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Early Start

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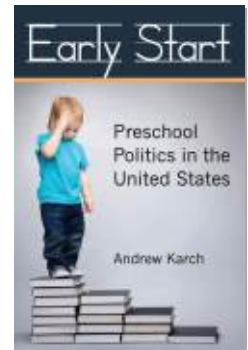
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Introduction: The Preschool Puzzle

On April 1, 1968, the U.S. commissioner of education, Harold Howe II, was supposed to address the annual meeting of the Department of Elementary School Principals of the National Education Association in Houston, Texas. When his presence was required at an appropriations hearing in Washington, Howe was unable to make the trip. Instead, his speech was read to the principals. It contained a bold prediction: “I would predict that by the year 2000 most children in the United States will be attending regular public school starting at the age of four.”¹

Two elements of the commissioner’s prediction are noteworthy. First, he foresaw a society in which preschool attendance for four-year-old children would be nearly universal. This element of his prediction was bold, because only 15.7 percent of three- and four-year-olds in the United States were enrolled in school in 1968.² Second, Howe envisaged a preschool system that would be an extension of the government-operated system of elementary and secondary education. Preschool would be publicly provided. This element of the prediction was also bold in 1968, when private nursery school enrollment outnumbered public enrollment by more than a two-to-one margin. Of the 816,000 children enrolled in nursery school that year, 554,000 (68 percent) attended a private school.³ Undaunted by these statistics, Howe nonetheless envisioned a universal, publicly provided system of preschool education.

In the late 1960s, many individuals shared Howe’s enthusiastic support of preschool education but were more pessimistic about its prospects. Representative Albert Quie (R-MN), a leading congressional expert on education policy, worried about the future. In a memorandum to members of the House Republican Task Force on Education, which he chaired, Quie observed, “Preschool education has not come of age in America, and unless several major problems are recognized and effectively counteracted, it may well die an infant.”⁴ The congressman argued that such issues

as teacher training, parental roles, and educational effectiveness might lead to disillusionment.

More than four decades later, the specifics of both officials' predictions remain unfulfilled. As Howe predicted, preschool attendance increased substantially between 1968 and 2000, from 15.7 percent of all three- and four-year-olds in 1968 to 52.1 percent in 2000.⁵ Enrollment expanded nearly fivefold among three-year-olds, and the enrollment rate of four-year-olds rose from 23 percent in 1968 to 65 percent in 2000 (Bainbridge et al. 2005, 730). By the turn of the twenty-first century, preschool enrollment had become an increasingly common part of early childhood in the United States. The universal, government-administered preschool system that the commissioner envisaged, however, did not exist. Contemporary American preschool policy consists of a fragmented amalgamation of programs and services that are funded and delivered in different ways in the public and private sectors. This complicated system remains bedeviled by many of the issues that Quie raised. Debates over teacher training, parental roles, and the effectiveness of preschool programs are as divisive today as they were during the late 1960s. Yet these ongoing controversies have not caused preschool education to "die an infant." Both enrollment in and public spending on preschool programs increased dramatically in the early 2000s.⁶

Policymakers, advocates, providers, and citizens continue to advance competing visions of the appropriate governmental role in early childhood policy. Some parties favor increased public investment, while others advocate general deference to parental autonomy and the private sector. This debate has never been resolved, and the contemporary preschool system has been described as an "uneven patchwork of public and private programs" (Barnett and Hustedt 2003, 60). Its fragmentation has repeatedly frustrated supporters of a more comprehensive and unified approach. A recent report concludes, "While nearly every level of government and sector of society has a stake in improving early care and learning, the responsibilities are so fragmented that no single actor holds enough of the levers for change to get it done."⁷ This book attempts to isolate the political sources of the current system and its fragmentation.

