the National Education Goals were incorporated into law in March 1994 when the 103rd Congress passed Goals 2000: Educate America Act.

Three objectives were established to meet the School Readiness Goal that "by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn:

1. All children will have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare children for school.
2. Every parent in the United States will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping such parent's preschool child learn, and parents will have access to the training and support parents need.
3. Children will receive the nutrition, physical activity experiences, and health care needed to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies, and to maintain the mental alertness necessary to be prepared to learn, and the number of low-birthweight babies will be significantly reduced through enhanced prenatal health systems." (National Education Goals Panel 1994, 8)

## Public Libraries and the School Readiness Goal

The relationship between public libraries and the school readiness goal is an ideal and natural partnership for four major reasons:

1. From a professional standpoint, public libraries already have identified themselves in that crucial role. Preparing preschoolers for learning was identified as one of the eight major roles that libraries can play in their communities in the Public Library Ass5a7/MC6lons:

kindergarten children (Heaviside and Farris 1995). Forty percent of those libraries also offer group programs for infants and toddlers, an increase from 29% in 1988. Sixty-six percent work directly with preschools, and 56% work with day care centers. Clearly, public libraries already accept their role in providing readiness activities for preschoolers.

4. From a practical viewpoint, public libraries are at the hub of community-wide efforts. In Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the most impoverished rural and urban communities are targeted for community partnerships to support "sustained collaborations" among a variety of educational, community, and business agencies. Libraries are specifically mentioned as appropriate agencies for these collaborations (U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science 1992, 136–37). One might conclude that *every* community serviced by a public library should make that library an integral part of any plan designed to be community-wide and comprehensive, because the nature of public library service is to meet the specific needs of the individuals in the whole community that library serves.

## Literacy As the Main Focus of the Public Library-School Readiness Partnership

Although libraries and librarians can and should support a wide array of developmental needs associated with getting preschoolers ready for school (e.g., physical health by providing relevant material and community resource referrals), the major focus of this paper is on the public library's contribution to school readiness through the provision of literacy experiences for preschoolers and the support of parents' and caregivers' efforts to provide those experiences. Support for this focus on literacy is drawn from four sources:

1. The National Education Goals Panel (1994) selected 16 indicators for measuring the attainment and progress of the 8 National Education Goals. Four of those indicators were assigned to the School Readiness Goal—two pertaining to children's health and two pertaining to children's learning. "Participation in preschool programs" and "family-child reading and storytelling" are the two learning indicators, the latter being the prime pathway for children becoming literate. It is clear that the Panel judges literacy as a significant aspect of readiness since the indicators were selected based on characteristics such as comprehensiveness across all goals, how critical indicators are in determining whether the goals are actually achieved, and how "policy-actionable" they are. The Panel's 1994 report, *Building a Nation of Learners,* states that "early, regular reading to children is one of the most important activities parents can do with their children to improve their readiness for school, serve as their chos(hi)-12 p-6(h).023 0 Td   [(s)-1(fr)3(i)-2ors(t)-2(e) s anddreadi g(hi)-12 24 (24)c

**Readiness**

Scaffolding works best when the adult is able to lead the child just a bit ahead, provide a pace for learning that suits the child, use familiar contexts, and keep the child an active participant. Even the very young child who actively participates in scaffolding is taking an important step in lifelong learning, one that allows instruction from others to be an important part of his or her development.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposes that a child's development is affected by interactions within, between, and among various contextual settings ranging from those in which the child interacts nearly daily (e.g., family, child care center, and neighborhood playground) to those that are more removed but affect the child directly and indirectly (e.g., social service systems, parents' place of employment, and local, state, and national governments). This theory of development matches the philosophical wisdom of the African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child."

Bandura's (1977, 1986) work in social learning theory contributes much evidence on the power of learning by imitation, one of the primary methods of acquiring literacy. For example, at the most basic level, early readers tend to come from homes where reading can be observed. Bandura's research on imitational learning informs practitioners that children are more likely to imitate models who are similar to them and are respected members of their community.

