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4TH EDITION

# Introduction to Early Childhood Education

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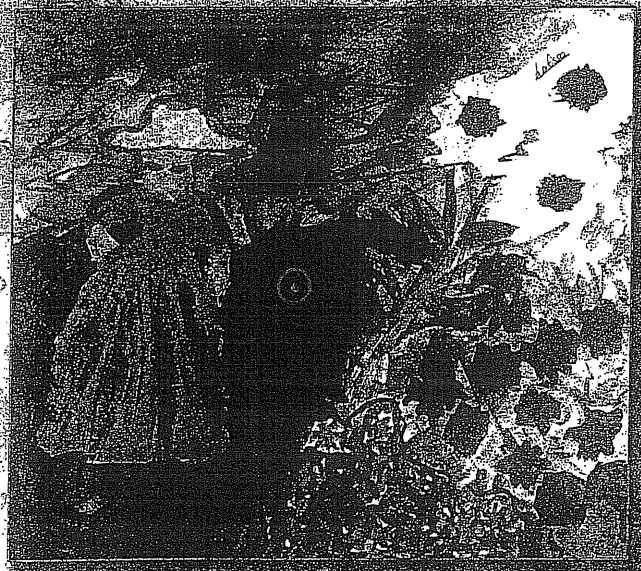


Annotated Student's Edition

CHAPTER 1

# The Scope of and Need for Early Childhood Education

The profession you are exploring through this text and the course in which you are enrolled is **early childhood education.** Just what is this field? What does it encompass? What does it involve? Why is it important? What is its place in today's society? What is its future? There is so much to discuss about early childhood education, so much to share. As you begin learning about this field of study, the answers to some of these questions will gain greater significance and become more focused. This chapter presents an overview of the field of early childhood education.

## THE GROWTH OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Although the importance and value of education in the early years of life have been acknowledged for more than 2,000 years (Carter, 1987), relatively recent factors have brought early childhood education to the forefront of public awareness. Fundamental changes in the economy, family life, public awareness, and public support have had a profound effect on early childhood education. You have undoubtedly seen the recent newspaper headlines and national magazine covers that have directed a spotlight on child care. Much of their focus has been on changes in family life that have brought about the need for child care outside the home. These changes include many complex factors such as a rising cost of living, an increased number of dual-income families, an increase in single-parent families, an increased number of teenage parents, greater mobility as families move more readily to different parts of the country, and a decrease in the impact of the extended family.

The needs of working families are not the only reason early childhood has been in the public focus. Over the past several decades, the success of publicly funded programs such as Head Start has shown us that high-quality early educational intervention can



Today, an increasing number of women in their childbearing years are in the work force. It is estimated that almost 60 percent of mothers of young children work, requiring some form of child care for their children. What will the percentage of working mothers be as we enter a new century? Experts predict a continuing rise.

**early childhood education**—Term encompassing developmentally appropriate programs that serve children from birth through age eight; a field of study that trains students to work effectively with young children.

combat poverty and dysfunction. There has also been increased attention to the needs of special populations of young children and how to bring them into the the mainstream of society, for instance, children who are disabled, abused, or culturally different. In addition, recent research on the amazingly complex and rapid development of very young children's brains has given us much greater insight into the importance of the early years.

Finally, many professionals are outspoken and eloquent advocates for the rights of children.

Life like this !!!

## Changes in Family Life

KEY POINT

Increasing numbers of women are entering the work force. Almost 60 percent of mothers of preschoolers now work and require child care for their youngsters.

"Typical" family life has changed considerably since the end of World War II. Demographic information indicates that increasing numbers of women are entering the work force. No longer do most mothers stay at home to rear their young children. Economic necessity forces many families to rely on two paychecks because one simply does not provide for all of their financial needs. In other families, both parents work because of the desire for personal and professional development rather than from economic need.

Whereas in 1950 only 12 percent of the mothers of children under six worked, that number has risen to about two-thirds of these mothers (Children's Defense Fund, 2000). This growth in the number of families in which both parents work has dramatically increased the need for child care.

KEY POINT

There are significantly more single parents today than ever before, mostly because of the increase in divorce. These parents need care for their children while they work.

Another family change that has affected the demand for child care is the increase in the number of single parents. The majority of single-parent families are created through divorce. The divorce rate has been steadily increasing. At the beginning of the millennium, 56 percent of the adult population was married and living with a spouse (Bureau of the Census, 2000). The increase in divorce has been steadily rising, and is almost 15 percent higher now than it was just 30 years ago. The divorced single parent who has custody of the children is probably the mother . . ., although an increasing number of fathers now gain custody or joint custody of their children. Not only will she experience a significant decrease in income and standard of living, but she

will also, most likely, have to work (or work longer hours) to support the family. Of course, to work outside the home, the single parent needs to find appropriate child care. In addition to the increased number of families headed by a divorced, single parent is a growing number of never-married parents, some still finishing their high school education. Today, far more teenage mothers opt to keep their babies than in past years. They also need child care while they are at school or work.

A third change in family life is the increasing mobility of many of today's families. Work demands cause some families to move away from relatives who might otherwise provide support. Family mobility, involving only the small **nuclear family,** has contributed to the declining influence of the **extended family,** that network of relatives such as grandparents, uncles and aunts, or adult brothers and sisters beyond the immediate family.

KEY POINT

Families today move more than families did in the past. Mobility takes them away from relatives who might have been available to provide child care while the parents work.

**nuclear family**—The smallest family unit, made up of a couple or one or two parents with child(ren).

**extended family**—Family members beyond the immediate nuclear family; for instance, aunts and uncles, grandparents, or cousins.

Until relatively recently, the most prevalent form of child care was that provided by a relative. Parental and relative care, combined, continue to be most widely used for infants and toddlers, although center care for this age group has been increasing, and is now the norm for almost half of all preschoolers (Capizzano, Adams, & Sonnenstein, 2000). In the mid-1970s, less than 10 percent of infants and toddlers and 20 percent of preschoolers were in center care. Two decades later, that number jumped to 24 percent of children under three and 45 percent of preschoolers (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). This change in family support is another reason for the increased demand for outside child care.

Changes such as increasing numbers of dual-income families and single-parent families, and a decline in the impact of the extended family, have dramatically raised the demand for child care and brought early childhood education to the forefront of public attention. "Child care is now as essential to family life as the automobile or the refrigerator. . . . [T]he majority of families, including those with infants, require child care to support parental employment" (Scarr, Phillips, & McCartney, 1990, p. 26).

