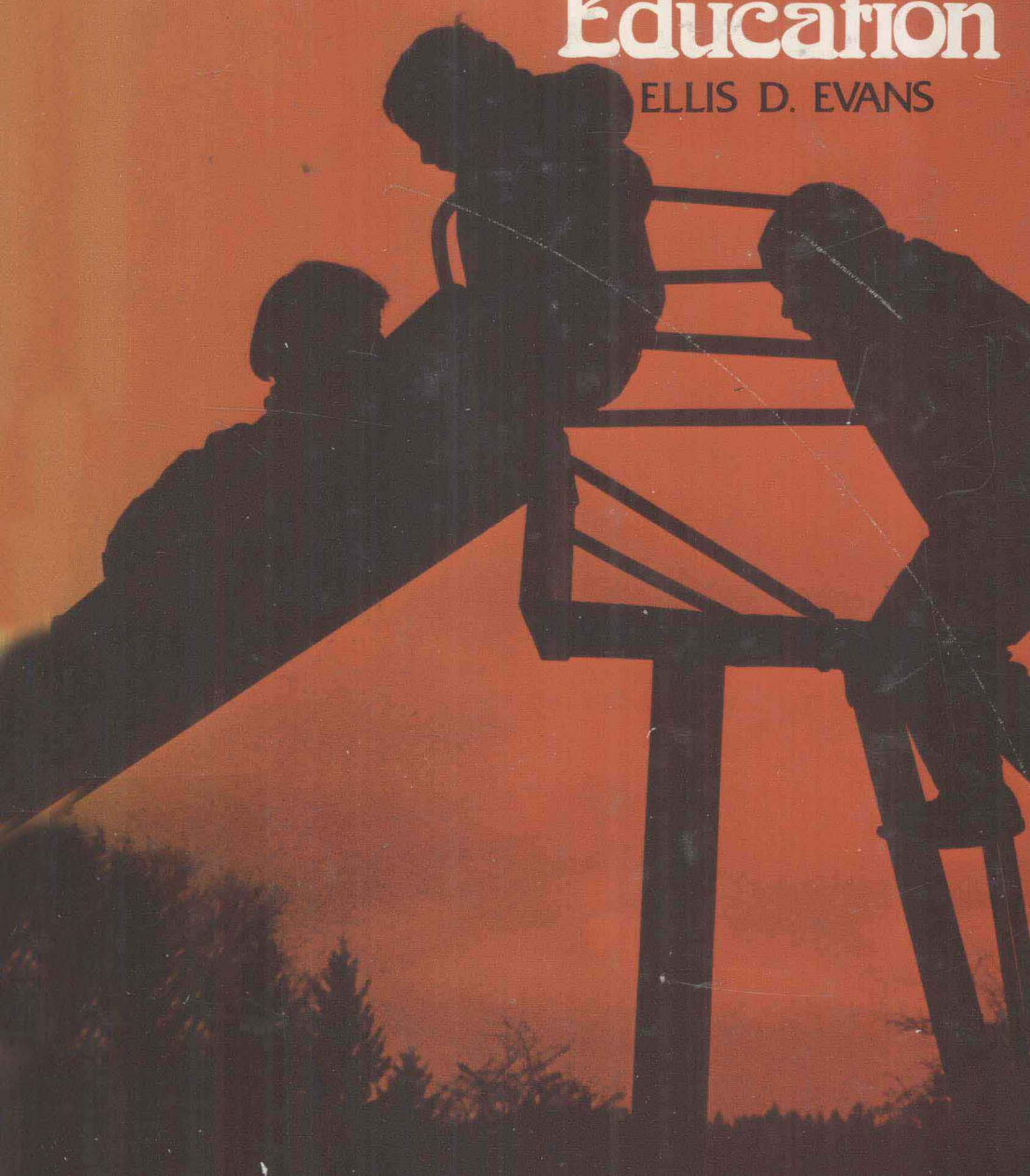
Contemporary Influences In Early Childhood Education

second edition

ELLIS D. EVANS



contemporary influences in early childhood education

Second Edition

ELLIS D. EVANS

University of Washington

HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON, INC.
New York Chicago San Francisco Atlanta
Dallas Montreal Toronto London Sydney

To Jennifer and Alicia, my daughters,
who have brought to life the beauty
of early childhood and now the
further excitement, charm, mystery,
and promise of middle childhood

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Evans, Ellis D.
Contemporary influences in early childhood education.

