Tutorial

Historical Perspectives on Literacy in Early Childhood

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Purpose: To more fully understand current trends in preliteracy research, as well as controversies that continue to surround best teaching practices, it is essential to have an understanding of the historical evolution of ideas and practices relevant to preparing young children for learning to read.
Method: Several interrelated historical movements relevant to placing current research and practices related to preliteracy development in context are reviewed. These ideas play out in the interrelated and changing ideas regarding the role of the family in children's literacy development, as well as in the appropriate curriculum for preschoolers. Both historical reviews and original documents pertinent to the various historical trends are used to provide the current synthesis.
Conclusions: The roots of most current practices during, and controversies regarding, the preliteracy period of development can be traced to a variety of different historical events, as well as to prominent philosophers and educators. Familiarity with these events, philosophers, and educators provides the perspective needed to effectively evaluate new information and approaches that come to the forefront, or that are currently being practiced by different groups or in different settings.

Key Words: family role, preschools, literacy

In 2001 and 2002, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) published documents regarding the roles and responsibilities of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in assisting children and adolescents in developing reading and writing skills (ASHA, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2002). Although some scholars in the discipline many years earlier had discussed the role of SLPs in fostering preliteracy and conventional literacy (for a discussion, see Rees, 1974; Stark, 1975; van Kleeck & Schuele, 1987), literacy development is a relatively new area in SLPs' scope of practice and one that is a result of advances in research and ensuing changes in educational practices and public policy (e.g., Schuele, 2009; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). Current practices in preschool, as described in Early Reading First (www.ed.gov/programs/earlyreading/index.html) and illustrated in recently published preschool curricula (e.g., *Opening the World of Learning* and *Building Language for Literacy*), have broadened developmentally appropriate practice for preschoolers to include implicit and explicit preliteracy instruction targeting oral language, phonological awareness, print awareness, and alphabet knowledge.

The infant, toddler, and preschool years are viewed as the point where "children take their first critical steps toward learning to read and write" (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1998, p. 32), although formal teaching of conventional literacy skills does not commence until children enter kindergarten and first grade. The current perspective stands in contrast to what were typical preschool practices 20 years ago, when developmentally appropriate preschool practices described the need to develop children's social, emotional, play, and broadly conceived cognitive skills but not foundational literacy skills (Bredekamp, 1987).

Understanding instructional and family literacy practices and their cultural variation, as well as the controversies that surround literacy practices, is enhanced by insights regarding where these practices come from, and how and why these practices have changed over time. In this article, current notions of the preliteracy or emergent literacy period of development in the preschool years are placed within a historical perspective. Having this historical perspective can deepen the insights of the SLP in many ways regarding current preliteracy practices. It may help SLPs understand why some preschool programs tend to focus strongly on structured tasks promoting skills that will help children with their later decoding (such as learning the alphabet), whereas others seem resistant to having children do anything but play and

develop their social skills. Or it may clarify why middle-class parents tend to teach the alphabet in a playful manner but shy away from teaching their preschoolers to actually read. Knowledge of historical roots and trends assists in understanding different literacy practices found across child care settings and among different cultural groups, and also assists in evaluating new trends in literacy practices.

Several interrelated historical movements are relevant to placing in context current preliteracy research and practices. They include convictions about where, what, when, how, and by whom young children should be exposed to literacy experiences and/or taught literacy skills. These convictions play out in the interrelated and changing ideas regarding the role of the family in children's literacy development, and in appropriate curricula for preschoolers. Before reviewing this content, however, it is important to be aware of dramatic historical changes in how widespread literacy is in the general population, and how much higher the demands on literacy skills have become, particularly in the last century.

Changes in Breadth and Depth of Literacy in the General Population

Being literate encompasses proficiency in reading and writing, but being literate has come to have a much broader meaning, one that also encompasses a person's knowledge base as well as educational experiences. Today in the United States, the goal of education is to ensure that every child becomes literate. Historically, it is important to recognize the evolution of whom in Western society was expected or allowed to learn to read (Mathews, 1966). For example, in Roman times only boys were taught to read. Access to print was limited to scarce, handwritten manuscripts owned by the wealthy. Other than monks and priests who read the scriptures in Latin, reading was of interest to few people. But the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s called for universal literacy, with the goal that everyone could read the scriptures in their own language. The invention of the printing press made universal literacy a realistic possibility. In this climate, the first Europeans began settling the American colonies in the 1600s.

Over the past several hundred years, not only has a far greater proportion of the population been expected to learn to read, but what constitutes functional literacy (i.e., a level of literacy needed to function in society) has come to involve increasingly higher level skills (Rogoff, 2003). In colonial America, reading and writing were considered quite separate skills (Keller-Cohen, 1993), and functional literacy did not involve an expectation of writing. Although most Americans could read (Rushdoony, 1979)—that is, if they were White, lived in New England, and were not among the poorest 10% of society (Gilmore-Lehne, n.d.)—most could not write (Keller-Cohen, 1993). In the early 20th century, functional literacy assumed only literal comprehension of what was read. But by the latter half of the 20th century, higher levels of literacy were widely expected (Myers, 1984, 1996; Resnick & Resnick, 1977); functional literacy now required a person "to move beyond literal meaning, to interpret texts, and to use writing not simply to record, but to interpret, analyze, synthesize, and explain" (Westby, 2004, p. 255). Clearly, just in the last few decades, technological changes have redefined dramatically what it means to be literate in American society.

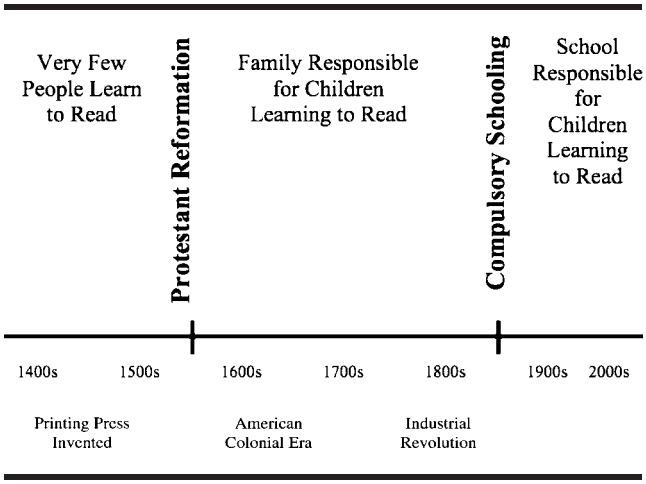
The Role of the Family: Historical Shifts From Directly Teaching Reading to Informally Fostering Foundational Skills

In this section, we briefly summarize the evolution of the mainstream culture's perspective on the role of the family in the young child's literacy development (see summary in Figure 1). The focus is on mainstream culture because it both reflects and shapes the culture of schools. Changes in ideas about teaching reading are influenced by changes in society at large, yet historical notions are evident in practices we see today.