## Benefits of Early Childhood Education

The need for child care among working parents makes early childhood education a topic of national prominence, but this is not the only reason for its increasing importance. On a parallel though separate track, there has been extensive discussion and research about the benefits of early education for special populations of children and families. Thus, children from low-income families, children with disabilities, and children at risk for other reasons have been enrolled in publicly funded programs. Since the mid-1960s, federal, state, and local support has increased as a result of mounting evidence that high-quality early childhood programs can and do make a long-term difference that carries into adulthood. Researchers have concluded that good early childhood programs not only improve the lives of the children and families involved but also result in substantial economic benefits for society. Although early intervention programs are expensive, their cost is more than recovered in subsequent years through greater schooling success, decreased need for special education, lowered delinquency and arrest rates, and decreased welfare dependence (Barnett, 1996; Schweinhart

KEY POINT

Research has shown that good early childhood education programs have a lasting effect on children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

KEY POINT

Investment in early intervention programs has substantial social and financial benefits for society.



Research has shown that programs such as Head Start offer many positive benefits for children from low-income families.

& Weikart, 1997). We will discuss more specific aspects of some of this research in Chapter 5.

## Child Advocacy

KEY POINT

Many professionals participate in child advocacy, bringing to public and legislative attention the needs of children and families in poverty as well as the need for affordable child care for families with moderate incomes.

KEY QUESTIONS

If you were given "three wishes" to bring about changes for young children and their families, what would they be? Share these with others in your class. From a combined list, develop several child and family issues that you think child advocates might address.

**child advocacy**—Political and legislative activism by professionals to urge change in social policies affecting children.

A third factor that has brought early childhood education into the public consciousness is the urgency with which many professionals view the plight of increasing numbers of children and families. Of particular concern are the many families that face abject poverty, lacking the most basic necessities. Yet the social problems reach beyond the needs of the poor, to working parents with moderate incomes who are beset by the scarcity of affordable, high-quality care. Dr. T. Berry Brazelton (1990), a well-known pediatrician and child advocate, concludes that America is failing its children because they are subject to more deprivations than any other segment of society. As the poorest group in America, 20 to 25 percent of children live in poverty.

In its 2000 yearbook on the state of America's children, the Children's Defense Fund expresses deep concern about the number of children who grow up in poverty:

> How long will we stand mute and indifferent in a nine trillion dollar economy as poverty, poor health and housing, poor education, and family and community disintegration rob millions of our children's lives and futures; gnaw at their bellies; chill their bodies and spirits to the bone; scratch away their resilience; snatch away their families and sense of security; and make some of them wish they had never been born? When has the time ever been riper to end immoral child poverty, hunger, and homelessness and to make America a safe and compassionate home for all our children? (Children's Defense Fund, 2000, p. xi)

Organizations such as the Children's Defense Fund and the National Association for the Education of Young Children actively advocate children's rights. Their frequent lobbying for children's rights through **child advocacy** in the nation's capital has promoted legislation related to child care, mandatory education for children with disabilities, Head Start, health care for poor children, and other vital services. It was largely through their efforts that the ABC Bill (Act for Better Child Care) was developed and presented to Congress in the late 1980s. In its 1990 session, Congress finally passed a child care bill that succeeded to

a large extent because of the relentless effort of thousands of early childhood professionals and other advocates who inundated members of Congress with letters, visits, and phone calls (Mann, 1991). This legislation, however, achieved only part of what was originally envisioned by those who advocated it. In 2000, Congress passed a budget that included large increases for child care, Head Start, and other early childhood programs, largely because of the efforts of child lobbyists.

The needs of children and families have become political concerns. They have come to the attention of both political leaders and the public through the astute efforts of those dedicated to advocating the rights of children, including early childhood professionals. But there is a continuing need to promote a common concern for the welfare of all children. Based on current trends, researchers predict that the problems facing children and families will intensify, the gap between the well-to-do and the poor will widen, and the number of children who grow up in poverty will increase (Halpern, 1987).

## WHAT IS INCLUDED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION?

We have looked at some of the concerns that have made early childhood education, as one aspect of the needs and welfare of young children, a current issue. But early childhood education is a broad term and includes a variety of approaches and programs. We will now examine some of the ways in which this term is used and some of the classifications into which programs can be grouped.

**KEY POINT**

Early childhood education programs can be defined by their purpose. The main purpose of many programs is child care. The goal of others is enrichment. A third category includes programs whose main aim is compensation for some lack in the children's backgrounds.

### Purpose of Programs

We have already touched on some basic differences in programs that stem from their underlying thrust. The major purpose of many programs is to care for children while their parents work. The rapid rise in recent years in the number of children in full-day care, either in child care centers or in family child care homes, has paralleled the increasing prevalence of working mothers. The primary goal of child care programs is to provide safe and nurturing care in a developmentally appropriate setting for children.

Enrichment is a second aim, prevalent particularly in part-time preschools. Such programs usually include specific activities to enhance socialization, cognitive skills, or the overall development of young children. The underlying notion is that children will benefit from experiences that they may not receive at home; for instance, participating in group activities, playing with a group of age-mates, or learning specific concepts from specially trained teachers.

**KEY QUESTION**

Visit an early childhood program in your community and share this information with other members of your class who have visited different programs. Classify the programs according to their characteristics; for instance, purpose, setting, ages of children served, and source of support. Does your community have a variety of programs? Which types of programs predominate? What family needs are met by these programs?

A recent phenomenon that has proliferated is **hothousing**, an apt term that has become popular. Hothousing is aimed at accelerating some aspect of young children's development and is of considerable concern to many early childhood professionals. It differs from enrichment by the nature of its activities and by its lack of developmental appropriateness. Programs that are highly didactic, have high teacher control, focus on "right" answers, and expect children to perform inappropriate academic tasks have been found to be harmful to young children.

**hothousing**—Term taken from horticulture in which plant growth is speeded up by forced fertilization, heat, and light; refers to accelerated learning programs for young children.



Many young children are cared for in family child care homes rather than in center-based care facilities. Typically, family child care homes have children of various ages, spanning infancy through the preschool years.

Most disturbing is that such programs result in stress and undermine the children's sense of motivation and initiative (Stipek, Feiler, Daniels, & Milburn, 1995). Such programs are generally designed to meet the expectations of "upwardly mobile 'yuppie' parents, who want designer diapers and designer degrees in Greek, Suzuki, and computer programming for their infants" (Clarke-Stewart, 1988, p. 147).

A third major purpose, found particularly in publicly funded programs, is compensation. Compensatory programs are designed to make up or compensate for some lack in children's backgrounds. The basic philosophy of programs such as Head Start is to provide experiences that will help children enter the mainstream of society more successfully. Such experiences include a range of services, encompassing early childhood education, health and dental care, nutrition, and parent education.

These categories, although descriptive of some underlying differences among programs, are not mutually exclusive. Few child care centers are concerned with only the physical well-being and care of children. Most also provide enriching experiences that further children's development. At the same time, preschool programs have to be concerned with appropriate nurture and safety while the children are in their care. Similarly, compensatory programs are also concerned with enriching experiences and caring for children, whereas child care or preschool programs may serve to compensate for something lacking in the backgrounds of some of the children. In fact, many Head Start programs now are offering wrap-around services to provide extended care for children of working parents.