Bibliography, each chapter
1. Education, Preschool—United States—1945–
I. Title.
LB1140.2.E9 1975 372.21'0973 74–16007
ISBN 0–03–089584–7

Cover photo by Alan Keimig. Courtesy of Muckleshoot Tribal Head Start, Auburn, Washington.

Printed in the United States of America
567890 038 09

preface

The second edition of this book has been prepared largely in response to the rapid developments occurring in early childhood education since 1970. Much of the original book remains valid and timely. But during the past four years some profound shifts and reassessments in major ideas, policies, and practices concerning early education in America have materialized. These changes provide the substance for many segments of this new version of the book. And, much more now is known about early education as a result of the sheer volume of study which has been conducted since the first edition was written.

Readers familiar with this earlier version will note that both its organization and content have been modified. As a result, I believe new research information is better conveyed and salient issues are more sharply delineated. The strong empirical research orientation established in the first edition remains a distinguishing feature of the text. If anything, the documentation is more thorough than before in order to satisfy personal and professional standards of scholarship. The resultant chapter bibliographies can also serve as a springboard for serious students who wish to develop further their fund of in-depth knowledge about psychology and early education.

More specifically, this revised edition differs from its predecessor in four ways. First, a "new" opening chapter has been written in order to summarize recent significant changes in the field and to establish a conceptual background for subsequent chapters. Second, a chapter has been written to portray the wide range of approaches specific to language education in early childhood and some important issues associated with the increasingly popular language emphasis in early educational programming. Third, this revision contains an expanded discussion of infant and parent education, together with new data about children's educational television. And fourth, the final chapter of this edition is more conceptually detailed with respect to major issues. It also deals to a greater extent with matters related to research in early childhood education.

The only major segment of the original book not included in this revision concerns research and theory about perceptual-motor training for young children. Briefer sections about some early education programs (e.g., the new nursery school, the early training project) also have been omitted. These omissions are due primarily to space restrictions and should not be taken to indicate a lack of concern about the place of these programs in the overall early education picture. In the case of perceptual-motor training, few, if any, points made in the original edition have been contradicted by recent research. Interested readers may wish to review those comments before taking up the current edition. As for other omissions, I can only say

that selectivity in reporting is inevitable in a book of this kind. To review all programs of note in early education would require a volume of encyclopedic proportions. In general, I have preferred to concentrate upon programs which I know about in depth and which can be taken to illustrate more general classes or categories of programs.

It is notable that since the first edition of this book appeared in print, early childhood education professionals have come increasingly to support a definition of such education as "group settings which are deliberately intended to effect developmental changes in children in the age range from birth to the age of entering the first grade."[1] Clearly, this definition can be taken to include nursery schools, kindergartens, and most day care centers whose functions are not limited to minimum physical caretaking. Accordingly, I have made greater reference to the day care literature in this second edition. However, the magnitude of this literature made it impossible for me to do justice to advances in day care, much less to the issues of import which pervade every major aspect of the day care scene in America. Readers concerned principally with day care practices, problems, and research will therefore have to turn elsewhere for a comprehensive discussion. Furthermore, I still believe that early childhood education legitimately can encompass primary grade schooling. Consequently, space in this edition has been reserved for discussions of programs that extend beyond the first grade and into the mainstream of elementary schooling.

