structured, teacher-directed DISTAR curriculum model was thought to be the most effective way to teach disadvantaged children in the 1960s. Early studies (Weikart, et al., 1978), however, established that children who participated in the other curriculum models—the child-directed traditional nursery-school model and the cooperatively planned High/Scope Perry Preschool model—experienced

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the same levels of academic growth as children who participated in DISTAR. The 1986 study is an attempt to follow up on the success of these children a decade or so later. According to the High/Scope researchers who conducted the study, children taught by the DISTAR model reported twice the incidence of delinquency and related family and social problems. Participants in the High/Scope and traditional nursery-school groups, according to the study, reported more positive family relations and attitudes toward themselves and others. High/Scope researchers Schweinhart et al. have argued that these results should not be surprising. After all, they said, High/Scope and the traditional nursery-school models included social and behavioral goals for the children, but DISTAR laid claim only to academic goals—a reflection of the confidence that educators at that time had in the benefits of direct instruction in skills presumed to be requisite for reading.

As policymakers examine curriculum choices for the early childhood initiatives of the 1990s, Schweinhart, Weikart and Larner (1986) and other High/Scope researchers have used the results of this controversial study to recommend giving pause to the idea of formal academic schooling for four-year-olds. Not all education researchers, however, agree with the reported ill effects of direct instruction, such as DISTAR, or with their view of what constitutes formal academic learning.

For the past decade, professionals from many different disciplines have been rethinking how best to prepare children for academics and life. Researchers in the field of beginning reading are redefining how children "get ready" to read. Direct teaching of subskills, once thought to be building blocks for book reading in kindergarten and first grade, has lost ground to models that emphasize early experiences with books, playful exploration of written language, and collaborative learning with peers and adults in many different settings. Although research in beginning reading historically has focused on letter and word knowledge in first grade, a recent emphasis on literacy development before entry into formal schooling has provided many insights into what preschool children know about written language and how they come to know it.

What differentiates recent research on beginning literacy development from a past focus on maturation and the idea that lower-level learning must precede higher-level learning, is a characterization of the child who literally from birth is "getting ready to read." According to this view, the child is becoming literate by actively constructing and

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using symbols within the interactive social context of family, play, school, and community. In order to better represent this shift in perspective, the beginning stage of learning to read is not called "reading readiness" or "early reading and writing" but *emergent* literacy (Clay, 1966; Teale & Sulzby, 1986; Goodman, Altwerger & Marek, 1989) to emphasize that literacy is a developmental process analogous in many respects to oral language learning. Within this concept of literacy development, then, written language learning cannot be confined to the doorstep of the kindergarten or first grade, and a great deal of importance should be attached to the experiences of the three- or four-year-old child (Adams, 1990).

However, while the early childhood educators have been explicit about what they don't want—the curriculum and standardization of the public-school primary grades—those who espouse an expanded public-school role are much less articulate about what learning they want early schooling to accomplish. Ambach (NYS Education Department, 1983), for example, originally built his argument for universal public education for four-year-olds on his perception that the four-year-old of today could already do what is typically taught in the kindergarten and so, he argued, why not move the curriculum down a year, ultimately allowing children to graduate after eleventh grade, at the age of sixteen or seventeen. The focus of the argument seems to have shifted considerably since then, one emphasis being the educational benefits an early start can give to children who are less prepared for school, rather than a general acceleration of the process of schooling.

Gersten, Darch, and Gleason (1988), for example, in their review of the characteristics of academic kindergartens that appeared to promote the later school success of low-income children, note that the relationship between poverty and failure persists in our schools. The authors believe that the separation of academic learning from social development often described by the researchers in the literature on appropriate early childhood education (Schweinhart, Weikart & Larner, 1986; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1988) is a false dichotomy and, if applied to the education of disadvantaged children, would limit what schools might be able to accomplish for these children. Without the economic and educational resources of middle-class parents who provide an academic curriculum at home for their preschoolers, low-income children may depend entirely on teachers and schools to provide them with the resources to achieve comparable academic learning. In the interests of equity, these authors believe that early-childhood education should be "academic."

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Lisa Delpit, a former first-grade teacher and McArthur Fellow, notes that the much-maligned DISTAR and its direct teaching of letters of the alphabet may have been considered successful with children of poverty or children of color because it actually taught them new information that they needed to know in order to read and write. Rather than penalize children for what they do not already know from home—what they have never been taught—Delpit says *teach* them (Delpit, 1988).

At the same time, David Elkind, current president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and nationally known lecturer and writer, argues emotionally for a nonacademic early childhood experience. Elkind calls the incursion of teacher-initiated academics—particularly reading—into the preschool the "miseducation" of children. In his view, and that shared by many other early childhood educators, such academic efforts are not only misdirected but harmful to the development of young children (Elkind, 1988).

Making good on the promise that every child in America will start elementary school ready to learn to read and write will take more than good intentions and money. Although few would argue with the idea that we need to expand early childhood education to achieve this goal, few would agree on exactly what we would have early childhood education do in order to accomplish it.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

In this book, I present the findings of a two-part study of early schooling and literacy learning. The first part of the study is an historical review of the literature on this topic, and the second is an analysis of the beliefs and understandings of contemporary policymakers in New York State regarding the issue of public school for four-year-old children, including the meaning of school readiness and the role policymakers assign to literacy learning.