Implicit in Howe's speech and Quie's memorandum is the notion that the late 1960s and early 1970s represented a key moment for preschool in the United States. Even though the two officials did not accurately predict the future, they correctly recognized that the decisions their contemporaries made would have enduring consequences. Indeed, the structure and politics of contemporary American preschool education can be traced

to the early 1970s. At that time, multiple efforts to create a national framework for the universal provision of preschool services fell short, but several smaller programs at the national and state levels were created or expanded. The beneficiaries of those programs became ardent defenders of the status quo. Their mobilization prevented officials from adopting a more coherent approach to preschool service delivery and contributed to the fragmentation that is a defining feature of the present system.

Contemporary American Preschool Education

This book emphasizes a specific subset of programs that often fall under the broader heading of early childhood care and education. Preschools include “programs offered under public and private education auspices or providing compensatory education under special legislation” (Kamerman and Gatenio 2003, 1–2).⁸ The key attribute of these programs is their educational emphasis. Regardless of whether it is called a prekindergarten, a nursery school, or something else, the main focus of a preschool is preparing children for their enrollment in kindergarten and elementary school.⁹ Preschools in the United States typically serve children who are three or four years old. They may be either half-day or full-day, public or private; and they may operate year-round or cover the conventional academic year. The line between preschool and other forms of child care is often blurred, and this book emphasizes governmental policies toward educational programs at the expense of center-based child care or family child care approaches that are often described as custodial.¹⁰

Most contemporary assessments of American preschool education emphasize its complexity. In the absence of a comprehensive national policy, one scholar describes early childhood programs as a “mishmash of financing mechanisms and funding streams” (Fuller 2007, 285). Another calls preschool “education’s version of the Wild West” (Kirp 2007, 25). Many observers agree that the contemporary preschool system is not really a coherent system at all, and some scholars have inferred that its development has been “unsystematic [and] chaotic” (Kagan and Neuman 2003, 60).

Preschool education in the United States differs from that of other countries along two main dimensions. First, the private sector plays a prominent role in preschool service provision. The Current Population Survey (CPS) has tracked nursery school enrollment in the United States since 1964. Using these data, figure 1 illustrates how private nursery school

enrollment exceeded enrollment in government programs for most of the late twentieth century. Spending patterns also illustrate the importance of the private sector. Whereas parents' fees cover between 10 and 30 percent of the costs of early care and education in most European countries, with governments paying the remaining costs, parents are responsible for roughly 60 percent of the costs in the United States (A. D. White 2005, 1).¹¹ In some other countries, preschool is the preserve of the public sector, with the private sector playing a circumscribed role. In the Czech Republic, for example, early education and care is "almost entirely a public service" (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2001, 157). In the United States, by contrast, both the public sector and the private sector are heavily involved in preschool education.

The distinction between the public and private sectors is important because the two sectors serve different constituencies in the United States. The programs administered by the national, state, and local governments are generally targeted initiatives that make services available to "disadvantaged" children. Public preschool programs mainly serve children from low-income families, children with learning disabilities, and children in areas with limited private-sector preschool availability. These compensatory programs, the most famous of which is Head Start, are an attempt to level the educational playing field and to promote equality of opportunity. Their chief objective is to prepare children for school, and this emphasis on "school readiness" has been a defining feature of preschool politics since the late 1980s.

Economically secure families are more likely to rely on the private sector for preschool services. As a result, some observers characterize early childhood policy in the United States as a "two-tiered" system stratified by class. Targeted government programs serve poor families and their children, while the private market serves more-affluent families. The government encourages well-off families to rely on the private sector by providing an income tax credit for child and dependent care. Initially established as a tax deduction in 1954, this tax expenditure historically has "mainly benefited middle- and upper-income families and spurred the growth of both voluntary and commercial services in the private sector" (Michel 1999, 5). Supporters of this approach argue that it promotes parental autonomy, allowing parents to choose a particular type of program or provider. Another justification for this tax expenditure is that it subsidizes third-party providers who furnish services that benefit society as a whole. In this case, the tax code underwrites private preschool (and child care) providers.