As in the first edition, many persons have provided me with wide-ranging assistance in the preparation of the text. Without their help, the book would still be languishing in a state of disarray, both technically and conceptually. To the following persons, then, I wish formally to express my sincere gratitude: J. Myron Atkin, Wesley Becker, Harold Bessell, Margaret Bland, Barbara Calabrese, Daisy Dawson, Rheta DeVries, Margo Fitzgerald, Harry Guay, Mary O. Haller, Norris Haring, Alice Hayden, Ronald Henderson, Alice Honig, Margaret Johnston, Constance Kamii, Shari Nedler, Peter Rinearson, Irving Sigel, James O. Smith, Joseph Stevens, Jr., Robert Tostberg, Nancy Van Arsdale, David Weikart, and Aline Wolf. Thanks are also due to my critic reviewers, whose efforts were coordinated by John Tugman; and especially to my wife, Cindy, whose immeasurable contributions include moral support, just criticisms, and manuscript typing. Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to the many editors and publishers of professional literature who have given their consent to quote important passages from published materials.

Ellis D. Evans

Seattle, Washington
September 1974

[1] Katz, L. Early childhood education as a discipline. *Young Children,* 1971, *26*, 82.

contents

chapter

1

changing patterns of early education

For most of us, the decade of the 1960s brings to mind international conflict, political assassinations, urban crises, student dissent, moon walks, a growing sense of urgency about ecology, and the onset of liberation movements. Less sensational but significant in its own way was a stirring of educational and psychological thought that continues to swirl in the 1970s. This thought, together with a social catalyst known as the War on Poverty, served to energize a renaissance within early childhood education. This was not an overnight occurrence. But certain patterns of philosophical discourse and empirical research jelled during the early sixties to nourish society's view of young children's educational needs. Among these patterns were new concepts of the nature of psychological development during infancy (Kessen, 1963), an overhaul of concepts of motivation (White, 1959), creative insights into children's thought processes and the variables that affect them (Piaget, 1961), a heightened understanding of learning and language performance associated with social class differences (Bernstein, 1961), new interpretations of the structure of knowledge and the relationship of early to later learning (Bruner, 1960), the effects of early stimulation on brain structure and chemistry (Kresh, 1969), an apparent shift in socialization practices toward a greater emphasis on children's achievement training (Bronfenbrenner, 1961), and new data from the study of human intelligence (Stott and Ball, 1965).

The cumulative impact of these and other patterns of research and scholarly discussion provided a credible psychological rationale for educating children under six years of age. Of course, early childhood education had existed for many years (see Chapter 2). But the marshalling of scientific data facilitated a much more serious view of the importance of such education. It also supplied a firmer basis for an expenditure of vast sums of federal monies, many of which went to finance experimental programs for children from poverty backgrounds. The name of the game was "early intervention"—education for four-year-olds with more than occasional interest in programs for even younger children (see Chapter 8). In the discussion that follows, an attempt is made to portray some forces which contributed to the unprecedented concern for children's cognition which dominated the 1960s. Next to be examined are some major outcomes of the early intervention movement, all of which have implications for our conceptualization of early childhood education in the seventies. The final section is reserved for an overview of major issues in early education. These issues are, for the most part, timeless, although their intensity may vary with changing social conditions.

EARLY INTERVENTION: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Move to Cognitive Enrichment

Most generally, *cognition* refers to the processes by which children acquire knowledge and thinking skills and utilize them in problem solving. We are concerned here with a growth of conviction among psychologists about the crucial role of environmental stimulation in children's cognitive development. An appropriate exemplar of the move to study cognitive enrichment during the early childhood years is the work of psychologist William Fowler. Fowler's early analytic review (1962a) of the gaps in our understanding of early cognitive learning (and the reasons for these gaps) led to several important conclusions. One was that the potential of the preschool years for maximizing cognitive development had never been fully exploited in American education. Another conclusion was that the early years are better than those later in the developmental sequence for building conceptual learning sets, interests, and habit patterns, and that early learning can facilitate learning which occurs later.[1]