In summary, learning is facilitated when children have the following:

1. Opportunities to participate in literacy activities that are guided and paced by a more skillful member of the child's social-cultural world (Vygotsky 1978; Bruner 1983).
2. Opportunities for learning that enable the child to be an active participant, regardless of the modality being used (e.g., listening, looking, speaking) (Bruner 1983).
3. Opportunities for intimate learning; that is, learning with support from someone who knows the child well enough to make appropriate judgments about when and what the next learning steps should be (Bruner 1983). The emphasis on parents as first teachers in Goals 2000 is certainly supported by this aspect of Bruner's theory (Goals Panel 1994, 8).
4. Opportunities to acquire positive literacy attitudes through interacting with and observing models who will be most influential for individual learners, especially those models who share similar characteristics with the learner, and whom the learner respects and admires (Bandura 1977). The importance of acquiring a positive "literacy attitude" is amply demonstrated in much of the emergent literacy literature (Morrow 1993, 132–33).
5. Opportunities for support for learning that resides not just in their families and schools, but across a range of cultural contexts that directly and indirectly influence children's development (Bronfenbrenner 1979).

## Research Findings

While developmental and learning theories offer broad guidelines for evaluating and planning literacy programs, this section includes several findings about specific, effective practices in support of the theoretical conclusions. These findings may also serve as recommended practices for librarians designing programs. While there is a large body of research addressing the topic of effective techniques in support of early literacy development, this section focuses on practices derived from literature reviews and from more than one study; practices that seem possible to adapt to librarians working with children, families, and caregivers; and practices that are related to the roles that librarians can reasonably serve.

Some research findings regarding children's books follow:

1. Children's early experiences with children's books are among the most significant correlates with their success in learning to read in school. Specific aspects of these books, such as the interest level for children and ease of understanding and remembering the story, make the experience even more effective (Mason and Kerr 1992; Morrow 1993).
2. Children are more motivated to request being read to, and to "read" or explore on their own, from books with which they are already familiar or have heard or read before and have enjoyed (Brock and Dodd 1994; Dickinson et al. 1992; Herb 1987; Schickedanz 1993).
3. There is a positive relationship between how much children have been read to and how well they will read (Lancy 1994; Scarborough, Dobrich, and Hager 1991; Wells 1985).
4. Storybook reading is a more effective influence on literacy development when children have opportunities to engage in conversation about the story (Mason and Kerr 1992; Norman-Jackson 1982; Pellegrini and Galda 1994).

The research also produced findings regarding additional literacy factors:

1. Children benefit most from the opportunity to interact with on-the-spot literacy events in their everyday lives, such as watching for the McDonald's sign along the highway, finding a correct page in a catalog, or looking at one's own name on an envelope or name tag (Taylor and Strickland 1989; Teale 1995).
2. Literacy is enhanced when adults join in with children's pretend or symbolic play; for example, playing restaurant or playing school (Norman-Jackson 1982; Pellegrini and Galda 1994).

In addition to guiding library practice in programming for preschoolers, these findings also might suggest content for workshops in which librarians, parents, caregivers, and preschool teachers share techniques for enhancing children's literacy.

# Children at Risk for Difficulties in Acquiring Literacy

Identification of the variables or conditions associated with difficulty in literacy acquisition is a good first step toward assuring that all children find a successful pathway to literacy.

## The Socioeconomic Status Factor

The socioeconomic circumstances of a child's world can interact with a child's literacy development in many ways. Hart and Risley have found that one of the most frightening ways econcomic circumstances affect a child's literacy development is through the relative frequency of social interaction between parents and young children. As Bloom points out in her foreword to *Meaningful Differences* (Hart and Risley 1995):

> Hart and Risley discovered that some things don't matter [in literacy development]. For example, race/ethnicity doesn't matter; gender doesn't matter; whether a child is the first in the family or born later also doesn't matter. But what does matter, and it matters very much, is relative economic advantage. First, . . . children living in poverty, children born into middle-class homes, and children with professional parents *all have the same kinds*

*of everyday language experiences.* They all hear talk about persons and things, about relationships, actions, and feelings, and about past and future events. And they all participate in interactions with others in which what they do is prompted, responded to, prohibited, or affirmed. But children in more economically privileged families hear some of these things more often and others less often, than children in poverty and working-class homes. The differences between the families . . . were not in the kinds of experiences they provided their children but in the differing amounts of those experiences. The basic finding is that children who learn fewer words also have fewer experiences with words in interactions with other persons, and they are also children growing up in less economically advantaged homes . . . It turns out that *frequency matters* . . . And the finding is heartbreaking that by the time the children were 3 years old, *parents* in less economically favored circumstances had said fewer different words in their cumulative monthly vocabularies than had the *children* in the most economically advantaged families in the same period of time (x–xiii).