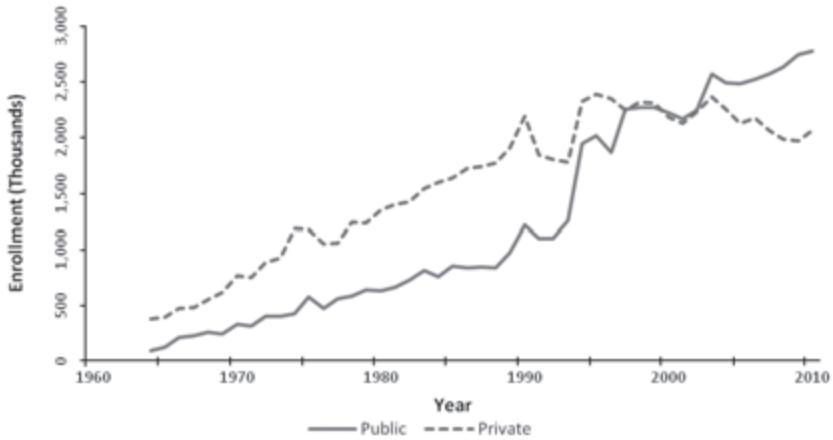


Fig. 1. Nursery school enrollment, 1964–2010. (Data from Current Population Survey.)

The second dimension along which preschool education in the United States differs from that of other countries is its public-sector decentralization. Government programs are administered at the national, state, and local levels. Dozens of national programs provide or support education and care for children under the age of five. They are administered by the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services, and other agencies. In addition, many programs exist at the state level. During the 2009–10 academic year, forty states funded one or more prekindergarten initiatives (Barnett et al. 2010). One scholar characterizes this crowded landscape of governmental activity as a “hodgepodge of federal, state, and local funding streams and regulations” (Finn 2009, 27). This book focuses on national and state initiatives. Decentralization is a defining attribute of preschool education in the United States, whereas countries like France operate more-centralized systems.

The decentralization of preschool education allows subnational officials to design and administer programs that are consistent with the needs or preferences of their jurisdictions. As a result, preschool programs in the United States vary widely in their eligibility requirements, quality standards, resources, and other characteristics. The states have been an especially important locus of policymaking in the early 2000s, with enrollment in and spending on public-sector programs rising considerably. During the 2005 legislative sessions, for example, officials in twenty-six states boosted preschool funding by a total of approximately six hundred

million dollars. In some states, including Colorado, Florida, Louisiana, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania, spending on preschool increased by at least 30 percent.¹² Although the economic recession that began in 2007 slowed the pace of change, the past two decades represent a period of significant state-level innovation in early childhood policy.

Many observers believe that this fragmented system produces undesirable outcomes. Reform advocates frequently describe the present patchwork approach as both administratively burdensome and counterproductive. According to the National Education Association, it is “out-of-date, inconsistent, and represents a tragically missed opportunity to improve children’s chances for success later in school.”¹³ A coalition of educational associations argued that a lack of program coordination “often results in duplicate services, a convoluted number of programs and policies that are largely divorced not only from each other but also from the K–12 system, and contradictory policies that ultimately are not in the best interest of taxpayers or children and their families.”¹⁴ Advocacy groups are not the only ones who worry about the negative impact of program fragmentation. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has described American preschool education as a “patchwork of services, regulations, and funding sources [that] leads to confusion, uneven quality, and inequality of access” (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2001, 184).¹⁵ The structure of American preschool education, in short, affects who gains access to programs and the quality of the services they receive.

In sum, preschool education in the contemporary United States is distinguished by its fragmentation. This complexity is a by-product of both its reliance on private-sector service providers and the decentralization of the government programs that do exist. The overlapping prerogatives of the private and public sectors and of national, state, and local governments result in an unusually complex system that many observers find problematic. During the late 1960s, neither Howe nor Quie foresaw the emergence of such complexity. How and why did preschool education in the United States take on its distinctive contemporary shape? That is the primary question that motivates this book.¹⁶ In other words, it offers a “political analysis” rather than a “policy analysis” of preschool education (Sroufe 1995). It does not assess the desirability of government involvement in this policy sector. Nor does it evaluate the effectiveness of the contemporary preschool system (though it does investigate the political impact of such program evaluations when relevant). Instead, this book seeks to illuminate how political factors contributed to the distinctive fea-

tures of the contemporary preschool system and what their impact reveals about the current prospects for significant reform.¹⁷