This elaborate review of research on early learning was followed by a general proposal to promote early conceptual development through a series of learning sequences tailored to the cognitive abilities of preschool children (Fowler, 1965). At the heart of this proposal is the task of devising sequential levels of complexity that progress from perceptual to classification activities. Fowler's general teaching strategy requires an atmosphere

[1] Tangible evidence of Fowler's orientation to systematic cognitive stimulation is his study of process variables in a two-year-old child's learning to read (Fowler, 1962b).

of "play-game activities" coordinated with children's problem-solving capacity. A further refinement of this cognitive-stimulation approach has appeared in the form of a developmental curriculum for disadvantaged children (Fowler, 1966). Its main features are psychocognitive diagnosis procedures and the precise programming and pacing of "simulation sequences."

A concept of developmental learning as the basis for analyzing and arranging educational experience for young children has continued to dominate Fowler's subsequent professional contributions. In one, for example, the problem of timing in forms of deprivation-stimulation is examined (Fowler, 1970). Another contribution is a three-year study of infant care based upon developmental learning principles and practices, the details of which are discussed in Chapter 8. In still another paper, Fowler (1971) has discussed the role of structured guidance in facilitating children's cognitive development. After reviewing much research, including his own infant development program, Fowler concludes that

> on a broad plane our findings generally support the notion of the equal, indeed essential, value of both symbolic, guided cognitive orientations and self-propelled free play and flexible approaches toward early child care and education. The implications of our research to date suggest that, far from being uneconomic, integrated cognitive-interpersonal approaches to child rearing foster the development of competence, autonomy, and personality development in children from many social backgrounds (Fowler, 1971, p. 35).[2]

This conclusion represents a balance of viewpoints that are too often phrased in adversative terms: free play versus structured academic learning; or a child-centered, learning by self-selection and self-pacing approach versus a tightly structured, authoritarian, and didactic approach to childhood education. As will be seen, such false dichotomies do much to distort and confuse thinking about early learning in school settings.

Educational Policy Commitments As balanced as Fowler's programming may be, his continued work is cited primarily to exemplify a growing commitment to the value of stimulating cognitive development in systematic ways. This commitment, established during the sixties, neither was nor is today shared by all professional early childhood educators. Yet cognitive development has become the watchword for many researchers and practitioners. This value orientation has represented a shift away from the more traditional nursery school (and to some extent, kindergarten) emphasis upon social-emotional development (see Chapter 2). This shift has been formalized in many ways, including the issuance of policy statements from high-level professional organizations. Consider, for instance, the following excerpt from the introductory statement of the powerful

---

[2] Reprinted with permission from *Young Children*, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, October 1971. Copyright © 1971, National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1834 Connecticut Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

Educational Policies Commission (1966) in a document entitled *Universal Opportunity for Early Childhood Education:*

> The development of intellectual ability and of intellectual interest is fundamental to the achievement of all the goals of American education. Yet these qualities are greatly affected by what happens to children before they reach school. A growing body of research and experience demonstrates that by the age of six most children have already developed a considerable part of the intellectual ability they will possess as adults. Six is now generally accepted as the normal age of entrance to school. We believe this practice is obsolete. All children should have the opportunity to go to school at public expense beginning at the age of four (p. 1).

Similarly, the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development (1971) has made public the following position:

> Preschooling is desirable for all children, but it is a necessity for the disadvantaged. Without it, there is little possibility of achieving equality in education. . . . only a massive effort to establish both public and private preschool educational programs will provide the preparation in motivation, intellectual capacities, and physical skills essential to success in achieving total basic literacy (reading, writing, and computation) (pp. 35–37).

This committee has also advocated federal support for free day care centers at which children as young as two years of age would be eligible for "educational experience and enrichment."