Poorer preschool children and those from working-class homes are also less likely to have children's books in their homes, are less likely to be read to frequently and at an early age, are less likely to have opportunities to talk about books with an adult, and are less likely to have opportunities to engage in imaginative storytelling (Mason and Kerr 1992).

The effects of poverty on a child's learning history may continue into a child's schooling as well. McGill-Franzen and Langford (1994), in case studies of preschool children and their teachers,

--

34% between 1973 and 1992. The statistics also reveal a disproportionate number (54%) of poor children living in families with a single parent, typically the mother (Children's Defense Fund 1995). To have any hope of succeeding, emergent literacy programming efforts must address the particular circumstances of the single-parent family.

## Children Who Are Ethnic and Language Minorities

Some children who are members of ethnic and language minority groups are found to be at risk for difficulties with acquiring literacy for the following reasons:

1. The lack of congruity between the expectations and routines of the school curriculum and the children's entry knowledge, ways of knowing, and experiences (Gutierrez 1993).
2. Their disproportionate representation among children living in poverty. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that in 1992, black children were almo-cul( r)38[(s)-1( ew 14.04 0

- x Many children are cared for away from their homes. For example, 60% of married women with children under 6 years work. Approximately 57% of their children are cared for in child care homes or child care centers. Concerns continue to grow about the appropriateness of the care children receive as
    - o professional standards for quality care are not in wide compliance,
    - o researchers studying family child care homes have observed care so poor in some that they believe it may actually harm children's development, and
    - o poor and minority children are more likely to be in lower quality child care situations (Children's Defense Fund 1996, 25–33).
- x Concerns about the expertise and consistency of nurturance among staff in child care settings grow in proportion to the escalating staff turnover and in inverse proportion to hildre s-1( d)-10(e

4.  The Children's Defense Fund (1995) reports that each year between 3.3 and 10 million children are exposed to domestic violence (depending on definition of violence).
5.  The estimated number of children with serious emotional disorders now exceeds 3 million, many of whom go unserved (Children's Defense Fund 1996).

## Successful Intervention Strategies for Children Who Are at Risk for Failing to Acquire Literacy

These intervention strategies are drawn from two types of studies—intervention programs for at-

o Children acquire literacy better when their literacy experiences build on their existing knowledge, strengths, and interests, instead of participating in

4. Help children's families and caregivers recognize and find ways to support children's literacy growth through daily routines and events (including storybook reading, pretend play, and participating in everyday family activities that involve reading, writing, speaking, and listening).

## Additional Practices Derived from Literature Regarding Children At Risk

1. Make literacy a part of all broad-based family intervention programs in the community. Help make the public library an active part of the community network of service providers who work with children and families in need.
2. Provide literacy experiences that
   o   are characterized by all the specific practices recommended for all children;
   o

In 1995, ALSC President Therese Bigelow's message to the members highlighted the division's continued dedication to the welfare of children, as represented in ALSC's new motto: "Preparing the nation's children today for the world of tomorrow" (Bigelow 1995, 1). In that same issue of the *ALSC Newsletter,* the division's Goals and Objectives for the New Millennium were recorded. Emphasizing and extending the *Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Public Libraries,* much of the content in these goals underscores ALSC's knowledgeable advocacy of education for early literacy. Inclu dento tlss unTJ   -0.004 ns4TJ   0Tc 0 Tw -04.93 -1.eT1   [(C)-3l

neighborhood dangers. Nespeca concludes that more research should be conducted to find out how to meet the serious literacy needs of lower income families, and suggests a stronger outreach component for public libraries. One mother in the study suggested that the libraries should have workshops for Head Start parents, a suggestion at the very heart of the Library-Museum-

Expanding on existing national programs (e.g., the U.S. Department of Education's Read!Write!Now! summer program), the America Reads Challenge focuses on activating an army of tutors, including college students in work-study jobs, to finally draw the line in the sand across which no illiterate child may pass. Another major focus of America Reads is actively promoting the crucial idea that the parent is a child's first teacher, and that every effort should be made to work through families. The Prescription for Reading Partnership is poised to be an active component of the America Reads Challenge across the nation.