Such an endeavor seems especially important since so many actors agree that the status quo is undesirable. In light of this consensus, the stability of the fragmented system is somewhat puzzling.¹⁸ To explain its emergence and persistence, we must examine key policy decisions, the reactions they spawned, and the ways in which these decisions and reactions created stakeholders whose mobilization constrained subsequent possibilities for change. Only by treating policymaking as an iterative process that plays out over considerable periods of time is it possible to isolate the political origins of the contemporary American preschool system.

Policy Development and Preschool Education

The American preschool system was not put into place at a single moment in time by self-conscious politicians who believed that a combination of public-sector and private-sector programs was the most effective way to deliver services to young children. In order to explain the current system and its implications for future reform possibilities, it is necessary to treat policymaking as a long-term causal chain. In keeping with recent research on policy development (Pierson 2005; Hacker 2005), this book focuses on how early childhood policy unfolded over time. It argues that its contemporary fragmentation can be traced to the temporally distant events of the early 1970s. Three concepts help explain this long-term causal chain: critical junctures, venue shopping, and policy feedback.

Critical junctures are founding moments that fix into place basic political orientations and institutions. They are “periods of significant change that produce distinct legacies” (Mayes 2004, 5). Critical junctures establish the organizational logic of a social policy, and subsequent changes tend to be variations or extensions of that logic. They are important in and of themselves and because they have significant and long-lasting consequences. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several forces placed preschool education on the national political agenda. The mothers of young children entered the workforce in large numbers, cognitive psychology research suggested that the early years were a critical period for child development, and the political environment was conducive to major expansions of government activity.

In 1971, Congress considered the Comprehensive Child Development Act. The bill would have provided wide-ranging educational, nutritional,

and health services to preschool-aged children. Both supporters and opponents viewed it as a step toward the universal public provision of preschool services, precisely the kind of program envisioned by Howe in his April 1968 address. It marked a dramatic departure from the temporary targeted initiatives that characterized previous national government programs. The legislation passed both houses of Congress with bipartisan support, but President Richard Nixon vetoed the bill and denounced it in harsh terms, due in part to pressure from conservatives.

Existing scholarship correctly acknowledges the significance of Nixon's veto but underestimates its short- and long-term consequences. The early 1970s have been called "the high-water mark" in efforts to establish public responsibility for the education and care of young children (Beatty 1995, 199), and the veto itself has been recognized as a "watershed" moment (Olmsted 1992, 5; E. Rose 2010, 9). The veto was not the final word on the issue, because the demographic, intellectual, and political forces that had placed preschool education on the national agenda remained in effect. The veto therefore spurred a series of reactions and counterreactions that affected the subsequent evolution of American preschool education. The absence of a comprehensive national policy facilitated the growth of private-sector programs to meet growing demand for preschool services. Meanwhile, advocates of government intervention, frustrated by their prospects at the national level, turned to other institutional settings to pursue their goals. This dynamic is known as venue shopping.

Important public policy decisions are made in various institutional settings in the United States. This decentralization gives policy advocates an incentive to focus on the arena in which they are most likely to be successful. After losing a congressional battle, for example, reformers can turn to the executive branch or to the state or federal courts. They can shift their focus to another institutional setting because "there are no immutable rules that spell out which institutions in society must be charged with making decisions" (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 31). Venue shopping has long been recognized as an important element of the policymaking process.

Preschool advocates engaged in venue shopping after the veto of the Comprehensive Child Development Act. The coalition of interest groups supporting the bill had been unable to achieve their most ambitious goals at the national level, so some members shifted their attention to the states. The states represented fertile terrain for their efforts, because many state officials felt the vetoed legislation privileged localities and community organizations at their expense. They introduced numerous measures to allow greater governmental intervention in the education and care of young

children, and these measures bore substantial fruit. Several states established offices of child development or preschool projects or commenced preschool activity in the early to mid-1970s. In addition to this state-level innovation, preschool advocates refocused their congressional efforts and won several smaller victories at the national level. Head Start was placed on surer footing, and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit was dramatically expanded.