In the 1st century AD, when only male children were taught to read, the Roman rhetorician Quintilian challenged the existing views of Hesiod and Erathosthenes, who believed that reading instruction should not begin until young boys reached their 7th year and entered formal schooling. Quintilian (1920) argued that children younger than 7 could profitably engage in literacy education if one ensured that the studies be made an amusement, such as playing with ivory letters to learn the alphabet.

Quintilian's idea that learning among very young children should be done in a fun manner resurfaced centuries later in the ideas of the British philosopher John Locke. In 1693, Locke argued in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* that reading instruction should begin as soon as a child could talk and should be like play (Beatty, 1995). Locke also believed that all education should take place in the home (Axtell, 1968). He suggested that many different ways could be found to match teaching to children's temperaments and make learning a sport that children would enjoy. Although published over 300 years ago, Locke's ideas contain some key tenets that are still discussed today, such as ensuring

FIGURE 1. An overall historical timeline of major events influencing who learned to read and where they learned to read.



that literacy activities are engaging for young children and adapting those activities to individual learners. But Locke's work was not published in America until 1830 and, therefore, had little influence during the colonial era.

In colonial America in the 1600s and 1700s, the goal of reading instruction was to read Bible scriptures. Reading instruction typically started at a very young age, took place in the home (Cremin, 1970; Hall, 1989), used formal didactic techniques that were precursors to modern phonics approaches, and had the Bible as the primary text of instruction (Delonas, 1976). The job of teaching often rested with mothers (Wells, 1975), who were considered the best teachers for children from birth to age 5 (Delonas, 1976). Thus, if children later attended school, they often had been taught to read at home.

The importance that society placed on ensuring that families taught their children to read is indicated by early laws passed in several New England colonies. These were discussed by Hall (2000) and are summarized in the following quotes. A Massachusetts law of 1642 required that parents ensure that children, servants, and apprentices acquire the "ability to read & understand the principles of religion and the capital lawes [sic] of this country" (p. 120). Likewise, a 1650 Connecticut law stated that children must know "perfectly to read the English tongue" and that parents should "catachise their children and servants" (p. 120). In 1647, "the Massachusetts government ordered that towns of fifty households appoint someone to teach reading and writing and that those of one hundred households or more add a 'grammar' school" (p. 120).

From the colonial period in America until the early 1900s, reading generally was taught via a code-oriented approach called the ABC or alphabetic method that basically had been in place since the Greek and Roman days; it later came to be known as *synthetic phonics* (e.g., Venezky, 1987). Children first learned letter names and then the sounds letters represented. They next learned to combine (synthesize) the sounds represented into simple and mostly meaningless CV or VC sequences (e.g., *ab, ad, eb, el, fa,* and *pa*), and finally they learned to combine syllables into words. Synthetic phonics was the technique used to teach children to read the religious content in the *New England Primer,* first published in 1690 and widely used for the next 100 years. Noah Webster carried on the tradition in his secular *American Spelling Book* that was first published in 1788 and that also enjoyed 100 years of widespread use.

Concurrent with the colonial era in America, the ideas of the French romantic philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau began to take root in Europe in 1762, when his book *Emile* was published. The book, with a focus on child-centered learning, presented a radical departure from prevailing views about children's education. Rousseau's ideas had a profound impact on the education of young children. They are found today in prevalent child-centered philosophies of teaching and in the emergent literacy perspective itself (e.g., authentic child-generated uses of print as a basis for instruction, and implicit learning of the conventions and meaning of print through engagement in literacy events). Rousseau, like Locke, believed that *all* education should take place in the home, not just that of very young children. However, he maintained that this education should not be in the hands of mothers but should be relegated to male tutors.

Rousseau went far beyond Locke's ideas that learning should be fun; he was against any form of formal, didactic teaching and championed informal learning experiences, such as games, that exercised the senses and exploration of the physical environment. He departed dramatically from Locke regarding teaching reading and proposed that children should not be taught to read until they wanted to learn. In fact, reading instruction for the imaginary "Emile" of his book did not commence until the age of 12.

Similar to the writings of Rousseau, the ideas presented in Maria and Richard Edgeworth's book *Practical Education,* published in England in 1798, are evident today. Educational historians discuss *Practical Education* as being a seminal work, combining "the best theories of Locke and Rousseau with a spirit of scientific inquiry" (Harden, 1984, p. 25). A daughter and father team, the Edgeworths showed none of the disdain for parents (particularly mothers) found in Rousseau's writing. Instead, they emphasized the lasting effects of early education, recommending that reading instruction begin at age 4. They impressed upon parents a grave responsibility regarding their importance for their child's early education. Here we are reminded of far more recent discussions of the critical importance of the very early years to a child's development (e.g., Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). The Edgeworths claimed that children should read books or have books read to them that would cultivate the "habit of reasoning" (Edgeworth & Edgeworth, 1798, p. 299). We see a similar notion today in research demonstrating that as middle-class parents read to their children, they often engage their preschoolers in higher level thinking requiring inferencing (see van Kleeck, 2006b, for a review).

With the advent of industrialization in the mid-1700s in England, working-class mothers headed to factories to work; this societal change initiated a substantial shift in the care and education of young as well as older children. The effects of the industrial revolution spread to the United States in the 1800s. Although more educated and affluent families continued to care for their children at home, care for children from working class or indigent families became more prevalent outside the home. Beatty (1995) described "infant schools" for toddlers through 5-year-olds in England in 1816; activities included clapping, marching, dancing, and outdoor free-play, but not reading. America, too, began experimenting with infant schools. The influence of the emphasis on motor activities in early infant schools can be seen in the 20th-century belief that various forms of play should dominate the preschool and kindergarten classroom. Until very recently, infant school philosophy was further reflected in the belief across most preschools (though not all) that teaching the alphabet was developmentally inappropriate (Bredekamp, 1987).

