

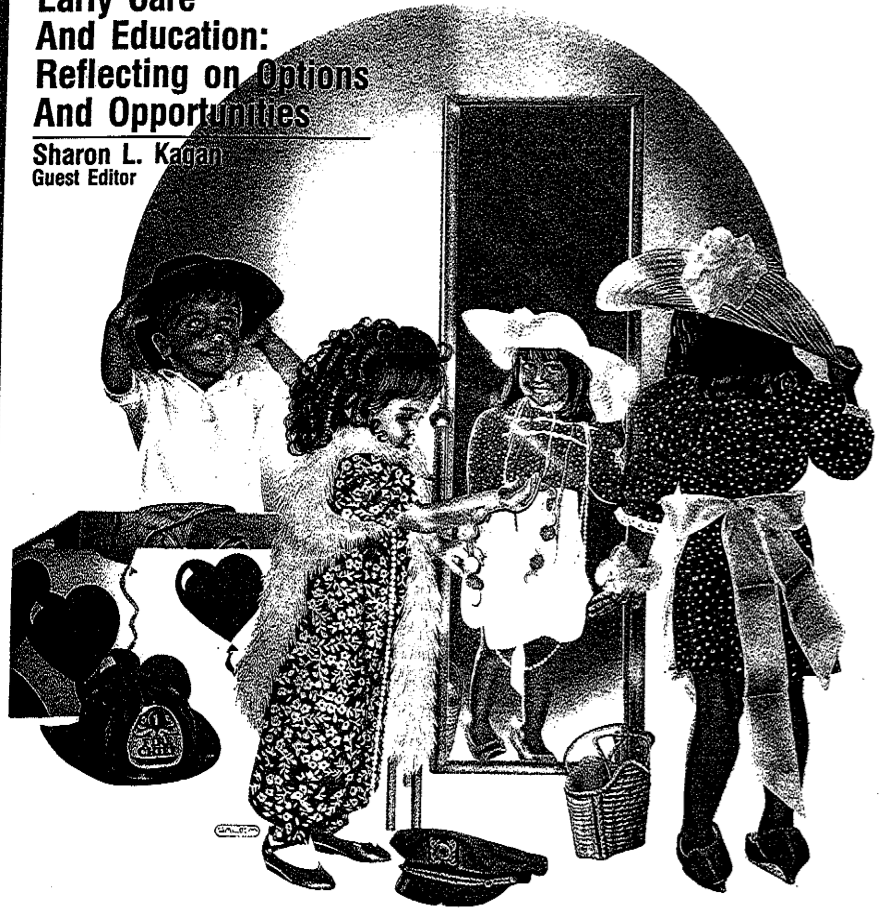
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# KAPPAN

Early Care  
And Education:  
Reflecting on Options  
And Opportunities

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## Early Care and Education: Reflecting on Options And Opportunities



EARLY CARE & EDUCATION



tion charts the challenges we must meet as we strive to convert rhetorical commitments and isolated models into high-quality programs for all youngsters.

For individuals who understand the cultures of schools and have accepted the herculean challenges associated with school reform, the issues raised in the following pages will have a familiar ring and some important new twists. Dealing with very young children who learn and think in delightful — but different — ways, who are vulnerable to change, and who initially need the security of home and family imposes new conditions on educators. Dealing with the intricate and sometimes acrimonious ecosystem of early care and education, in which schools are not the sole (or even the primary) providers, poses daunting challenges and opens new opportunities. Dealing with pedagogical, staffing, and service-delivery patterns that defy conventional school practice will demand that careful analysis precede implementation.

The articles in this special section are designed to foster that analysis by addressing the major issues associated with implementing early care and education services in the schools: restructuring the schools to accommodate early care and education (Sharon Lynn Kagan); fostering developmentally appropriate programs (David Elkind); addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse populations (Barbara Bowman); establishing services for handicapped youngsters (James Gallagher); developing appropriate procedures for screening and testing young children (Tom Schultz); ameliorating the staffing crisis (Robert Granger); and creating comprehensive service delivery systems comparable to those in other nations (Sheila Kamerman). Descriptions of several programs are included as examples of current efforts.

This special section forecasts problems, delineates issues, and proffers strategies that should prove helpful as early childhood policies and programs are crafted. It postulates that, in spite of unresolved challenges, early care and education may be extremely effective catalysts for restructuring schools, and it predicts that improvements in quality and quantity of services will emerge from the combined wisdom of parents, early childhood and elementary educators, policy makers, and the public. It is toward hastening the sharing of such wisdom that this special section is dedicated.

— Sharon L. Kagan

**I**F PULITZER Prizes were awarded for attracting public and professional interest, surely the issue of early care and education would be a strong contender this year. Hardly a day passes without major national and local

coverage by broadcast and print media. Rather than exorcise the atrocities of child care, media attention extols the benefits of early intervention as a means of reducing work-related family stress and increasing youngsters' social and academic competence. Politicians in statehouses, intrigued by the financial savings

associated with early intervention, are passing legislation that enhances the availability and quality of services. On Capitol Hill and in the White House, interest in the care and education of young children is at an all-time high, and strong bipartisan support may yield far-reaching legislation. National and local founda-

tions are funding research and action proposals, and numerous corporations have launched programs and services for employees, their children, and their families.

Clearly, this surge of activity is quantitatively different from past efforts, but — more important — it is qualitatively different. The concept of early care and education has matured. Today's programs are grounded in research that verifies the efficacy of early intervention, particularly for low-income children. Early intervention is viewed as a potential remedy for escalating social problems that resist quick-fix solutions. In addition, child-care issues no longer concern only low-income families but cut across all social strata. Early intervention has seeped into the national Zeitgeist. The debate has been radically altered: no longer do we ask *whether* we should serve young children and their families; today we ask *how* and *where*.

As the national discussion of early care and education turns to strategies and mechanisms, the schools — though not the sole participants — become critical players. To date, most state-level expansion of early intervention programs has

been funneled through state departments of education, and pending state legislation gives every indication of continuing that trend. While recognizing the importance of Head Start and of for-profit and nonprofit care, pending federal bills (including Sen. Edward Kennedy's Smart Start and Rep. Augustus Hawkins' Child Development and Education Act) also include significant roles for public schools. At the local level, hundreds of exciting efforts are already under way to improve existing school services, to add new services directly, or to expand the role of the schools as brokers of services within communities. Schools throughout the nation are contouring in new ways their relationships with families and with other institutions that serve young children.

That the *Kappan* is devoting a sizable portion of this issue to a special section on early care and education reflects the growing national interest. However, consistent with its traditional leadership role, the *Kappan* must do more than mirror the current climate of opinion. Consequently, rather than reaffirm widely accepted rationales for early intervention or chronicle promising practices (which others have done well), this special sec-



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