The successful venue shopping that occurred during the 1970s had profound long-term consequences. By succeeding in multiple venues, preschool advocates established the foundation for the fragmentation of the contemporary system. Their successes generated policy feedback. A key element of the developmental perspective, policy feedback is the notion that “policies with specific qualities can produce social effects that reinforce their own stability” (Pierson 2005, 37). The adoption of a public policy can facilitate the organization and empowerment of its beneficiaries, as these constituencies mobilize to protect it against attack and press for its extension. Policymakers who wish to alter the status quo often must overcome the opposition of groups that benefit from existing arrangements. Their political power can constrain the options that future generations of officials possess, and it can make the retrenchment of existing policies difficult (Pierson 1993, 1996). Three groups played such a role in preschool politics: state and local government officials, Head Start supporters, and private-sector preschool providers.

State and local officials generally value money and authority. When programs are established at the subnational level, officials with jurisdiction over them may defend their authority against encroachment by their counterparts at the national level. They may be loath to cede policymaking authority to actors in another institutional venue. Several state and local preschool programs were created during the early- to mid-1970s. They gave subnational officials a stake in this policy arena that they did not previously possess. When members of Congress later returned to the issue of preschool services, state and local officials appeared at congressional hearings to defend their prerogatives, urging Congress to provide more funding for existing state programs. They argued that the national government’s role should consist of agenda setting and financial support, that it should strengthen and not supplant state efforts. This form of policy feedback shifted the terms of the political debate and constrained reformers’ options. It proved difficult for congressional reformers to overcome the opposition of the policymakers empowered by existing arrangements.

In terms of its political impact, Head Start is the most important pre-

school program at the national level. It is a targeted program through which the national government distributes grants to local community organizations to provide health, nutrition, and other social services to disadvantaged children and their families while preparing the children for primary education.¹⁹ Head Start centers share a name, a mission, and a philosophy; receive training and technical assistance; and meet uniform performance standards. Established as part of the War on Poverty in 1965, Head Start maintained a tenuous existence during its early years. Supporters succeeded in placing the national program on surer footing in the 1970s, and today it retains strong public support (Vinovskis 2005; Zigler and Muenchow 1992).

The existence of Head Start mobilized another set of stakeholders. Head Start prioritizes parental and community involvement. It views parental involvement as a way both to empower parents and to educate and counsel them. In terms of planning and program governance, the families who participate in Head Start are an “integral part of the decision-making process” (Grotberg 1981, 12). Head Start also provides parents with career development opportunities. Historically, most of its employment and training efforts have focused on careers in early childhood (Zigler and Muenchow 1992, chap. 5). As a result, Head Start parents are staunch defenders of the program both because they value its educational and other services and because they are protecting their decision-making authority and their jobs.

The formation of the National Head Start Association (NHSA) in the early 1970s illustrates how public policies can lead to the organization of their beneficiaries. The organization viewed defending Head Start as its primary mission. Ironically, its formation contributed to a fissure within the early childhood policy community. The NHSA, like other Head Start supporters, has frequently called for additional public investment in preschool but tends to view new programs as a financial and existential threat. This competitive dynamic has affected preschool politics at both the national and the state level.