The impact of these societal changes influenced the care and education of older children as well. The implementation of compulsory schooling in formal institutions (e.g., in 1852 in Massachusetts and shortly thereafter in most other states) provided a context for older children to learn the "mature ways of their community" now that many parents no

longer worked at home (Rogoff, 2003, p. 102). With the advent of compulsory education, the responsibility for teaching reading now fell to the schools, and the role of the family in teaching reading began to wane.

At this same time, the progressive ideas first put forth by Rousseau were evidenced in the shift away from early formal didactic instruction in the home to the idea that such instruction could be quite harmful (e.g., Alcott, 1830; Brigham, 1832). Mothers were advised against teaching reading or other academic skills to children younger than 6. To avoid the dangers of precocious children that were discussed at the time, informal methods were advocated. As Beatty (1995) describes, "manuals described independent, inquisitive, noisy children whose mothers encouraged them to ask questions constantly" (p. 33).

It is perhaps not a coincidence that the influence of Rousseau's ideas in the United States, occurring approximately a century after their publication in Europe, coincided with the introduction of compulsory education. Rousseau did not believe that mothers of children younger than 6 should teach their children to read, and this philosophical belief dovetailed nicely with a new practical reality. If all children were required to go to school, teaching them to read ahead of that time would usurp the role of the elementary school teacher. Schools, being age-graded by necessity so that compulsory attendance could be enforced, needed society's help in discouraging practices that would result in students of the same age having markedly different skill levels. We see these ideas manifested in today's practices; the vast majority of middle-class parents stop short of actually teaching their children to read. They do typically teach their children letter names and sounds in playful fashion, but they are much less likely to teach them to write letters or to read or write words (Haney & Hill, 2004; Stevenson, Chen, & Uttal, 1990).

By the end of the 1800s and through most of the 1900s, ideas about the role of the family in early literacy development remained under the influences of romantic philosophy and progressive ideas about education. What children learned at home was best learned in a playful, enjoyable manner. In 1898, Iredell proposed that, through activities such as book sharing and scribbling, young preliterate children were learning things about how print works and what it is useful for, and as such were taking their first steps in learning to read and write. And, in 1908, Huey wrote a chapter in his book on teaching reading that focused on the natural literacy experiences at home that he speculated help to prepare children for later literacy learning in school.

The ideas of Iredell (1898) and of Huey (1908) presaged by several decades the research movement referred to as "emergent literacy" that originated with New Zealander Marie Clay (1966) and began attracting more followers in the United States in the 1980s (see Schuele & van Kleeck, 1987; Teale & Sulzby, 1986, 1987; van Kleeck & Schuele, 1987). This research movement illuminated the concepts about literacy and attitudes toward literacy that preschoolers can develop as they engage in naturally occurring literacy activities in the course of their everyday interactions within their families. The concepts spawned by emergent literacy provided a catalyst for the prodigious multidisciplinary research efforts that have vastly increased our knowledge about preliteracy development over the past 30 years (see Dickinson & Neuman, 2006; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001).

The Role of the Family: The Current View of Emergent Literacy

By the late 1980s, research from the emergent literacy perspective was beginning to provide substantial evidence (primarily, although not exclusively, from mainstream culture families) regarding the specific activities and resultant skills and knowledge about literacy that young children can acquire in their home environments before they reach formal schooling. One general conclusion of this body of work suggests that, in their everyday informal interactions with print used by adults in their worlds, in the context of sharing books with adults, and in their own explorations with writing, children become aware first and foremost that print is meaningful and useful. These attitudes and beliefs lay important foundations for children's eventual transition to conventional reading and writing. Becoming literate has come to be seen as a social process heavily influenced by a child's search for meaning. The ways in which children engage in literate acts in their play and in other meaningful activities guided by adults, long before they possess conventional literacy skills, also highlight that becoming a reader and writer are closely related skills (van Kleeck, 1990, 1995).

Sharing books with young prereaders, in particular, often took center stage in research agendas and in recommendations to parents. The major literacy policy document of the 1980s, *Becoming a Nation of Readers,* joined in touting the virtue of this family activity with preschoolers. A frequently quoted conclusion of this document is that "the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children" (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 23). As research on book sharing has accrued, it is apparent that it is not only being read to but also how adults engage children in discussions about books that is important to later reading achievement, particularly reading comprehension (see van Kleeck, 2006a, for discussion). For the greatest benefit to the child, books should be shared in an interactive manner that encourages the child's verbal participation in the activity. Indeed, three recent meta-analyses have documented the moderate to strong impact of interactive reading interventions on children's language and early literacy skills (Mol, Bus, & de Jong, 2009; Mol, Bus, de Jong, & Smeets, 2008; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

Research on emergent literacy has found its way into practice with recommendations that now abound (e.g., Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000) but extend far beyond book sharing. Recommendations apply to both what parents can do at home and what preschool educators can do in the classroom. In this way, the role of the home environment and the appropriate practices for preschool classrooms now often are viewed as quite similar. However, such recommendations can be at odds with the cultural practices in many homes, and as such may be either inappropriate or may need to be

realigned with variation in families' beliefs and practices (see van Kleeck, 2006a, for a review).

Perceived Importance of the Infant, Toddler, and Preschool Years

Current views of the family's role in fostering early literacy skills take place against the backdrop of a copious body of research on early brain development and social policies set in place in the 1960s. Known as the Decade of the Brain in the United States, the 1990s witnessed a popularization of research on infant brain development. For example, *Newsweek* published a Special Edition titled "Off to a Good Start: Why the First Three Years Are So Crucial to a Child's Development" (Kantrowitz, 1997), and *Time* published a special article covering similar territory that was titled "Fertile Minds" (Nash, 1997). In these and similar reports, claims were sometimes overstated as the nuance and details of findings were not reported. Nevertheless, the research findings on infant brain development research became woven into the belief system of the mainstream culture.

However, there has been a backlash from some researchers against the idea of the critical importance of a child's early years and hence the impact of the child's early home environment on later development. Detractors have used the phrase "infant determinism" to refer to a belief in the irreversible impact of early childhood experience on later development (e.g., Bruer, 1997, 1999; Kagan, 1998).