### Program Settings

Programs for young children can be divided into home-based and center-based settings. In the United States, when all ages of children are considered, the largest number are cared for in **family child care homes**. Infants and toddlers in particular are cared for in such homes (Capizzano et al., 2000) because parents of very young children seem to prefer a more intimate, homelike setting. Most states require licensing or registration of family child care homes, although it is estimated that a great majority of homes are unlicensed (Halpern, 1987).

**family child care homes**—Care for a relatively small number of children in a family home that has been licensed or registered for that purpose.

About 17 percent of infants and toddlers and 14 percent of preschoolers are cared for in family child care settings. These figures are in addition to the 27 percent of infants and toddlers and 16 percent of preschoolers who are cared for by relatives (Capizzano et al., 2000). In the first extensive study of family child care settings, Galinsky and her colleagues (1994) found that many of the homes were less than adequate. Only 9 percent of the homes studied were rated as good, 35 percent were rated as inadequate, and the remaining 56 percent were considered custodial, neither good nor "growth-enhancing." The study also found a clear relationship between program quality and children's development.

KEY POINT

Programs are either home-based, such as family child care homes, or center-based, located in a school facility and usually serving large groups of children.

**Center-based programs** are located in early childhood centers and usually include larger groups of children than do home-based programs. Center-based programs represent the greatest increase in the types of programs offered in the United States. In the 1960s only about 6 percent of young children were cared for in centers, but that number increased to 45 percent by the mid-1990s (Capizzano et al., 2000). At the same time, the number of preschoolers cared for in family child care homes decreased slightly, while the percentage of those cared for by a relative dropped considerably.

**center-based programs**—Programs for young children located in school settings, usually include larger groups of children than are found in home-based programs.

## Ages of Children

Another way early childhood programs can be grouped is by the age of the children. The classification of early childhood spans birth to age eight, which includes infants, toddlers, preschoolers, kindergartners, and children in the primary grades. Needless to say, working parents need care for children of varying ages.

KEY POINT

Programs are specially designed for children of varying ages, such as toddlers, preschoolers, and school-aged children.

**Infants and Toddlers.** One of the most dramatic increases in recent years has been in infant and toddler programs. In fact, center-based care for infants and toddlers represents the fastest growing type of program today. The majority of children under age three are cared for in family child care homes or by a relative; however, 22 percent of infants and toddlers were in center-based programs in the mid-1990s (Capizzano et al., 2000). Across the country, child care centers have been converting part of their facilities to care for infants and toddlers, and many states have incorporated new sections in licensing standards to consider the special needs of this youngest segment of the population.

Not all infant/toddler programs fall under the rubric of child care, however. A number of compensatory programs enroll children from infancy, starting with early parent-child education as a way of intervening in the poverty cycle. Notable is the Early Head Start program for children under the age of three.

**Preschoolers.** The largest segment of children in early childhood programs are preschool-aged, including youngsters from two or three years of age until they begin formal schooling. Some programs consider the preschool period as beginning at age three; others enroll children once they are out of diapers.

Programs for this age group include a wide variety of options. The majority of preschoolers are in all-day programs that provide care while their parents work. Some children attend part-day preschool or nursery



Center-based infant and toddler programs are among the fastest growing types of programs today.

school programs for social and educational enrichment. We will examine more specific components or developmentally appropriate practice for preschoolers in the remaining chapters.

**Kindergarten and Primary Children.** Many definitions of early childhood include children up to age eight. Thus, directions for curriculum, teaching strategies, and the environment in kindergartens and primary classrooms derive from what is known about the development and mode of learning of young, school-aged children.

Developmentally appropriate practice for this age group, just as for earlier ages, involves an integrated approach. **Integrated curriculum** acknowledges the importance of all aspects of human development—social, emotional, physical, cognitive, language, and creative—rather than focusing primarily on the cognitive. It also involves learning experiences that promote all aspects of development rather than separating the day into discrete times, such as for math, reading, physical education, or social studies. Through the use of learning centers (to be discussed in Chapter 7) and themes (Chapter 8), such subjects are fully integrated and considered an inseparable part of each other (Bredekamp, 1987).

**integrated curriculum**—A program that focuses on all aspects of children's development, not just cognitive development.

KEY POINT

Centers that serve school-aged children before and after school are an alternative to leaving these children, termed latch-key children, alone at home.

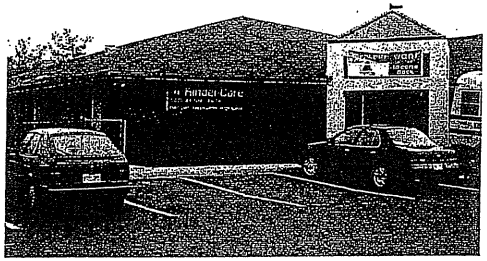
**Before- and After-School Care.** Young school-aged children whose parents work full time also require care when they are not in school. This is often provided through before- and after-school programs and full-day holiday and summer care. Such programs generally focus on recreation rather than education, particularly self-directed and self-initiated activities, since the children spend the bulk of their day in school (Bumgarner, 1999).

**latch-key children or self-care children**—School-aged children who, after school, return to an empty home because their parents are at work.

While many young children are enrolled in such programs, millions of others, labeled **latch-key** or **self-care children**, return to an empty home after school. Concerns about the safety, vulnerability, and lack of judgment of young school-aged children have prompted an increase in before- and after-school programs.

## Sources of Support for Programs

Yet another way of grouping early childhood programs is by the base of their support, especially financial. Many early childhood programs are




Franchised child care centers are one of the fastest growing providers of child care for children of working parents. KinderCare is the largest of these chains with well over 1,000 KinderCare Centers, most in urban areas.

privately owned, for-profit businesses, whereas others are not-for-profit enterprises operated through public funds or sponsored by an agency or church. A growing number of early childhood programs are also supported by employers.

**For-Profit Programs.** About 60 percent of all child care programs are operated for profit, either as a single, independently owned business or as part of a regional or national chain (Wash & Brand, 1990). This is a rapidly rising figure, and it is expected to continue to increase. For many years, the majority of child care in most American communities was provided by local owners who operated one or two centers. Over the past four decades, however, child care chains, which have experienced tremendous growth—increasing by as much as a thousandfold—have moved into virtually every metropolitan area (Neugebauer, 1991). The expansion of large child care chains appears to have slowed down toward the end of the 20th century, partly because so many new centers opened during the previous decades (Neugebauer, 1991). Child care chains are big business! Some even sell stock that is traded on the New York Stock Exchange, deal in mergers and takeovers, and utilize sophisticated marketing strategies.

KEY POINT

The majority of early childhood programs are privately owned and operated for profit. Among these, the number of child care chains has increased dramatically over the past three decades, particularly in metropolitan areas.

**Not-for-Profit Programs.** In for-profit early childhood programs, what is left over after expenses are paid is considered profit, which goes back to the owner or stockholders. In not-for-profit programs, such monies are incorporated back into the program or are returned to the sponsoring agency. Not-for-profit centers gain that status through incorporation or sponsorship from an entity that is itself not operated for profit. Churches are the most common sponsors of early childhood programs, and other groups, such as YMCAs, YWCAs, city recreation departments, hospitals, colleges, and universities, also are frequent sponsors.