Finally, the importance of private-sector preschool providers is an outgrowth of the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. The tax credit dates to 1954, when the federal tax code was revised to allow a tax deduction for employment-related expenses for dependent care. Eligibility was initially limited to gainfully employed women, widowers, and legally separated or divorced men. The Revenue Act of 1971 made any individual maintaining a household eligible, raised the deduction limit, modified the legal definition of a dependent, and raised the income level at which the deduction

began to be phased out. These changes sought to provide tax relief to middle- and low-income taxpayers. Additional reforms in 1975 and 1976 nearly doubled the income limit for phasing out the deduction and replaced the deduction with a nonrefundable tax credit. It was believed that these reforms would benefit taxpayers in the lower brackets by expanding the tax credit's reach to those who did not itemize deductions.²⁰

The number of returns on which the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit was claimed more than doubled between 1976 and 1988, and the aggregate amount of credit claimed rose even more sharply.²¹ In 2008, an average credit of \$535 was claimed on 6.587 million returns.²² Credit claimants are not the only source of policy feedback. The tax credit is politically significant because it facilitated the growth of early childhood services in the private sector. These private-sector programs met the needs of many middle- and upper-income families, making those groups less likely to demand further governmental action (Morgan 2006; E. Rose 2010). Even more important, the service providers themselves emerged as key stakeholders and active participants in preschool politics.²³ Providers “grew into a constituency to be reckoned with when questions about public funding for young children moved onto federal and state agendas” (E. Rose 2010, 224). They often lobbied Congress and state legislatures to protect their interests. Most public programs therefore incorporate private-sector providers for both logistical and political reasons. As a result, recent reforms tend to preserve, rather than mitigate, the fragmentation of the contemporary preschool system.

In sum, the main argument of this book is that the contemporary structure of preschool education in the United States can be traced to developments in the early 1970s. A critical juncture occurred in 1971, when Nixon vetoed legislation that would have provided a permanent framework for the universal provision of preschool services. The absence of a comprehensive national policy, in combination with revisions in the federal tax code, contributed to the growth of the private sector. Meanwhile, supporters of increased public investment, largely stymied at the national level, engaged in venue shopping in disparate institutional settings. Their successes at the state level and their ability to put national programs like Head Start on more-secure political footing had important long-term political consequences, because the constituencies who benefited from these arrangements subsequently mobilized to defend the status quo. Lobbying by state officials, Head Start supporters, and third-party providers in the private sector made it more difficult for the national government to adopt a more unified approach to the provision of preschool services. Subse-

quent political discussions therefore occurred on a different political terrain than had the discussions of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In short, the venue shopping that occurred after a critical juncture generated policy feedback that both contributed to the contemporary fragmentation of American preschool education and constrained reformers' options as they sought major policy change.

Plan of This Book

In recent years, many scholars have noted the unusual blend of public and private social benefits that characterizes social policymaking in the United States (Gottschalk 2000; Hacker 2002; Howard 2007). Indeed, the private sector plays an essential role in preschool education. Moreover, the targeted and residual nature of existing public programs also resonates with conventional portrayals of the American welfare state (Michel 1999, 9). Scholars have advanced several explanations of American social policy, and chapter 1 of this book assesses their applicability to preschool education. It examines the strengths and weaknesses of accounts based on political culture, interest group politics, and the institutional structure of the American political system. Each of these perspectives helps explain elements of preschool politics, yet none of them provides a complete and convincing account. They are largely static explanations that cannot capture the dynamism that characterizes this policy arena. Explaining the origins and contemporary complexity of American preschool education requires a developmental perspective that treats the making of public policy as a long-term causal chain. Chapter 1 describes the merits of the developmental approach and three of its central concepts. It argues that critical junctures, venue shopping, and policy feedback help account for the emergence and persistence of the contemporary preschool system.

In keeping with the developmental perspective, the remaining chapters of this book proceed chronologically. Chapter 2 describes American early childhood policy prior to the late 1960s. These historical episodes represent the antecedent conditions against which the impact of a critical juncture must be assessed (Collier and Collier 1991). The emergency nursery schools of the New Deal, the wartime child care centers of the 1940s, and Head Start shared two key attributes. They were targeted and temporary (Beatty 1995; Lazerson 1972; Slobdin 1975). They neither promoted universal access to preschool services nor established the framework for a permanent national policy.²⁴

The Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971 broke sharply with the past, because it attempted to create a permanent national framework for the universal provision of preschool services. Chapter 2 concludes by examining the demographic, intellectual, and political forces that placed this landmark proposal on the national agenda, and chapter 3 describes the remarkable political dynamics that surrounded it. After extensive debate and negotiations, the bill received bipartisan congressional support only to be vetoed and denounced in very harsh language. The veto is a critical juncture because it provoked responses in alternate institutional venues that affected the subsequent evolution of American preschool evolution.