Reviews of the voluminous developmental research spanning the biological and social sciences are decidedly more circumspect than the notion of infant determinism implies (e.g., Acheson, 1998; Keating & Hertzman, 1999; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The consensus is that what happens in a child's earliest years does not irrevocably determine what happens later in life, but it is nonetheless of crucial importance. The conclusion drawn by the Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development (convened by the National Research Council) captures the current scientific view of the importance of the first years of life:

> A fundamental paradox exists and is unavoidable: development in the early years is both highly robust and highly vulnerable. Although there have been long-standing debates about how much the early years really matter in the larger scheme of lifelong development, our conclusion is unequivocal: what happens during the first months and years of life matters a lot, not because this period of development provides an indelible blueprint for adult well-being, but because it sets either a sturdy or a fragile stage for what follows. (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, pp. 4–5)

The research demonstrating the importance of the home environment in setting the stage for a child's development has had an impact particularly on what middle- and upper-middle-class families choose to do with their children. It also has been used to set social policy and advance social programs (e.g., Head Start or universal prekindergarten) that aim to promote early development and learning in children from families with very limited resources. However, some scholars have suggested that middle- and upper-middle-class families may be *overdoing* the amount of stimulation they provide for very young children by enrolling them in too many programs and lessons that inappropriately push children's development (e.g., Elkind, 1987, 1999).

The belief that socioeconomically disadvantaged children were not getting the needed foundations for school at home gave rise to bringing this information into the home via television. This was made possible by two intersecting events. By the 1960s, technology had advanced to the point where lower prices made owning a television affordable for most American families (in 1968, there were 200 million Americans and 78 million television sets; Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1996). On the political front, President Lyndon Baines Johnson had declared the War on Poverty, dedicating federal funds to develop programs designed to reverse the adverse impact of poverty in the United States. With partial funding from the federal government, children's educational television programming was launched. A brainchild of the Children's Television Workshop, *Sesame Street* began in 1969 with the goal of teaching a preschool curriculum of letters, numbers, and social values to an inner-city audience. Although initially aimed at children from low-income families, the show had widespread appeal to children of all backgrounds. Educational programming for preschool children is quite prevalent today, with numerous television programs focused on teaching vocabulary and social skills, answering questions, and so forth.

Table 1 summarizes the historical trends that have been discussed thus far. We see that ideas spanning as far back as Roman times have influences on practices that are widespread today. As can also be seen in Table 1, once the role of parents in directly teaching decoding waned as compulsory education took root, scholars' ideas about parents' roles shifted. Having parents provide children with foundations for later reading instruction through playful literacy experiences in the home that are a natural part of everyday living (e.g., making shopping lists, sending greeting cards, looking up information in books and on computers, or using recipes) became the recommended approach.

In addition to the influence of home environment, educational institutions, through preschools and kindergartens, exert a great influence on young children's development. Today, it is commonplace for children to participate in center-based preschools prior to enrollment in mandatory formal schooling. Ideas about the roles of these early educational institutions in children's later reading and literacy development are discussed next.

Preschool Education: Laying the Foundations for Later Literacy Development

Preschool Availability and Accessibility

In the last 40 years, the percentage of children attending preschool has grown tremendously, and thus the potential impact of preschool education on children's literacy skills is great. In 1965, fewer than 20% of children were enrolled in preschools (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001, p. 25). But by 1980, this number had grown to 30% and by 2001 to

TABLE 1. Changing role of the family in teaching reading to preschool-age children.

When	Whose ideas/where	Age (in years) to begin teaching reading	Who teaches reading/where	Provide foundations for later reading	Methods advocated at home	Other skills to be fostered	Impact on today's practices in middle class
1st century AD	Hesiod, Erathosthenes, Rome	7	Teacher at school (boys only)				
1st century AD	Quintilian, Rome			Before formal schooling at home	Play (e.g., letters on ivories)		Such "toys" for infants and toddlers exist today
1693	John Locke, England			As soon as child can talk at home	Play (e.g., dice with letters on them)		Same as above
1762	Rousseau, French Switzerland	When child wants to learn (as late as 12)	Home by male tutors, not mothers	No	Completely child-centered informal learning	Games that exercise senses; exploration of physical environment	Forerunner of child-centered teaching methods for reading such as whole language
1798	Edgeworths, Ireland	4	Parents at home		A phonics approach	Read to child to cultivate "habit of thinking"	Reading to child practiced by most families
1816	Infant schools for toddlers to 5 years, England			No		Clapping, marching, dancing, outdoor free-play	Movement activities still prevalent in preschool and kindergarten
1830, 1832	Alcott, Brigham, USA	In formal schooling beginning at 6	Mothers advised against teaching reading		Informal methods to avoid precocity	Instill independence and curiosity	Mothers still do not teach reading, although they teach letters playfully
1898, 1908	Iredell, Huey, USA	In formal schooling beginning at 6	Teachers at school	Parents at home	Natural, playful literacy experiences		Presaged emergent literacy movement of 1980s–present
1966, 1980s	Marie Clay, New Zealand; many U.S. researchers	In formal schooling beginning at 6	Teachers at school	Parents at home	Natural, playful literacy experiences		Huge influence on preschool literacy curricula
1985	Anderson et al. (1985), USA	In formal schooling beginning at 6	Teachers at school	Parents at home	Reading aloud to children		Reading aloud very prevalent in culture
1990s	Decade of the brain, USA	In formal schooling beginning at 6	Teachers at school	Parents at home		Early stimulation of child of critical importance	Pervasive notion in today's mainstream culture

56% (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2002, 2005). And, if one looks just at 4-year-olds, the percentage is even larger: In 2005–2006, 71% attended preschool (Barnett, Hustedt, Hawkinson, & Robin, 2006). Today, there are public preschools (e.g., Head Start and state-funded preschools) as well as private preschools that are run by for-profit, nonprofit, and religious organizations. Prior to the mid-1960s, nearly all preschools were private (Seefeldt, 1974), whereas in 2005–2006 half of the children who attended preschool or center-based day care were served in public programs (Barnett et al., 2006).

Nursery schools started in England in 1913 as compensatory education for working-class children with the aim to even up the gross disparities in early backgrounds between rich and poor children (Beatty, 1995). In a very similar vein, preschools began to proliferate in the United States in the 1960s, with initiation of the federally funded Project Head Start in 1964, a compensatory program. As part of President Johnson's War on Poverty, the goal of Head Start was, and continues to be, to prepare preschoolers from socioeconomically disadvantaged families to succeed in school (for a history of Head Start, see Zigler & Valentine, 1979). Head Start has never been an entitlement program. There is insufficient capacity to serve all children whose families meet eligibility guidelines; only about half of eligible children are served (Gormley, 2005).