These two policy statements do not necessarily imply a subsidiary role for emotional development or the full cultivation of children's total capabilities. But these committees' joint concern for children's intellectual-academic life is clear. Both statements are based on the idea that earlier organized school experience will result in greater intellectual gains than would otherwise be likely (to say nothing of this avenue as a means to attack educational inequalities). And, again, support for this idea has been drawn largely from data published by researchers in developmental and educational psychology. Such data have been synthesized by Bloom (1964) and Hunt (1961). The latter authority has integrated both classical and new data from the study of intellectual development and its measurement. Hunt's framework permits a basic reinterpretation of the concept of human intelligence. Basically, Hunt's thesis is a challenge to the traditional idea that intelligence is fixed or predetermined by genetic forces. Instead, Hunt argues that intelligence is a network of central neural processes and information-processing strategies, which is affected significantly by the kinds of encounters a child has with his environment.

Bloom's summary and analysis (1964) of longitudinal data concerning intelligence has led him to infer that the rate of intellectual development is at its point of highest acceleration during the child's early years. This inference is coupled with the notion that growth variables are most

Cognitive-intellectual activities for young children have come to occupy a much more central role in many contemporary approaches to early education. This child in a Project Follow Through classroom has paused to consider a concept classification task. Photo by Peter Rinearson.

affected by environmental intrusions (variations) during the period of most rapid acceleration. Therefore, Bloom argues that the greatest payoff from environmental stimulation—at least in terms of intellectual growth—will come from the child's experiential base during the first four to six years of life.

It should be noted that many problems and issues are associated with this line of thinking: the true nature of intelligence, how intelligence is measured, how environmental interactions may differentially influence intelligence at different points in development, and the validity of research data upon which any generalization about intellectual development is based. Such matters will be raised in later sections of this book. Moreover, the concept that the early years represent a critical formative period for all subsequent intellectual growth has been seriously questioned by authorities in developmental psychology. Kagan (1973), for example, has extrapolated from research on Guatemalan children to make the point that early intellectual deprivation is not an overwhelming obstacle to normal development. His argument has been extended to the idea that intellectual deprivation may be reversible, even within the average classroom.

Basic Assumptions for Early Intervention

The continual emergence of psychoeducational controversies makes it difficult to say what is the truth about intellectual development and its

stimulation. Despite the debates, of course, children continue to grow, to be socialized, and to be educated for better or worse. It seems safe to say, however, that the dominant body of thought about early development and education revolves around the importance of early experience in the total span of human development. Certainly, this idea is central to the overall rationale for educational intervention at the preschool level, as indicated by the following assumptions (Blank, 1970; Sigel, 1973):

1. Children are, by nature, malleable and their growth and development can be modified extensively in a variety of directions.
2. The earlier one can effect a plausible intervention, the better.
3. The manipulation of early experience will influence subsequent psychological functioning. This influence can be salutary or *hindering*. In either case, cumulative development is involved.
4. The provision of qualitatively sound experience can mollify or compensate for basic lacks in children's environments. Such lacks define the basis on which experiences can be built. Furthermore, since the school's scholastic emphasis demands certain basic learning capabilities, such capabilities must become the focus for early intervention.
5. Children who fail to reap the benefits of planned intervention are likely to develop in ways that are counterproductive to extant social-educational conditions. Or, since a high-level capacity for symbolic (cognitive) activity is one of man's greatest strengths, children who manifest disorders in cognitive performance are failing to achieve their human potential. Thus, resources must be marshalled to prevent or remediate such disorders.

Compensatory Education

Such assumptions about early education, however valid, set the stage for an intervention movement that became virtually synonymous with the term *compensatory education*—education to "compensate" for real or perceived lacks in the total environment of many children. These children were almost exclusively children of the poor. They also were frequently children from racial-ethnic minorities. Thus, whereas prior to about 1965, prekindergarten education was largely the province of affluent children, it became an attempt to provide better opportunities for great numbers of so-called disadvantaged children. A psychological rationale was firmly molded—largely around the *cumulative deficit* hypothesis—and political conditions were ripe for improved educational and other services for the poor and oppressed. The cumulative deficit hypothesis was implicit in the initial rationale for early intervention. According to this hypothesis, experiential deficiencies induce growth deficits that interfere progressively with subsequent growth processes, learning, and motivational development (Ausubel, 1964; Deutsch, 1964; Jensen, 1966). Thus, a hierarchical arrangement of developmental phenomena is presumed. Data pertinent to the hypothesis include school failure rates among poor children and research

on the effects of environmental deprivation and enrichment upon measured intelligence and language development. (See Schultz and Aurbach, 1971, for a critical examination of the cumulative deficit hypothesis.)