Many religiously sponsored programs came into existence in the 1970s and 1980s. Often, religious buildings included nursery, preschool, or recreational rooms that were used primarily on the day of worship. As the need for child care for working parents became a more pressing social concern, many religious groups responded to that need by opening their facilities during the week. Some such programs are affiliated with and incorporate their religion, but many are secular.

KEY POINT

Religious houses of worship are the most common sponsors of not-for-profit programs, although other organizations and agencies also sponsor early childhood programs.



parent-cooperative—A program staffed by one professional teacher and a rotating staff of parents.

A unique form of not-for-profit early childhood program is the parent-cooperative. Parent-cooperatives, usually part-day preschool programs, are based on a staffing structure that includes a paid professional head teacher and a rotating staff of parents. As part of enrolling their children in the program, parents are required to assist a specified number of days in the classroom. This arrangement serves both a staffing and a parent education function. With increasing numbers of parents entering the work force full time, however, fewer parents have the time to participate in cooperative programs. The popularity of cooperatives, which was high in earlier decades, has waned considerably, and many communities today do not have such programs available at all.

KEY POINT

Another rapidly growing type of early childhood program is sponsored or supported by an employer for the children of employees. Child care as a work benefit has proved to increase worker productivity and loyalty.

**Employer-Supported Programs.** One of the fastest growing groups with a stake in early childhood programs are employers. Many companies have found that their interest in the needs and concerns of parent-employees has resulted in a more productive and stable work force. For the working parents of young children, work and family are not separable and, in fact, often overlap. Child care, in particular, is not just a family issue but also a concern to employers. Employees with young children, compared to other workers, more often are late for work, leave work early, miss work altogether, and deal with personal issues while at work. When employers support child care in some way, the result is lower absenteeism, greater stability and loyalty, better morale, decreased stress, and less distraction among their employees (Oekerman, 1997).

There are many ways in which employers can support their workers' child care needs. Some large companies have created child care centers in or near the place of work. In some instances, several employers band together in supporting a child care center that meets the joint needs of their employees. Another way in which employers help their workers is through arrangements with community child care centers, for instance, through a voucher system or direct subsidies. Such an arrangement can ensure that employees are given priority when child care openings are available.

Other employers provide referral services to help match the employee's need with available resources in the community. Some companies have helped develop and train a community network of family child care homes to meet their workers' needs. A growing trend among employers is to provide more responsive scheduling options, for instance, job sharing or flex-time. Child care is increasingly becoming a benefits option as companies allow their employees to select from a menu rather than providing a common benefits package for all. Some companies, recognizing the significant problem posed by children who are mildly ill, have begun to explore sick-child care options (Friedman, 1989; NAEYC Information Service, 1990).

An increasing number of companies is providing employer-sponsored child care for its workers. Facilitating this increase is one of the more recent trends, the rise of employer child care management organizations. Such organizations contract with businesses to provide child care services for their employees. The best known of these management organizations is Bright Horizons Family Solutions which, in

1999, managed almost 250 centers for companies across the country (Neugebauer, 1999).

**University- and College-Affiliated Programs.** A sizable group of early childhood programs is linked to higher education. The institution in which you are enrolled may, in fact, have such a program. Some are specifically laboratory or training programs that support student practicum and provide subjects for research; others serve primarily as campus child care centers for the young children of students, staff, and faculty. The trend since the 1980s has been for campus programs to combine these two functions, offering child care to the campus community while utilizing the children and families for practicum and research purposes (Everts, Essa, Cheney, & McKee, 1993).

Such programs are operated either as a campuswide venture or are affiliated with a specific department or unit, for instance, early childhood education, child development, or psychology. Because of the involvement of professional educators, campus programs are generally high quality, incorporating what has been learned about young children and early childhood programs through research, theory, and professional practice.

KEY POINT

Early childhood programs affiliated with institutions of higher learning provide training for students, and child care for student- parents, faculty, and staff.

**Publicly-Supported Programs.** Another significant supporter of early childhood programs is the public sector, whether it is the federal government or state and local agencies. Head Start is probably the best known federally supported program. In addition, Child Care and Development Fund block grants allow states to provide child care support for low-income working parents. There are also federally subsidized early childhood programs at the more than 400 U.S. military bases around the world. We will discuss two types of publicly supported programs, Head Start and public school preschools, in more detail.

**Head Start.** In 1964, in response to a growing concern about the perceived handicap with which many children from poverty environments entered elementary school, Project Head Start was initiated. The goal of Head Start was to help break the poverty cycle by providing children and their families with a comprehensive program that would help meet some of their needs. Today, there are Head Start programs in every state and territory, in rural and urban sectors, on American Indian reservations, and in migrant areas. Head Start serves over 800,000 preschoolers; it is estimated that this figure represents only about 20 percent of the eligible children in the country. Altogether, more than 17 million youngsters and their families have been involved in Head Start since its inception.

KEY POINT

Head Start is the largest publicly supported early childhood program, providing educational, nutritional, health, and parent support to enrolled children and families.

Although Head Start is an education program aimed at providing a high-quality early childhood experience for three- to five-year-olds, it also encompasses several other components. An important element is the provision of health care through medical, dental, nutritional, and mental health services for all of its children. This recognizes that children who are hungry or ill cannot learn. All children receive medical and dental examinations, immunizations, a minimum of one hot meal and a snack each day, and the services of a mental health specialist if needed.

KEY QUESTION

Visit a local Head Start program. What benefits do you see for the children? Talk to a staff member and find out what services are provided for the children and their families.

# EXPERIENCES

## CHAPTER 1

### JANE, Child Care Resource Center Director

#### Meeting Many Needs

Finding affordable, quality child care is difficult for many parents, especially parents with infants and toddlers. My job is to help them in this quest. Our resource center is supported by local businesses and the university, which contract with us to help parents find affordable, high-quality care. We do this through two separate but complementary components of our program.

One major element of our resource center is to recruit family home care providers. Some are already in the business, while others are new providers. We screen applicants carefully to ensure that our philosophy and practices are compatible. We provide training, ongoing support, start-up funds for licensing fees and equipment, and monitoring to the providers. In exchange, those invited to become part of our network make a commitment to give priority to children whose parents come to the resource center. Our main goal is to expand the selection of high-quality home care programs, particularly ones that care for infants and toddlers. One way for us to validate quality is to encourage the caregivers in our network to apply for home child care accreditation, which many pursue.

The second element of our center is to help parents find a good match to meet their child care needs. We keep track of all available child care openings in the community so that we can inform parents of various options. Part of our service to parents is to help them identify elements of quality in child care programs. We try to educate and sensitize parents to what they should look for in seeking a high-quality program for their young children through brochures, checklists, videos, and conversations with staff. Some children of university families are placed in the university's child care facility; other children are placed in one of the network homes; still others find what they need in a community facility.