In recent years, partially to counter this capacity problem and partially to meet a growing parental wish for 4-year-olds to be enrolled in preschool (Gormley, 2005), a growing number of states (there are now 38 of them) fund public preschool programs (Barnett et al., 2006), sometimes referred to as universal prekindergarten. In theory, universal prekindergarten provides state-funded prekindergarten for any and all children, regardless of income, but enrollment is voluntary (i.e., parents elect enrollment). However, as of 2005 only five states had committed to universal prekindergarten (Gormley, 2005), and most current state preschool programs (27) target children from low-income families (Barnett et al., 2006). As a result of the 1986 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, all states also provide free public education to preschool children with documented disabilities, regardless of family income.

State-funded preschool programs that target children from low-income families typically have a much less stringent eligibility requirement compared to Head Start. Whereas Head Start determines eligibility based on federal poverty level (e.g., for 2009–2010, this was defined as a family of four with income below $22,050 or a family of two earning below $14,570), public school prekindergarten programs typically rely on federal free/reduced lunch guidelines; however, this varies in different states (e.g., for 2009–2010, this was defined as a family of four with income less than $40,793). The lowest level of preschool attendance (41%) occurs among children whose families are in the middle of the economic distribution—those whose annual incomes are in the $40,000 to $50,000 range (Barnett, 2005). Children from these families often cannot afford the substantial tuition of a private preschool, yet they are not eligible for preschool aimed at children from low-income families. But this situation may change in the years to come because, if fully implemented by states, universal prekindergarten would make available a publicly supported preschool education for any child. The numbers of children enrolled in preschool do not tell the entire story, however. Historically, what occurs in preschools has varied quite dramatically and continues to do so today, as is discussed next.

From Reading Readiness to Emergent Literacy: What to Teach

The selection of literacy skills fostered in any particular preschool classroom is influenced by ideas about the appropriate educational experiences for preschoolers and about the development of reading. By the time preschools began proliferating in the United States, the generally held view was that teaching children to read was in the purview of the public schools and not the family. For much of the 20th century in the United States, the "reading readiness" perspective had a dominant influence on literacy instruction in preschool and the early school years (Lynn, 1963; Neuman & Dickinson, 2001; Sanderson, 1963). Initially, the readiness view was solely maturational; it was argued that children could not perceive letters or words until they had reached a mental age of 6½ years. Over time, the readiness view came to encompass the notion that teaching prerequisite skills could promote reading readiness (Lynn, 1963). There was never unanimous agreement within the readiness perspective, and substantial challenges to this long-held perspective began in the 1970s as the emergent literacy perspective came on the horizon (e.g., Clay, 1977; Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982; Holdaway, 1979). The time span between the generation of new ideas and their widespread implementation is often substantial; it would be more than 20 years before the new emergent literacy perspective would be readily and widely evident in preschool classroom practices.

What was considered foundational or prerequisite, of course, was tied directly to how the reading process was conceived. Through the 1960s, reading was considered primarily a visual skill (e.g., decoding involved discrimination of letter shapes). Preparatory experiences focused on children learning letter names, attending to visual distinctions, and perhaps associating sounds with letter shapes. As reading came to be viewed as a language-based skill, beginning in the 1970s, preparatory experiences gradually shifted to a focus on important oral language skills, such as vocabulary, semantic-syntactic skills, and narrative development, in addition to phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge.

Most "balanced" approaches to preliteracy and early literacy today take into account that there are two sets of preliteracy skills that are somewhat independent (see van Kleeck, 1998, 2007, 2008, for two models of these early foundations). One set provides foundations for later decoding and includes learning about the alphabet (letter names, shapes, and sounds) and becoming aware of phonological or sound units within spoken words (e.g., syllables and individual sounds or phonemes), and then learning to combine these two bodies of information to learn sound/letter (phoneme/grapheme) correspondences that are basic to decoding words in print in an alphabetic script such as English

(i.e., alphabetic principle). The other set of foundational preliteracy skills supports reading comprehension and includes vocabulary and sentence-level semantic-syntactic skills. To support higher levels of reading comprehension, and not just literal comprehension, van Kleeck (2008) adds to these foundations several higher level language skills that rely on vocabulary and semantic-syntactic skills, including inferencing, narrative abilities, and familiarity with features of written language.

Educational Philosophy and the Role of Preschool

For children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families, the compensatory role of preschool seeks to minimize later school failure. Thus, preschools must foster a foundation of learning skills that are built upon in elementary school and beyond. In contrast, for children from more advantaged families, the role of preschool is viewed as enrichment. Without preschool, there is little chance that this latter group of children will fail in school. Rather, preschool will help these children simply be more prepared to succeed in school and to transition to formal schooling more easily. In the next two sections, we consider the influence of educational philosophy on the nature of literacy instruction in preschools, innovative philosophies that affect primarily private preschools, and compensatory education philosophies that influence publicly funded preschools.

Innovative Educational Philosophies and Literacy Practices

From the inception of nursery schools, as noted by Beatty (1995), educators have experimented with pedagogic methods. Unlike views of kindergarten that became tied to public education early on, nursery schools were viewed as a source of empirical information about what environment and procedures were best suited to young children. Numerous philosophies about how to best educate preschoolers have been fairly widely implemented over the years. The most prevalent, primarily implemented in private preschools, have been the Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and Waldorf approaches. Each has quite distinct views about whether and how to focus on literacy or preliteracy skills with preschoolers.

Montessori. The Montessori approach was developed more than 100 years ago and is the most widely known and implemented of the three approaches, with approximately 5,000 schools in the United States, including 300 public schools (Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006). The ways in which this approach provides foundations for later reading can be found in publications such as a book written for parents by Lawrence (1998). The Montessori approach to preparing preschoolers for reading incorporates learning to read for meaning and using context clues. It also has a set of materials and a very structured sequence in which the materials are introduced that constitute a phonics type of foundation for later decoding. Via these materials and sequenced activities that are considered self-correcting, preschoolers learn (a) the alphabet and early encoding, (b) what we now call phonological awareness, and (c) handwriting. Children work on these skills independently; teachers intervene only to demonstrate a next step or if the child requests help.

In line with the Montessori belief that learning should be concrete and tactile, at about 4 years of age, children are introduced to sandpaper letters and encouraged to simultaneously trace the letter and make the sound. After one letter is mastered, another is introduced. After a child masters seven or eight letters, the "moveable alphabet" is used, in which vowels and consonants are made of different colors, to introduce simple CVC words (e.g., *cat* or *mat*).