When examining critical junctures, scholars must distinguish between their aftermath and their heritage (Collier and Collier 1991, 8). The aftermath of critical junctures refers to their immediate and short-term consequences. Chapters 4 and 5 analyze the aftermath of Nixon's veto. The early and mid-1970s included important developments both at the state level, the subject of chapter 4, and in Congress, the subject of chapter 5. State officials, due to prodding by preschool advocates and their own belief that the vetoed legislation privileged other actors at their expense, expanded their involvement in early childhood policy. Meanwhile, various initiatives faltered in Congress. Preschool advocates scored important victories by creating or defending more-limited governmental interventions, but these victories, in combination with the state activity described in chapter 4, contributed to the dissolution of the coalition that had come together to support comprehensive change. They both fragmented public-sector activity and gave disparate actors conflicting stakes in existing arrangements.

The heritage of a critical juncture refers to its long-term consequences and the extent to which it affects temporally distant events. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 examine the heritage of Nixon's veto. Chapter 6 examines the limited policy changes that occurred at both the national and state level during the 1980s. Preschool advocates made little progress, in part because they were unable to coalesce into a unified force for reform. They agreed on the merits of additional public investment but disagreed on the form that it should take. Those who benefited from existing arrangements often viewed both comprehensive and incremental reforms as threats to their interests.

Over the last two decades, early childhood policy has received substantial attention from national and state policymakers. Chapter 7 describes the demographic, intellectual, and political factors that returned the topic

to the political agenda. It then turns to recent congressional discussions of preschool education and demonstrates how previous policy decisions constrained policymakers' and reformers' options. Congress held several hearings that suggest a general interest in preschool education but evince little interest in an expanded national government role. The hearings focused on program coordination and the perceived deficiencies of the fragmented status quo. They both invoked administrative concerns and highlighted the political challenges involved in altering existing arrangements. Despite bipartisan agreement on the need for reform, the past two decades have been a period of limited congressional innovation.

Chapter 8 assesses the long-term consequences of Nixon's veto at the state level. In recent years, state officials have endorsed new preschool initiatives and expanded access to and increased spending on existing programs. This extensive state-level activity caused multiple scholars to identify the emergence of a preschool movement (Finn 2009; Fuller 2007, 5; Kirp 2007, 100). Chapter 8 combines secondary and case study evidence with a quantitative analysis of preschool funding decisions to illustrate how the existing slate of service providers affected early childhood policymaking. The major state-level shifts of the late 1990s and early 2000s built on or combined existing public and private programs, an approach that was a logistical and political necessity.

The concluding chapter of this book draws two types of lessons. First, it reassesses the developmental approach to the study of American social policy. Foundational concepts of this approach, including critical junctures, venue shopping, and policy feedback, help explain the fragmentation that characterizes the contemporary preschool system. The developments profiled in this book suggest that scholars should examine a wider range of programs and time periods in their efforts to develop generalizations about policymaking in the United States. They also suggest that scholars should devote more attention to the interactive relationship between episodes at the national and state level, to the role of subnational units as autonomous actors in a federal system, and to policy variation among the American states.

The second set of lessons with which this book concludes is more speculative. The past fifteen years have been a period of heightened interest in the education and care of young children. State and national officials have considered several different approaches to service delivery. Many states have acted, Congress has held multiple hearings on the issue, and some gubernatorial and presidential candidates have pledged to create voluntary prekindergarten programs for all four-year-olds. The evolution of

American preschool education, however, suggests that contemporary advocates of greater governmental involvement face significant hurdles. The prospects for a comprehensive and unified approach are not as bright as they were when Howe and Quie made their respective predictions in the late 1960s. A more diverse and entrenched set of constituencies now has a stake in preschool education, and accommodating them in pursuit of policy change will not be an easy task.