Compensatory education programs collectively represented two historically innovative components (Beilin, 1972). First, as mentioned above, formal and semiformal educational programs were introduced at ages below that at which most children begin kindergarten or first grade. Second, as will become more evident throughout this book, the focus of early education was substantially modified from a socialization–mental health function to a cognitive-stimulation approach. Despite the rhetoric for change, resistance was encountered by the new advocates of early cognitive education (Beilin, 1972). The economics of early intervention were questioned on the grounds that existing resources could be more satisfactorily improved than could a blueprint for an entire preschool system be translated into reality. The modified curriculum focus was resisted largely by the early childhood education establishment, whose tradition was steeped in the mental health–socialization point of view.

Regardless of the initial economic and philosophical resistance, the outcome of compensatory programs is clear: a massive educational experiment in the form of Project Head Start (see Chapter 2) joined by myriad smaller-scale intervention programs, subsidized mostly by governmental funds. Considering Head Start activity as a whole, the curriculum shift away from traditional early education practice was slow and complex. Perhaps the critical factor was a change in attitude to accept greater accountability for the impact of early education upon intellectual development.

Criticisms of Compensatory Education

Several streams of criticism regarding the theory and practice of compensatory education have since begun to flow (Bernstein, 1972; Nimnicht, 1973b). For some, it is illogical to speak of "compensatory" education when most of the recipients had not been offered an adequate educational environment in the first place. In other words, these critics argue that low-income minority children have been forced to accept all the shortcomings of public education: inadequate facilities, unstable teaching faculties, excessively large classes. This argument is perhaps less relevant when the clients for compensatory education are *preschool* children. However, preschool compensatory education followed by unimproved public school experience would hardly seem worth the effort.

A second criticism is that the concept of compensatory education has drawn attention to the wrong dimension of the problem. This means that too many professionals have been distracted by the presumed defects of poor families. Instead, these professionals should have been looking more critically at the internal organization of the school and its general climate for learning.

A third criticism, perhaps more widely discussed, is rooted in the classic and seemingly unsolvable dilemma of heredity versus environment in intellectual development. As summarized by Jensen (1969), the argu-

ment is that heredity accounts for as much as 80 percent of intelligence, as indicated by IQ (intelligence quotient). Consequently, environmental manipulations are unlikely to affect in any profound way children's intellectual achievement status. To this contention have been added various claims about genetically determined racial-ethnic differences in measured intelligence. To say that much passionate disagreement surrounds this viewpoint is a supreme understatement, although no one seriously denies that heredity does act as a major force in the course of intellectual development. At issue, again, is the nature and modifiability of intellectual capabilities, about which an entire literature has evolved. (See, for example, Bayley, 1970, and Guilford, 1973.)

A final criticism is directed not at the alleged impotency of compensatory education to produce respectable gains in intellectual competence, but at the methods of intervention, including the use of IQ gain to determine program effectiveness. This stream of criticism includes charges that compensatory education personifies an "institutional racism" in American social science and educational circles (Baratz and Baratz, 1970); that compensatory education is based upon a social pathology model which assumes that children of poverty and racial minorities are basically inferior. Even the basic right of educators to intervene has been challenged (Sroufe, 1970). Some authorities (e.g., Nimnicht, Johnson, and Johnson, 1973) have acknowledged the validity of such criticisms to the point of actively redesigning their early education strategy for two different groups of children: those whom the schools fail because the children do not fit the ubiquitous white, middle-class pattern; and those who are a product of genuine environmental deprivation. The latter group includes children whose environment does not provide the bare essentials—food, shelter, health, and adult attention—necessary for unstunted development.