Sound games that develop phonological awareness, played with a set of objects that begin with different sounds, are also part of the curriculum. Medial and final sounds of the names for objects are introduced later. Writing is also part of the preschool curriculum. First, letters are traced in a sand tray. Next, the manual dexterity for writing is fostered by having the child fill in eight metal insets of common geometric shapes. After extensive practice with the sand tray and metal insets, handwriting practice begins with an unlined chalkboard followed by a lined chalkboard, which is more difficult because the space for writing is predefined for the child.

Reggio Emilia. The Reggio Emilia approach was started just after World War II by parents in the Italian town of the same name. Unlike Waldorf and Montessori approaches, it does not have defined methods or accreditation processes (Edwards, 2002). The Reggio Emilia approach focuses on fostering the meaning foundations for later literacy by engaging children in representing ideas and feelings in a variety of media. It does not teach specific foundations for decoding print, such as alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness:

> Children grow in competence to symbolically represent ideas and feelings through any of their "hundreds of languages" (expressive, communicative, and cognitive)—words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, music, to name a few—that they systemically explore and combine. Teachers follow the children's interests and do not provide focused instruction in reading and writing; however, they foster emergent literacy as children record and manipulate their ideas and communicate with others. (Edwards, 2002, para. 10)

Waldorf. According to the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (www.awsna.org), this approach to education founded by Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian scientist and philosopher, in 1919 has been used in North America for nearly 80 years. It is a relatively small but rapidly growing approach to education, with 250 Waldorf schools in North America. In the Waldorf preschool and kindergarten, the teacher has two major goals. The first is to engage children in practical, domestic, and artistic activities (e.g., baking, gardening, handicrafts, and painting). The second is to nurture children's power of imagination via storytelling and by encouraging fantasy play. Toys are "less finished" (e.g., dolls having a minimum of detail) to foster more open-ended imaginative play. There is an emphasis on festivals and ceremonies that provide the backdrop for many activities.

The Waldorf preschool foundations for literacy, as such, focus on the oral language skills fostered by storytelling and engaging in fantasy play. More traditional academic subjects do not begin until first grade. Even then, the approach emphasizes oral traditions and oral communication. Reading instruction is viewed as an outgrowth of writing, and writing evolves out of children's art. In first grade, children learn about the alphabet by learning how the letters evolved out of pictographs. Children are not taught to read until second grade.

Education Philosophy and Literacy Practices for Disadvantaged Preschoolers

The curricula implemented in programs for disadvantaged preschoolers have sought to address the underlying purposes of these programs—to compensate for the lack of preparedness to succeed in school. Head Start grantees are local agencies that are funded directly from the federal government. Each program is required to provide a range of services, including health and social services and nutrition programs, in addition to educational programming. However, individual grantees have discretion in the selection of educational curricula. In the early years of Head Start, two prevalent curricula—HighScope and direct instruction—with very different goals and teaching methods (Crawford, 1995) illustrated the divergent philosophies advocated in individual Head Start Programs and how this played out in preliteracy instruction.

In method, if not in specific content, HighScope reflected the romantic philosophy that emerged in previous centuries. This program was inspired by the growing influence of Piaget's theory of children's cognitive development in the 1960s which suggested that children's general cognitive development was primary and that children needed to be very active participants in their own learning (Weikart, Rogers, Adcock, & McClelland, 1971). Teachers facilitate (but do not direct) children's engagement in intellectual, social, and physical key experiences (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997). HighScope has evolved over the decades, most recently incorporating emerging literacy concepts into its comprehensive curriculum (Hohmann & Weikart, 2002). Key developmental indicators (formerly key experiences) for literacy include comprehension, phonological awareness, the alphabetic principle, and concepts about print.

In contrast, direct instruction involved highly programmed, teacher-directed instruction focused sequentially on specific skills. The catalyst for direct instruction (also known as direct instruction for teaching arithmetic and reading [DISTAR]; Englemann & Bruner, 1969) is often considered to have been twofold (e.g., Graves & Dykstra, 1997). First, in response to concerns about illiteracy rates in the United States in the 1950s, Rudolf Flesch in his best-selling book *Why Johnny Can't Read* (1955) called for a return to a much stronger emphasis on the phonics method of teaching beginning reading. He advocated for systematically focusing on the sounds and letters basic to an alphabetic script, instead of employing the "look-and-say" or "sight word" method prevalent at the time. If you search the Internet today, you will find many grassroots phonics efforts and publishers of phonics materials that are marketed directly to parents still quoting and advocating Flesch's book, the copyright for which was renewed in 1983. It is still in print. Second, 2 years after the publication of *Why Johnny Can't Read,* an educational scare was set off by the Russians being the first to launch a satellite. Sputnik I went into orbit in October 1957. The general response in America was that the U.S. educational system was in need of reform. The return to a strong phonics approach may have held particular appeal in the compensatory programs for disadvantaged preschoolers. Today, the direct instruction model is not widely evident in Head Start; it has evolved into Reading Mastery (www.sraonline.com), a direct instruction program for kindergarten through third grade.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Learning Standards, and Preschool Curricula

The NAEYC and developmentally appropriate literacy practices. Shortly after private preschools emerged in the United States, professional researchers and educators from a variety of disciplines met (in 1926) and later organized (in 1929) as the National Association for Nursery Education (NANE). In 1964, NANE became known as the NAEYC. The NAEYC accredits preschool programs on a voluntary basis. To date, the NAEYC has accredited over 11,000 preschools (www.naeyc.org). Private preschools have typically sought NAEYC accreditation. However, in an age of increasing accountability, more and more state and federally funded programs also seek NAEYC accreditation today. In Dallas, TX, for example, Head Start accounts for 40% of the NAEYC accredited programs (see www.hsgd.org). In the state of Iowa, the voluntary nature of the accreditation process has been usurped by a requirement that all state-funded prekindergarten programs pursue or obtain NAEYC accreditation.