I used purposive sampling to identify not only the contemporary policy participants but also historical documents to be reviewed. As a starting point for identification of contemporary policy participants and policy alternatives, I consulted the reports of *Education Week*, widely circulated journals, and the state government's reports and memos. For purposes of the study, I included state government officials, interest group representatives, career bureaucrats, and academics cited in

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journalistic reports in my definition of "policy participant." I reviewed the yearbooks of the National Society for the Study of Education, documentary histories, and many additional curriculum, methodology, and theory-based sources. Through thematic analysis of current and historical documents, I tried to ascertain which parameters of school readiness have been prominent at different points in time.

I present the historical review in four chapters. Each of the early chapters describes formal attempts at preschool education. Although the chronology of these innovations overlaps, I treat these preschool attempts separately for purposes of analysis. Chapter 2 ("Early Schooling, Literacy and the Law") describes several early school arrangements, including the infant school, dame school and early reading and writing schools; it covers approximately the late seventeenth through mid-nineteenth centuries. Chapter 3 describes kindergarten from the mid-nineteenth century through mid-1960s ("The Early Kindergarten, Readiness, and Reading"). Chapter 4 ("Child Care, Social Class, and the Government") compares the child care center and nursery school and describes Head Start. In this chapter, I describe the government's differing policy orientations toward special groups of children and cover roughly the period from the early twentieth century through the present time. Chapter 5 ("Development: From Mere Description to a Moral Face") explains current educational thinking on the relationship between early schooling, literacy learning, and child development and provides a summary of the first part of the study, including issues that have been replayed over three centuries.

The second part of the study is an analysis of interviews with individuals who represent important contemporary points of view on early schooling in New York State and whose characterizations of school readiness reflect the perspectives of the social institutions or groups they represent. Throughout data collection, I used analytic techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 1984; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to develop categories of the participants' understandings of the issues surrounding current discussions of public school for four-year-olds. I relate these categories to each other and to issues that have been argued throughout the history of early childhood education. In chapters six through twelve, I report these interview data, interpretations, and additional document analyses, and in the appendix, I more fully explain the procedures and methodology used in the second part of the study.

Contemporary policy participants dichotomize expert knowledge into "program" knowledge and "policy" knowledge. This dichotomy is treated in chapter 6 ("School Readiness Defined: From Mama Robin

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to the SATs"), as is the participants' understandings of the concept of "school readiness." Chapter 7 presents a thematic analysis of the documents that were identified by program participants as representative of the consensus in the field of early childhood at the time of the study ("The Authorities on Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Dispositions, Language, and Cognitively-Oriented Active Learning"). Chapter 8 ("Readiness for School, but What Counts as 'School'? Education, Socialization, and Habilitation") describes how contemporary policy and program knowledge reflects the bureaucratization of education and the separation of its responsibility from other social services. Issues such as auspice and funding help define what constitutes education, particularly since content or program experts have not been altogether successful in defining socialization as a legitimate educational objective.

Within the broad category of values, all participants shared a single concern—that of securing equal opportunity for children of the poor. This shared value is not new to contemporary discussions but instead was the reason for establishing public primary, or reading and writing, schools in the nineteenth century. However, another value—rationality—is probably an artifact of the contemporary bureaucracy and the interrelated configuration of services provided to young children. Equal opportunity and rationality, or an arrangement of services with the requisite standards, oversight and fiscal support that "makes sense" for the children but does not displace existing structures, are explained in chapter 9 ("Equal Opportunity for the Least of Us and Popular in the Suburbs: Public School for Four-year-olds").

Lastly, the demographics of New York State may be seen as driving public policy toward some kind of response to preschool children. Poverty, educational failure, the problems of working women, and many other social concerns and societal changes are providing "windows" of opportunity for creating new policies. Chapter 10 ("Making the Agenda: Conflicts, Windows, and Labels") develops an explanatory theory of how it all may fit together in New York.

In chapter 11 ("Beginning Reading Materials: Are They Getting Harder?"), I reexamine the role of literacy instruction. As described in chapter 6, present-day policy participants rejected the notion that reading and writing belonged in the preschool curriculum. The early childhood experts I interviewed for this study claimed that the reading curriculum formerly taught in first grade has been shifted down to the kindergarten. Kindergartens were thought to be more academic than in the past, requiring children to have mastered a reading curriculum

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in kindergarten that used to be taught in first grade. By extension, these program specialists perceived prekindergartens as under pressure to teach what was formerly a kindergarten curriculum. Because the research literature is strangely silent on kindergarten practices, and even less has been written on curriculum practices at the prekindergarten levels, I present an initial review of changes in what might be called the reading "curriculum" itself—the beginning levels of commercial reading materials. Although the focus of this review is the material published by one company, Scott Foresman, these materials have been both widely used and frequently analyzed for change over the past sixty years. Thus, a perceptible shift in either the difficulty of the materials or the age of the children targeted for instruction offers some evidence that may corroborate or undermine the perceptions of the program specialists regarding more reading at earlier ages.

Finally, I synthesize the study in chapter 12 ("The Shared History: Literacy, Young Children and Early Schooling"). Public perceptions of what children should learn and, likewise, public responsibility for early childhood education have changed according to values and beliefs of different historical periods, including the present.

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