And so changes occur. Sometimes the changes are minor or trivial. Other radical changes are often slow in coming. But changes do occur. In the next section some of the more visible outcomes of the early flirtations with intervention programs for young children are examined. Some results are enormously important. Others, more than anything else, reinforce some of the basic good sense that many educators have demonstrated through the years. Taken together, these outcomes continue to pave the way for a deeper probing of contemporary influences in early childhood education.

SOME MAJOR OUTCOMES OF THE EARLY INTERVENTION MOVEMENT

Modified Expectancies about the Effects of Early Education on Children

As indicated above, several changes in our collective thinking about early intervention and compensatory education have occurred during the past several years. It should become clear in later chapters that the measured

impact of such intervention efforts upon children's intellectual growth has not often confirmed the optimistic predictions made during the sixties. It can be said that the experience of the past decade has jolted many expectations about what can be realistically accomplished under the circumstances faced by most early childhood educators. Few such educators are now likely to deceive themselves about the magnitude of the overall lasting intellectual-academic gains which can be attributed to preschool programs.

Hindsight is a remarkable phenomenon. Several national authorities (e.g., Akers, 1972; Zigler, 1973) maintain in retrospect that early intervention was oversold. Others (e.g., Nimnicht, 1973a) argue that in many parts of the country far too great a burden was placed on children to respond to crash and often short-lived intervention efforts by educators. Regardless of the past, we are now well into a period of consolidation, introspection, and more critical examination of the premises, intents, and procedures of early intervention programs. Accordingly, professionals appear more modest, even humble, about the enormous complexity of early education problems. Simple solutions are not forthcoming. Early childhood education is decreasingly seen as a panacea for society's ills, despite the fact that such education historically has been viewed by many as a means of social reform (Lazerson, 1972). More comprehensive interrelated social programs now seem to hold greater promise for change than singular efforts at preschool education. True, it can (and has) been argued that the great early cognitive-stimulation experiment has yet to be attempted on a mass scale (Medinnus, 1970). This argument is based on the premise that Head Start, for instance, did not (and still does not) comprise systematic cognitive education. Often more encouraging, however, have been data from smaller-scale, intensively structured and organized programs that suggest impressive immediate gains in terms of their stated goals (Edwards and Stern, 1970; Weikart, 1972). Examples of such programs appear in later chapters.

The humble spirit in early education has possibly been dampened even further by a broad frontal attack on inequalities in education (Jencks, et al., 1972). The essence of this argument, supported by reams of standardized test data, is that the quality of an educational experience—measured in terms of expenditures per pupil, structural arrangements, teacher characteristics, or any other index taken to indicate equality in educational opportunity—has little, if any, bearing on the cognitive development and even the eventual earning capacity of an individual. What can make a difference, it is claimed, are factors such as initial socioeconomic standing, motivation, and other personal-social characteristics of children. Even luck, chance, and fate have been brought into the picture. In other words, it is claimed that the long-term effects of education are fairly uniform, regardless of what goes on in schools. This claim would presumably include any organized effort at preschool education. Schools, therefore, should be evaluated not on the basis of cognitive-intellectual impact, but on how satisfying a place children and teachers find them to be (Jencks et al., 1972).

Predictably, this viewpoint has its critics. The logic, methodological features, interpretations of data, and proposals for change reflected in *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America* (Jencks et al., 1972) have all been well roasted (for example, by Ellena, 1973). If nothing else, existing data clearly show that the quantity of educational experience can make a difference in postschool success, including further options for self-development (Levin, Guthrie, Kleindorfer, and Stout, 1971). Yet the Jencksonian viewpoint adds to the sobering effect of unrealized hopes about the extent to which early education can influence intellectual development.