Within its accreditation capacity, the NAEYC sets standards for what is considered a high-quality preschool and kindergarten environment. Their recommendations are widely used by preschool teachers, directors, and policy makers (McGill-Franzen, 1993). The 1987 NAEYC document *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8* (Bredekamp, 1987) had a substantial impact on preschool education. It strongly promoted the view that preschool should be structured around play and other child-selected activities. Children's active participation in meaningful reading and writing activities was encouraged, but work on "isolated skill development such as recognizing single letters" (Bredekamp, 1987, p. 57) was considered inappropriate practice. These recommendations were in large part an oppositional response to the direct instruction programs (e.g., DISTAR) that were prominent in preschool and kindergarten settings (see Durkin, 1987, regarding kindergarten teachers' overwhelming use of whole-group phonics methods at that time). Thus, the 1987 NAEYC document helped to swing the pendulum from advocating structured activities that were teacher-directed to advocating child-selected and child-initiated activities in which teachers served

more as guides. Likewise, the goal of the preschool experience moved from an emphasis on specific academic skill development to one that fostered social skill development. Although the emerging literacy paradigm already had stimulated an extensive amount of research on natural learning activities of preschoolers in their homes and in preschool settings, this work was barely evident in the 1987 NAEYC document.

A decade later, the NAEYC published a new version of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* that reflected the current trend among a number of scholars of attempting to achieve a balance between direct instruction and child-selected activity in preschool settings (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). As Dickinson (2002) notes, gone were the admonitions against direct teaching of content area academic skills, such as those related to alphabet knowledge. Instead, it was noted that children need to learn "letter names and letter-sound combinations" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 131) and that such knowledge is not discoverable by children on their own but requires direct instruction (Schickedanz, 2003). Recently, the NAEYC adopted a further revision of the *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* position statement (2009).

Shortly after the publication of the 1997 NAEYC document, the presiding president of the International Reading Association (IRA), Jack Pikulski, wrote an article voicing concerns that the document had simply not done enough to illuminate how teachers could support children's early literacy development (Pikulski, 1997). He initiated a collaboration between the IRA and the NAEYC that resulted in a new position statement (NAEYC, 1998) as well as a book of the same title (Neuman et al., 2000). These publications go far beyond the 1997 document in explaining and providing examples of the many ways teachers can enhance young children's literacy skills. The titles of the subsections in Neuman et al. (2000) on teaching ideas highlight the breadth of the recommendations offered and reflect a balance between meaning-oriented and code-oriented activities: The Power and Pleasure of Literacy, The Literate Environment, Language Development, Building Knowledge and Comprehension, Knowledge of Print, Types of Text, Phonological Awareness, and Letters and Words. The position is taken that no one teaching approach is likely to be effective for all children, and for this reason teachers must be prepared in a variety of research-based teaching methods.

Development of preschool learning standards. A greater understanding of reading development and grave concerns over poor educational achievement in the United States have motivated a variety of school reforms over the past few decades. The publication of *The Report of the National Reading Panel* in 2000 and the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 had a huge impact on educational practices in the last decade. These reforms have resulted in states developing standards for learning across content areas. At the same time, the federal government has increased its role in holding public schools and Head Start accountable to standards through mandated student assessments as well as program evaluations. In recent years, development of federal guidelines and state standards has been extended to the preschool level (Neuman & Roskos, 2005).

As we have seen, the scope of preschool literacy instruction as well as the systematic and explicit emphasis on preschool literacy instruction advocated today is much broader and quite different than in the past. Several forces emanating from research are catalysts for the current trends. For example, at the federal level, the goal of Early Reading First, a subpart of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, was to fund (on a competitive basis) local education agencies and public or private organizations that serve preschoolers from low-income families to develop "preschool centers of excellence." It was required that these centers enhance language and preliteracy instruction using evidence from scientific reading research and provide extensive and varied professional development for preschool teachers. The goals of instructional preschool activities were to promote oral language skills that are foundational to later reading comprehension (vocabulary, expressive language, and listening comprehension) as well as skills that are foundational to later decoding (phonological awareness, print awareness, and alphabetic knowledge). There is also an emphasis on promoting children's cognitive learning opportunities in high-quality language and literature-rich environments. An additional example is the publication of *Developing Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel* (2008). The report, mentioned earlier because it contains a meta-analysis of book-sharing intervention research, is a scientific synthesis of early literacy development and interventions. It provides support for current preschool practices as well as directions for future research efforts.

Learning standards in Head Start. In 1998, in the reauthorization of Head Start, Congress mandated that individual Head Start programs implement standards of learning in the areas of early literacy, language, and numeracy skills. They also highlighted the role of curriculum in meeting standards of learning. In 2002, President Bush proposed an initiative called Good Start, Grow Smart in an attempt to further strengthen these standards in Head Start (Good Start, Grow Smart Interagency Workgroup, 2006). Program performance standards are delineated across eight domains, including language and literacy, and collectively 100 indicators (child outcomes) describe targeted development and learning within the domains (www.hsnrc.org/CDI/pdfs/UGCOF.pdf). These domains and indicators suggest that Head Start programs are engaging children in experiences to promote later decoding abilities as well as later reading comprehension. A congressional legislative mandate requires all Head Starts to report child progress on nine indicators, as shown in Table 2.

The most widely used curricula in Head Start today are The Creative Curriculum (www.teachingstrategies.com) and HighScope (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). These broad-based curricula address the many domains of preschool development and learning (e.g., literacy, social-emotional, and physical) and link to the program performance standards. The Creative Curriculum provides a framework for teachers to plan developmentally appropriate experiences, whereas HighScope is a more traditional curriculum in that it provides specific activities. To

TABLE 2. The legislative mandate to measure progress in Head Start programs—nine child indicators.

Domain	Domain element	Indicators
Language development	Listening and understanding	• Understands an increasingly complex and varied vocabulary • For non-English-speaking children, progresses in listening to and understanding English
	Speaking and communicating	• Develops increasing abilities to understand and use language to communicate information, experiences, ideas, feelings, opinions, needs, questions, and for other varied purposes • Uses an increasingly complex and varied vocabulary • For non-English-speaking children, progresses in speaking English
Literacy	Phonological awareness	• Associates sounds with written words, such as awareness that different words begin with the same sounds
	Print awareness and concepts	• Recognizes a word as a unit of print, or awareness that letters are grouped to form words, and that words are separated by spaces
	Alphabet knowledge	• Identifies at least 10 letters of the alphabet, especially those in own name • Know that letters of the alphabet are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named

Note. Adapted from the *Head Start Child Outcomes Framework* (www.hsnrc.org/CDI/pdfs/UGCOF.pdf).

track children's developmental achievements and learning progression in order to meet the increasing emphasis on accountability, both curricula have an extensive assessment component.