We monitor information about the various available options for child care and match these to what parents need; the age of the child, the location and distance between home and work, cost, and type of program are some of the considerations we put into the equation. In addition, we try to impact the community by recruiting and training new home care providers so that the choices for high-quality care are increased.

A combination of employer support and trained professionals can make a difference in a community, as this child care resource center has shown. Increasingly, families, employers, and professionals are finding innovative ways of meeting the needs of children, parents, child care providers, and the community.

Almost half a million children are served every year through Head Start programs, but it is estimated that this program serves only about one-fifth of those children eligible.

Parenting education and parent involvement are also integral elements of Head Start. Many parents have found employment through the program because it gives them priority for any available nonprofessional Head Start jobs. Another component involves social services for families to provide assistance, information about community resources, referrals, and crisis intervention. Finally, Head Start also serves children with special needs, following the congressional mandate that at least 10 percent of its children must be handicapped (Head Start, 1990).

Since 1994, Head Start has also begun to serve children under the age of three. The Early Head Start program provides child development and family services to pregnant women and low-income families with infants and toddlers. Early Head Start was developed in response to the growing recognition of the importance of the earliest years of children's lives, acknowledgment that infant and toddler care were woefully lacking in most communities, and realization that Welfare Reform would create new child care needs. Some Early Head Start programs provide center-based services while others rely more on home visitation and support. The goals of the program are to enhance children's development, including health, social competence, cognitive and language ability, and resilience; support family development, including parenting, economic self-sufficiency, and family stability; staff development (for instance, providing training and educational opportunities); and community development. Toward the end of the 20th century, nearly 40,000 children were served in Early Head Start programs. Early Head Start, like Head Start, mandates continuing staff training and education. One basic requirement is that all staff must have at least a CDA by the year 2003, and at least half have a two-year degree in early childhood education or child development at a minimum.

KEY POINT

Increasing numbers of school districts across the country are offering programs for preschoolers, particularly for those considered at risk for school failure.

**State and Public School Involvement.** Funding for early childhood education programs is coming from a wider range of sources than ever before. Some states have allocated funding out of their budgets for early childhood programs. Georgia, for instance, is providing universal access to prekindergarten education through funding from a state lottery. In California, early childhood programs are offered through use of monies from that state's Tobacco Settlement funds.

KEY POINT

Funding for early childhood programs is increasingly being allocated through state budgets, and more public school districts are also offering services for prekindergarten children.



More pervasive is the involvement of public schools in sponsoring early childhood programs. Public schools have, of course, always been the providers of kindergarten, first-, and second-grade programs; children in these classes have, by definition, been included in early childhood, as a category. In addition, a few states have provided services to young children below kindergarten age for a number of years, but increasingly more school districts are extending their programs to preschoolers. In another way, public schools have, for many years, provided early childhood centers as part of high school or vocational school training programs.

Public school sponsorship of early childhood programs is, of course, subject to the same limited supply of money that constrains other publicly supported programs. Typically, therefore, existing programs serve a limited group of children. In most states, such programs give priority to children who are considered at risk for school failure. Some states specify low-income children, while others indicate that participants have to be Head Start eligible. This focus on poor children or children at risk to a large measure responds to the 80 percent of children who are eligible for Head Start but are not included in that program. Some states provide programs for three- as well as four-year-olds, although the majority are structured to serve only fours. In a few states, prekindergarten programs are designed for children who come from non-English-speaking families. Educators, however, are calling for a broader constituency in public school early childhood programs, one that includes all children rather than only a limited group.

## DEFINING QUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Up to this point, we have discussed early childhood programs in fairly concrete, descriptive terms, looking at characteristics by which programs can be grouped. Programs can and should also be examined in terms of how they best meet the needs and consider the well-being of children. Such considerations are related to quality.

Current research is, in fact, focusing on identifying factors that create good early childhood programming for young children. The old questions about whether child care is good or bad for children or what type of care is best are now obsolete; today's research questions seek to find out how to make child care better for young children. Current research is attempting to provide empirical support for the reasons commonly cited as indicators of good programs. The emerging picture tells us that quality in child care is not dependent on single, separable factors but is a result of the presence of and interaction among a variety of complex elements (NICHD, 2000).

### Child-Adult Ratio

KEY POINT

When an adult is in charge of too many children, the behaviors of both the children and adults are adversely affected by this high child-adult ratio.

It has generally been assumed that when caregivers are responsible for large numbers of children, the quality of care is adversely affected. A number of studies have addressed this assumption and found that the ratio significantly affects children's behavior and child-adult interaction (Helburn & Howes, 1996; Howes, 1997).

An optimal ratio of adults to children is one indicator of quality in early childhood programs. A low ratio facilitates interaction and allows for more individualized attention to each child. According to research and the advice of experts, what is an appropriate ratio for young children? What other factors are important in determining an appropriate ratio?

For instance, when there are larger numbers of children per adult, there is less verbal interaction among adults and children than when the **child-adult ratio** is lower. Teachers in classrooms with lower ratios were more sensitive and responsive to the children than teachers who had more children in their care (Howes, 1997). A significant factor in providing quality care has to do with giving children individualized attention, confirming their unique identity and worth as individuals. When an adult is responsible for a large number of children, that adult is less able to provide such attention and is more concerned instead with controlling and managing the group.

**child-adult ratio**—The number of children for whom an adult is responsible, calculated by dividing the total number of adults into the total number of children.

What is an appropriate child-adult ratio? There is no definitive answer, although the literature does provide some suggested guidelines. For instance, the National Association for the Education of Young Children suggests a ratio of 3 to 1 for infants, 6 to 1 for toddlers, 8 to 1 for three-year-olds, 10 to 1 for four- and five-year-olds, and 15—18 to 1 for children in the primary grades (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Keep in mind, however, that child-adult ratio is one variable that interacts with other factors, such as group size and teacher qualifications. For instance, in France, child-adult ratios are considerably higher than in the United States, but French preschool teachers are highly trained, adequately paid, and accorded greater status and respect than their American counterparts (Howes & Marx, 1992).

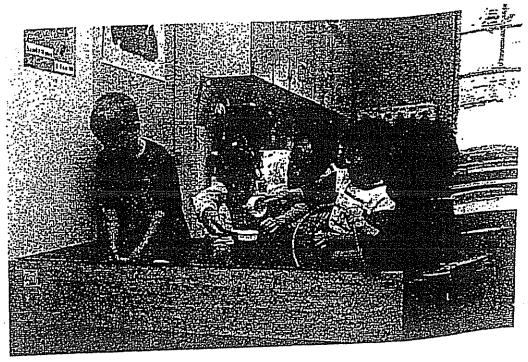
## Group Size

In the late 1970s, the large-scale National Day Care Study (Roupp, Travers, Glantz, & Coelen, 1979) published its findings. These indicated that group size was one of two consistently important variables that define quality of care for young children. In smaller groups, adults and children interacted more; children were more cooperative, innovative, and verbal; and they earned better scores on cognitive and language tests. Another study summarized that, with a moderate number of children in a group, children seem to demonstrate greater social competence (Clarke-Stewart, 1987b). When caregivers are in charge of large groups of children, however, they tend to be less responsive to the children and provide less social stimulation (Howes, 1983).