First Book. Established in the spring of 1992, in recognition of the "central role played by underdeveloped literacy skills in social problems including poverty, hunger, unemployment, drug addition, and crime," First Book's (1996) primary goal is distributing new books to children at risk of failing in school or at risk of failing to develop adequate literacy skills to succeed in life. Two of First Book's great strengths are its ability to work with existing community-based programs that already focus on family-oriented literacy efforts through tutoring and mentoring and the practice of involving children's librarians on local First Book boards. From the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's "Ready to Learn" Initiative [Goal: To ensure that by the Year 2000, all children enter school ready to learn], which places board members in contact with local PBS stations throughout the country, to their scores of partnerships with funders, publishers, booksellers, and professional organizations, First Book's national impact has been felt in the heart of America—the home, where a child's first book now occupies its rightful place of importance.

## Some Community Success Stories

Beginning with Books. Pittsburgh's "Beginning with Books" program turned 16 this year, and during these years has placed more than 200,000 quality books in the hands of young children and their families and provided "countless hours of informal counseling or more intensive training on why, how, and what to read to young children" (Turning Pages 1995). In 1984, project directors Elizabeth Segel and Joan Friedberg began this program of prevention-oriented literacy in an effort to reach children and families who were unserved and unaware of the value of good literature in nurturing early literlnd f   [(B)7(e)-6(g)ente260( Phr)3(s)-4(r)uts E47(e)4( t)h 2(hi)-24-6(e)f

recommended methods and philosophies mirror the conclusions presented in the early literacy framework. The longevity and success of the project help to establish that the guidelines set forth in the framework are sound from a theoretical, as well as a practical, perspective.

Targeting Child Care Providers. Donna Dengel, the early childhood specialist at the Multnomah County Library i c-4(.)ai lap boo4(o6RT)]T(ad)-4(r)1(o)-14(vi)-4(.)(p)-14-4(r)Flundatm la l(i)a drp 9()-6(ced0(

3. Sufficient budget, resources and staff to adequately serve the literacy needs of all of the communities' preschool children, their parents, teachers, and caregivers—those who enter the library building, and those who are unable to visit but still need the library's resources and the children's librarian's skills.

4. Continuous assessment of the climate of the public library to help ensure the success of its mission of providing equal access to all its services. Barriers to equitable service delivery often develop accidentally because of convenience or tradition. An ongoing examination of the climate of the public library might include reviews of personnel and hiring policies, collection development and selection policies, and staff development and service practices—these are among the many elements affecting public library service to preschoolers.

# Summary

A comparison of public libraries'

Derman-Sparks, Louise. 1989. *Anti-bias curriculum: Tools for empowering young children.* Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Des Enfants, Sherry (Norfolk). 1994. Libraries can serve homeless children: Project Horizons. *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries* 7, no. 3 (Spring): 259–64.

Dickinson, David K., Jean M. DeTemple, Julie Hirschler, and Miriam W. Smith. 1992. Book reading with preschoolers: Coconstruction of text at home and at school. *Early Childhood Research QuarterlyV0 Twochlen: H4(tee(S)6(pr)3(i)-2(ng)10())3(:)-2( 259)]TJ (–)Tj (64.)Tj 10.6 0 Td ( )Tj*

Sacks, Oliver. 1987. *The man who mistook his wife for a hat and other clinical tales.* New York: Harper.

Sanders, Barry. 1994. *A is for ox: Violence, electronic media, and the silencing of the written word.* New York: Pantheon.

Vygotsky, Lev S. 1978. *Mind in society, the development of higher psychological processes,* edited by M. Cole, V. John-