State standards for preschool. In 2000, only 16 states reported having early childhood education standards, but as of 2005, 43 states had developed learning standards for children ages 3 to 5 in the areas of language, literacy, and mathematics (Neuman & Roskos, 2005). Using Texas as an example, the prekindergarten curriculum guidelines provided by the Texas Education Agency in 1999 defined the recommended content and performance standards for preschoolers in a number of areas, including language and early literacy. As with Early Reading First, the areas included under language and literacy span those that provide foundations for later reading comprehension (e.g., listening comprehension, vocabulary, verbal expression, motivation to read, displaying knowledge of literary forms, and written expression activities such as dictating stories and "writing" messages) and those that provide foundations for later decoding (e.g., phonological awareness, print awareness, alphabet knowledge and early word recognition, and written expression advancing from scribbling to recognizable letters).

We are clearly in a new era of standards-based education that has now been extended down to the preschool years. As Neuman and Roskos (2005) discuss, standards-based educational reform is based on a "set of goals that include: (a) high expectations for what children should know and be able to do; (b) reliable assessments of basic skills for purposes of accountability; (c) alignment of curricula to standards and assessments; and (d) quality professional development" (p. 127). As these authors note, it remains to be seen if the standards promote quality practices. What is certain, however, is that they will profoundly affect "teacher licensure, professional development, curriculum, and assessment" (p. 143) in the public preschool arena.

Effects of Preschool Curricula

Despite the commonalities in preschool standards across states and Head Start, there are concerns about the effect of program quality on child outcomes. Resource inequities could have an impact on the language and literacy environment of classrooms and children's acquisition of language and literacy foundational skills. Indeed, three levels of quality for preschools—one generally poor, one highly variable, and one typically better—seem to relate closely to the socioeconomic backgrounds of the children they serve. From extensive analyses of a national sample (n = 22,000) of children followed from kindergarten through Grade 5 (West, Denton, & Reaney, 2001; Whitehurst & Massetti, 2004), it was concluded that "after adjusting for family income, children who attend state prekindergarten programs or private nursery schools are better prepared in emergent literacy (as well as math and general knowledge) than children who attend Head Start or child care programs, which did not differ in their effects" (Whitehurst & Massetti, 2004, p. 260). As such, state and private preschools appear to be doing a better job than Head Start. However, there is ample evidence for "tremendous variation among state preschool programs," with quality standards ranging "from excellent to poor" (Barnett et al., 2006, p. 7).

The differences in the types of instruction and resources related to preliteracy development between three income-eligible preschools and two private preschools (one religious and one affiliated with a university) were dramatically highlighted in a small qualitative study by McGill-Franzen, Lanford, and Adams (2002). University experts in early childhood education nominated the five participating preschools

as having excellent programs. McGill-Franzen et al. found that the teachers from the income-eligible preschools (one was a Head Start preschool) encouraged children's participation in book sharing by having them "chime in" and memorize the stories, whereas the private preschool teachers engaged children in frequent discussions about books that involved cognitively challenging talk in which they defined concepts, elaborated on confusing parts of the text, summarized important elements, and engaged the children in predicting and making inferential responses.

In the income-eligible classrooms, there were also far fewer books, and the books available were less challenging (i.e., had fewer words), were often stored out of sight, and were in very poor condition. The more attractive books were often off limits to the children in order to preserve them. The teachers in the income-eligible classrooms also modeled fewer uses of literacy than in the private preschools. McGill-Franzen et al. concluded that the children in the income-eligible preschools had "less access to print, fewer opportunities to participate in literacy, and little experience listening to or discussing culturally relevant literature" (p. 443).

To identify those curricula that are most robust in their effectiveness, and the varied circumstances under which particular curricula are effective, the Institute of Education Sciences (U.S. Department of Education) initiated the Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research initiative in 2002 (Preschool Curriculum Evaluation Research Consortium, 2008). Findings from this initiative and similar studies can provide guidance to preschools in their selection of specific curricula.

Summary and Implications for Clinical Practice

This brief foray into the history of what today is thought of as the preliteracy or emerging literacy period of early childhood development sheds light on many current practices and beliefs. We see how the role of the family has evolved over time. Beginning with the promotion of universal literacy during the Protestant reformation, parents had the responsibility of directly teaching their children to read, and this became a legal responsibility in early colonial America. Today, parents from the mainstream American culture seem to intuitively know that they should provide their children with a variety of important foundations for later reading but stop short of teaching them to read. In the growing homeschooling movement, however, many families are choosing to once again take on the responsibility for teaching reading (as well as other academic skills) to their children.

We continue to see diverse views regarding preliteracy skills in private preschools, particularly in those following a particular educational philosophy, such as those of Montessori or Waldorf. In the increasingly ubiquitous public preschools, however, accreditation standards and state guidelines are requiring research-based approaches to fostering preliteracy development that balance teaching skills important for later reading comprehension (oral language skills) with skills important for later decoding (alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness skills).

What does all this mean for SLPs' clinical practice? There is little doubt that the work of SLPs will increasingly encompass literacy, particularly in school settings. Current models or frameworks of emergent and conventional literacy view oral language as a part of literacy more explicitly than in the past. Thus, even if SLPs continued to work only on oral language skills, this focus alone would be considered a piece of literacy development by the schools in which they work. But with the converging focus of educational efforts on literacy achievement, it is unlikely that SLPs will focus on oral language alone with preschoolers. And, as SLPs work ever more collaboratively with other education professionals, there is a need for them to have a broad understanding of the history and theory behind current educational practices.

Understanding even a bit of this history is essential to providing the perspective needed to effectively evaluate new information and approaches that come to the forefront, or that are currently being practiced by different groups or in different settings. The principles of evidence-based practice can give SLPs the critical tools to evaluate the relative merit of research on preliteracy; understanding historical changes can help SLPs go even deeper and understand the potential underlying philosophies and beliefs that may be implicitly informing what questions are even asked in the prevailing research. Indeed, the dazzle of a new technique and the pull of a new trend can also obscure underlying beliefs these techniques or trends may be implicitly supporting—beliefs that are subject to change across various constituencies, over time within a particular cultural group, or even over time in one's personally held value system. If preschool experiences are to provide a foundation for all children, particularly the most academically vulnerable children (e.g., children with delayed or impaired language skills, and children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families), to succeed in elementary school, SLPs' assessment and intervention efforts must be fully integrated with the broader picture of preschool education. An understanding of the history of preschool education likely will help SLPs achieve this integration.

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