KEY POINT

Research has shown that a moderate group size results in children who are more socially and intellectually competent than those who spend their day in large groups.





Both younger and older children benefit from mixed-age grouping, as in this class, which enrolls children between the ages of three and six.

Ideal group size cannot really be defined because other variables, including the parameters of the physical environment, need to be considered. The National Association for the Education of Young Children provides some guidelines for group size (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). For very young preschoolers, the association recommends no more than 12 children per group with two teachers; a maximum group size of 20 children is recommended for four- and five-year-olds.

## Mixed-Age Grouping

Only in relatively recent times has our society stratified children into narrow groups defined by age, particularly in the educational context. "Although humans are not usually born in litters, we seem to insist that they be educated in them" (Katz, Evangelou, & Hartman, 1990, p. viii). Many theorists and researchers have expressed concern about the increasing separation of people into age-segregated groups in education, housing, recreation, work, and other aspects of life (Bronfenbrenner, 1971). It is more natural, they say, that people of all ages interact and share various aspects of their lives. Throughout history, socialization was facilitated because people of all ages learned from and helped each other.

KEY POINT

Grouping children of varying ages together has benefits in many development areas for both younger and older children.

**mixed-age grouping**—Programs in which children of different ages—for instance, three- to six-year-olds—are together in one class.

Early childhood education programs are also often segregated into narrow, homogeneous age groups, with the three-year-olds in one class, four-year-olds across the hall in another, and the mature five-year-olds in their own environment. But many educators suggest that heterogeneous or **mixed-age grouping** will benefit both younger and older children. Positive social behaviors such as sharing, turn taking, and helpfulness are encouraged in mixed-age groups. Similarly, older children have more opportunities to practice leadership skills, and young children become involved in more complex forms of pretend play. Children also appear to reap cognitive benefits from mixed-age grouping (Katz et al., 1990).

As we have already mentioned, quality in early childhood programs depends on many factors. There are certainly many outstanding, high-quality programs in which children are grouped by narrow age criteria; other equally good programs utilize a mixed-age model. Nonethe-

Warm, responsive interaction among adults and children is an important element in defining quality in early childhood programs.

less, research suggests that children receive some unique benefits from being placed in groups that contain a wider age-range of children. For this reason, mixed-age grouping is included as a criterion of quality.

## Developmental Appropriateness of the Program

Child development theory and research have given us a good understanding of what young children are like and under what conditions they thrive and learn best. From such information, we are able to plan environments, develop activities, and set expectations that are congruent with children's needs and characteristics (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Throughout this book—particularly Chapter 7, which considers how to structure an appropriate environment; Chapters 8 through 11, which examine how various components of the curriculum reinforce development; and Chapters 15 through 17, in which we consider guidance principles—we will focus on developmentally appropriate practice.

In recent years, there has been increasing concern that public education is not adequately preparing children for the challenges of the future. This concern has been accompanied by a push to return to "the basics" in education. Some have interpreted this to include young children, with the idea that an earlier introduction to academics will result in better prepared and educated children.

As we will consider in various contexts in this book, early childhood professionals and researchers have expressed grave apprehensions about this trend, aptly termed hothousing, which pushes preschoolers into inappropriate tasks for which they are not developmentally ready. Young children can learn a lot of material in a mechanistic, rote manner, but if these experiences are meaningless, such information has little relevance (Sigel, 1987). Thus, for an early childhood program to meet quality criteria, it must respect the emerging abilities of young children without imposing inappropriate expectations.

KEY POINT

High-quality programs have developmentally appropriate expectations and activities, and do not push children into inappropriate, accelerated activities.

## Child-Adult Interaction

Although many factors contribute to the quality of an early childhood program, perhaps the most important factor on which quality depends is

KEY POINT

Frequent and responsive interaction between adults and children is a necessity in high-quality programs.

# A CLOSER LOOK

## Quality, Compensation, and Affordability

"The ability of many early childhood programs to provide high-quality services is in jeopardy because they lack sufficient resources to fully cover the costs of quality. As a result, the development and well-being of millions of children may be at risk" (NAEYC, 1995b). These words capture the essence of NAEYC's position statement, revised in 1995, on quality, compensation, and affordability. It brings together the three interrelated elements that keep early childhood education from reaching its potential. Recommendations and goals for achieving higher quality, equitable compensation, and affordable access are outlined in the position statement.

Considerable research has recently underscored the wide range in quality of programs for young children. For instance, review A CLOSER LOOK in Chapter 3 for a discussion of the *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers* report (Helburn et al., 1995) which found that only a small percentage of early childhood programs meet standards of excellence and that the majority are mediocre or less in quality. Poor quality programs place children at risk in all areas of development.

Research has also demonstrated that children's development is supported by professionals who are specifically educated in early childhood education. Yet those who work with young children are not adequately compensated for their work. The average salary of those who work with young children is considerably less than the pay received by others with comparable training. As a result, there is a high rate of turnover in early childhood programs (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989), a factor which further compromises the well-being of children who need consistency and stability in their lives.

The third interrelated element is affordability of child care, particularly for low income families. There is considerable inequity in the percentage of salary that families spend for child care. Families with low income spend 25 percent or more of that income on child care, compared to the 6 to 8 percent spent by families in median to higher income brackets. Affordable access to child care is estimated to keep many low income mothers from the work force or from educational pursuits.

Recognition of the seriousness of this problem has led to active and aggressive measures by NAEYC and other committed organizations and individuals who are concerned about the welfare of young children. For instance, efforts such as the Worthy Wage Campaign have been designed to educate decision-makers and the public to help improve the salaries and benefits earned by early childhood professionals. But considerably more work is needed before the goals of NAEYC's position statement on quality, compensation, and affordability are met.

the interaction between the adults and the children. In a good program, adults are involved with children, they are nurturing and responsive, there is ample verbal exchange, and interactions aim to teach, not just to control (Clarke-Stewart, 1987a). A wonderful physical facility, an exemplary child-adult ratio, and a favorable group size would all be negated by uncaring and unresponsive child-adult interaction. It is, after all, the teachers who determine the tone and the character—in effect, the quality—of a program.

## Staff Qualifications

KEY POINT

Research shows that teachers with specific early childhood training are important in a high-quality program.

Research has given us some indication about teachers who are most likely to provide a high-quality early childhood program. Earlier we discussed how the National Day Care Study (Roupp et al., 1979) found group size to be one of two important quality variables. The other significant variable that emerged from this study was the importance of a staff with specific training in early childhood education and development. Such teachers engaged in more interactions with the children, and the children showed greater social and cognitive abilities compared to those whose teachers lacked such training. These findings, particularly in relation to children's more advanced cognitive and language ability, have been supported in other research (Burchinal, Roberts, Nabors, & Bryant, 1996; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997). In addition, teachers with early childhood training were rated as more positive and less punitive, employing a less authoritarian style of interaction with the children (Arnett, 1987).