Perhaps because of the lack of confirming evidence of any lasting impact of early intervention upon intellectual development, many childhood educators have backed away from an extreme and often narrow concern with cognitive outcomes at the preschool level. There are, of course, numerous programs which continue a vigorous and rather strict formal emphasis upon cognitive activities—if not on empirical then on philosophical grounds (Bereiter, 1972). Generally speaking, however, the early education enterprise seems more balanced in terms of its basic priorities. Having been little influenced by the cognitive ground swell, some program builders maintain now, as always, a stronger affective emphasis. Examples of both value positions are examined at various points in this book.

As program emphases have been tendered, so has the obsession with measurable long-term cognitive effects as an inviolable condition for program justification. The idea that short-term outcomes are good has begun to take hold. Early childhood programs have their unique contributions to make within the total scope of developmental education, as do programs for older children, adolescents, and young adults. More apparent now is the sensible view that the accomplishment of carefully selected immediate objectives has merit. If educators at each successive grade level worked to ensure the best possible experience for children within a coordinated hierarchical curriculum, perhaps the harsh trial of early childhood education could be further softened.

Renewed Appreciation of Home-Related Factors: Nutrition and Parental Support

However profound and lasting the impact of any educational program may be, the power of home-related factors as mediators of such impact must be recognized. Surely, some prerequisites must be met for any early education program to succeed. Foremost among these prerequisites are adequate nutrition, beginning in the period of prenatal development, and consistent home support and stimulation of children by their parents or caregivers (Gordon, 1971; Read, 1972).

First, consider nutritional factors. Unfortunately, malnutrition is often a telling accompaniment of poverty status. Exact statistics are unknown, but even severe malnutrition—including protein-calorie deprivation—can be observed in the United States. Such malnutrition often is implicated

as a factor in impaired mental development. No known educational program has much chance of overcoming the effects of early and prolonged malnutrition. Even children who may not suffer chronic malnutrition, but are simply hungry a great deal of the time, are poor prospects for the best educational services.

Fortunately, many preschool programs include a minimal food service. This can be a fairly effective weapon against hunger, at least during school hours. The more serious problem, however, involves children whose nutritional care has been below minimally acceptable levels prior to their entry into a preschool or early school program. For more extended discussions of nutritional variables on brain development and learning, see Coursin (1972) and Foster (1972).

Obviously, parental responsibility and resources are involved in providing adequate nutritional care. Equally obvious is the fact that parental influence extends beyond nutrition and general caretaking activities. Much evidence has accumulated to dramatize the potential impact of parental support, encouragement, the modeling of learning strategies, general verbal stimulation, reinforcement for autonomous behavior, and achievement training upon children's responsivity in formal school settings (McCandless and Evans, 1973). In fact, the preschool programs that seem most effective nearly always include a systematic means for eliciting and maintaining parental involvement (see Chapter 8).

The salient influence of parents on children in early intervention programs should come as no surprise. Many early childhood educators—especially those associated with home and family life cooperative nursery schools—have long believed in the importance of parental support and education. Active parental involvement—with the ultimate goal of enhancing the family's ability to respond to its children—is increasingly seen as a given in any intelligent approach to early childhood education (Nimnicht, Johnson, and Johnson, 1973).

Sensitivity to Cultural Differences

As we have seen, a fundamental premise of compensatory education was that certain cognitive and motivational deficits characterized most "disadvantaged" children, predisposing them to early and cumulative school failure. Accordingly, compensatory education was an attempt to make up for these deficits. One dangerous undercurrent of thinking about the disadvantaged child as deficit ridden was a reinforcement of ethnocentrism regarding any deviation from the white middle-class norm. Certainly ethnocentrism did not color the teaching patterns of all educators. But a prevailing attitude seemed to equate cultural *differences* with cultural *deficiencies* (Cole and Bruner, 1972). The results of a shift in thinking about this matter can now be observed. Ethnic, racial, or social class differences are increasingly seen as differences to be respected and accommodated to in the schools, not as deficiencies invariably tied to poverty or purported social disorganization.