## Staff Consistency

KEY POINT

Staff consistency is important, because high staff turnover has a negative impact on young children.

A serious concern among professionals and parents alike is the high rate of staff turnover in early childhood programs, estimated at 41 percent per year in a recent national study (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989). Many young children spend the bulk of their waking hours in child care with adults other than their parents. One important task of the early years is forming a secure attachment relationship to adults. Although primary attachment is with parents, research has shown that young children certainly do become attached to their caregivers. But when children lose an adult with whom they have formed such an attachment, the loss can be profound (Essa, Favre, Thweatt, & Waugh, 1999).

One study found that there is less child-adult interaction in centers with a high teacher-turnover rate (Phillips, Scarr, & McCartney, 1987). This is not surprising when interaction is dependent in part on establishing a relationship, something that takes time to develop. Another study (Howes & Hamilton, 1993) found toddlers who experienced changes in their primary teachers were more aggressive as four-year-olds. Similarly, McCartney and her co-researchers (1997) found that children who experienced more changes in caregivers during the first year had more behavior problems as preschoolers. In fact, the effects of stable caregivers early in life were still evident when the children were nine years old (Howes, Hamilton, & Phillipsen, 1998). This research supports the importance of a stable, secure relationship between young children and their caregivers.



A physical environment that is child-centered, organized, and stimulating is integral to the overall quality of a program.

## Respect and Concern for Staff

KEY POINT

A good staff, which provides an appropriate program for young children, has to be respected and nurtured.

As we have discussed, a nurturing, well-trained, and consistent staff is important to a quality program, but a reciprocal concern for the well-being of the staff also is needed. Working with young children is a demanding, challenging job. Thus, it is in the best interests of the children, the families, and the employer if staff members receive appropriate pay and benefits, and work in a satisfying environment. In such a setting, the needs of the staff are seriously considered, an atmosphere of camaraderie is fostered, autonomy is encouraged in planning an appropriate program for the children, and the physical environment includes space for adults (Jorde-Bloom, 1988a). Chapter 4 will discuss some of the parameters and issues associated with providing such an environment for the staff.

## Physical Environment

KEY POINT

A child-oriented environment and family involvement also contribute to the quality of a program.

Even though we will discuss the physical environment of the early childhood program in greater detail in Chapter 7, it is necessary to note here that the physical facility is another important factor that contributes to program quality. According to research, children demonstrate higher cognitive skill levels and greater social competence in schools that are safe and orderly, contain a wide variety of stimulating equipment and materials, and are organized into learning centers on the basis of similar materials and activities when compared to children in programs that lack these features.

A child-oriented environment conveys to children that this place is meant for them. There are interesting and worthwhile things to do in a child-oriented environment because it was designed with the characteristics, ages, and abilities of the children in mind. A child-centered environment also requires fewer restrictions and prohibitions because it was fashioned specifically for children. This contributes toward a positive and pleasant atmosphere. In short, a good environment conveys to children that this is a good place to be, that people here care about them, that they are able to satisfy their desire to learn and their innate curiosity, and that it is safe to try without fear of failure.

## Family Involvement

With increasing numbers of children spending many hours per day in child care, parents and teachers are, more than ever, partners in many aspects of child rearing and socialization. Studies have shown that the children benefit when parents and the early childhood staff share a common commitment to the best interests of the children, communicate openly, and have mutual respect. However, if there is a lack of communication so that parents do not know what happened at school and teachers are not informed of significant events in the child's home life, there is a lack of continuity for the child. In Chapter 3 we will explore this home–school link in much greater detail. In addition, at the end of each of the remaining chapters, we will look at the importance of families in relation to the topic of the chapter.

## Quality as a Combination of Factors

For the purposes of discussion, we have isolated a number of components that contribute to quality early childhood programming, including child-adult ratio, group size, mixed-age grouping, developmental appropriateness of the program, child-adult interaction, staff qualifications, staff consistency, concern for staff, the physical environment, and family involvement. It is important to keep in mind, however, that quality can best be understood and studied as a combination of components. As you further your understanding and knowledge of the field of early childhood education, remember that quality is not defined by a single factor but depends on the complex interaction of a variety of elements in which you, as an early childhood professional, play a key role.

KEY QUESTION 4

Suppose you were asked by the parent of a young child, "How do I find a good child care program?" What would you answer? How can you help a parent recognize quality indicators?

# THE FUTURE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Up to this point, we have examined social forces that have helped to shape the field of early childhood education, looked at the multifaceted descriptors that define the field today, and examined some qualitative aspects of programs for young children. As we have entered the 21st century, we can look back and unravel some of the factors that have shaped the field as it exists today.

But what lies ahead? Are there more changes in store? Will unresolved social issues be addressed? Will early childhood education become an important force in considering these issues? Lacking the aid of a crystal ball, we might, nonetheless, try to predict what lies ahead by extrapolating from current trends.

KEY QUESTION 5

Projections for the future, as we have discussed, indicate an increased need for good early childhood programs. What changes do you think are needed to bring about improvements for children and for early childhood professionals?

KEY POINT

Economic and social factors point to a continual growing need for early childhood education. These include an expected increase in the number of women in the work force, an increase in the number of children in poverty, and greater employer sponsorship of child care.

- From all economic and social indications, it is reasonable to expect that a high percentage of families will continue to have two parents in the work force. Thus, while they are at work, dual-income families, along with working single parents, will continue to need care for their young children.
- At the same time, the increase in the percentage of women in the childbearing years has slowed down in the late 1990s. Nonetheless, the number of children potentially requiring child care after the year 2000 will be higher than in the middle to late 1990s (Wash & Brand, 1990).
- Employment opportunities in early childhood education will continue to increase. Bureau of Labor Statistics projections indicate that employment in the child care field will increase faster than for all other occupations through the year 2008 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000b).
- The number of young children who live in poverty is also expected to increase (Children's Defense Fund, 2000). Federal funding for programs such as Head Start, and local and state allocations to serve children at risk, are likely to increase, along with programs and job opportunities for teachers of young children.
- Employer involvement in child care sponsorship has been one of the fastest growing trends in recent years (Neugebauer, 1999). This interest is likely to increase as employers recognize the need to provide child care benefits for parent-employees to help maintain a productive work force. A shift in type of program sponsorship, along with new job opportunities, is likely to accompany such a trend.

KEY POINT

The need for qualified early childhood educators will increase.

- All indications are that the number of positions for early childhood professionals will continue to rise because of the ongoing need of families for child care, welfare reform creating a larger work force, projected expansion in publicly funded programs for children at risk, and increasing numbers of employer-sponsored programs. Yet there are and will continue to be grave concerns about the stability of the early childhood work force. In no other industry is there such a high turnover of employees as in child care.
- As we have discussed, stability of staff is an important element in the quality of early childhood programs because children's trust and attachment to the adults in their lives depends on that stability. As a result, there has been increasing concern about the interplay between the needs of children for quality care, the needs of parents for affordable child care, and the needs of early childhood professionals for appropriate compensation and status. This concern, expressed both from within and from outside the early childhood profession, will continue to be articulated. We can expect greater focus on and increasing public awareness of this issue in the future.

KEY POINT

The early childhood profession will continue to address issues related to quality care and the needs of staff.

- As issues related to early care and education continue to occupy public attention, it becomes more and more apparent that our country lacks a cohesive and consolidated social policy within which to consider child and family matters. For instance, a wide variety of agencies initiate, license, administer, and evaluate varying programs for children and families, often relying on disparate philosophies, approaches, and regulations. But, at the same time, because of increased public attention, there also seems to be greater willingness to address such issues with more depth, integration, and forethought. Sharon Kagan (1990), in her examination of legislation in this field, came to the following conclusion:

> A review of [such] bills . . . indicates that there is a clear and pervasive realization that grave injustices exist, and that structural changes in our ways of doing business have never been more necessary. Recognizing the severity of the fragmentation among systems, nearly every bill, ranging from large federal to small municipal initiatives, including those that foster single sector delivery systems (e.g., the schools), calls for the establishment of inter-agency and/or multi-disciplinary committees to facilitate cross-sector planning and program implementation. (p. 15)

It can be expected, therefore, that efforts to coordinate early childhood policies and approaches will continue in the future.

- Publicly funded programs for young children, including many Head Start, Early Head Start, and kindergarten programs, often are operated only part-day. Such scheduling is problematic for working parents who need full-day care for their children. This conflict may prevent youngsters, who would potentially benefit, from participating in such programs (Washington & Oyemade, 1985). In recent years, however, more efforts have been made to provide funding for more wrap-around services, providing extended hours for children who participate in a part-day program such as Head Start and Early Head Start. Nonetheless, the problem continues to exist and, because . . . limited funding is the major stumbling block to extending these programs to meet working parents' needs, this issue will continue to be raised.
- Within the early childhood profession, there is a continued focus on the pluralistic nature of our society and the shrinking world in which children are growing up. Many early childhood programs can be expected to focus more than ever on curriculum based on nonbias and inclusion of children and families from different cultural, ethnic, and economic backgrounds, as well as children with disabilities. We will explore this topic in more detail in Chapter 13.
- Finally, because of legislation ensuring that young children with disabilities are included in early education, there will be continued efforts to integrate them into programs with children who do not have disabilities. As we will see in the next chapter, such inclusive programs benefit everyone involved.

## SUMMARY

1. A number of social factors have contributed to the expansion of early childhood programs and brought early childhood education into the public consciousness. These include:
   A. Changes in family life such as an increased number of two-earner families and single parents
   B. Growing evidence of the benefits of early education for children from poverty, children with disabilities, and other children at risk
   C. Child advocacy, which has helped bring the needs of young children and their families to public and legislative prominence



2. There is considerable diversity in the types of early childhood programs with variations according to:
   A. Purpose of programs
   B. Program settings
   C. Ages of the children
   D. Sources of funding support
3. A most important factor in describing early childhood programs is quality. The following elements contribute to the quality of early childhood programs:
   A. Child-adult ratio
   B. Group size
   C. Mixed-age grouping
   D. Developmental appropriateness of the program
   E. Quality of adult-child interaction
   F. Staff qualification
   G. Staff consistency
   H. Respect and concern for the staff
   I. Quality of the physical environment
   J. Family involvement
   K. Quality as a combination of factors
4. There are trends and projections that suggest what the future holds for early childhood education.

## KEY TERMS LIST

center-based programs
child-adult ratio
child advocacy
early childhood education
extended family
family child care homes
hothousing
integrated curriculum
latch-key or self-care children
mixed-age grouping
nuclear family
parent-cooperative
self-care children

## KEY QUESTIONS

1. If you were given "three wishes" to bring about changes for young children and their families, what would they be? Share these with others in your class. From a combined list, develop several child and family issues that you think child advocates might address.
2. Visit an early childhood program in your community and share this information with other members of your class who have visited different programs. Classify the programs according to their characteristics; for instance, purpose, setting, ages of chil-

dren served, and source of support. Does your community have a variety of programs? Which types of programs predominate? What family needs are met by these programs?

3. Visit a local Head Start program. What benefits do you see for the children? Talk to a staff member and find out what services are provided for the children and their families.
4. Suppose you were asked by the parent of a young child, "How do I find a good child care program?" What would you answer? How can you help a parent recognize quality indicators?
5. Projections for the future, as we have discussed, indicate an increased need for good early childhood programs. What changes do you think are needed to bring about improvements for children and for early childhood professionals?

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Select additional books, articles, and Web sites on topics discussed in Chapter 1.

Children's Defense Fund. *The state of America's children.* Annually published yearbooks. Washington, DC: The Children's Defense Fund.

Elkind, D. (1987). *Miseducation: Preschoolers at risk.* New York: Knopf.

Kagan, S. L., & Cohen, N. E. (1997). *Not by chance: Creating an early care and education system for America's children.* New Haven, CT: The Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, Yale University.

## HELPFUL WEB SITES

Child Care Information Center:
http://www.nccic.org

The Children's Defense Fund:
http://www.childrensdefense.org

Kids Count:
http://www.aecf.org

For additional early childhood education resources, visit our Web site at

**http://www.earlychilded.delmar.com**


# PART II

# The Who of Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is made up of different people. In Part II we will explore the *who* of this field by examining the characteristics and needs of three groups—children, families, and teachers.

CHAPTER 2

# The Children

At the heart of early childhood education are young children. All the topics we will discuss in ensuing chapters are aimed at gaining a better understanding of children and how, together with their families, we can best meet their needs. Although our focus will be on children, it is always important to keep in mind that they must never be seen in isolation, but rather as part of a family system that provides context and identity through its lifestyle, culture, heritage, and traditions. In this chapter we will take a closer look at children. They should also seen as part of their community and cultural contexts, which shape much of their identity.

## CHILDREN—SIMILARITIES

Children are generally wonderfully engaging and winning, in part because of the freshness with which they approach all experiences. Most children possess a sense of trust that the world and the people in it are friendly and kind, and they will tackle that world with joy and enthusiasm. The amount of information that children learn in the first few years of life is unparalleled in later learning. At no other time in life will there be such zest and liveliness toward acquiring skills and knowledge.

Our task in working with young children is to provide an environment in which this enthusiasm is nurtured and sustained rather than subdued or even destroyed. Young children are eager to learn, but such eagerness can be battered down if they are frequently overwhelmed by developmentally inappropriate experiences. This is an awesome responsibility on the shoulders of early childhood educators, which can be met through careful and sensitive study and understanding of the characteristics and needs of young children.



**KEY POINT**

The early childhood educator's understanding of child development is vital in providing a supportive and developmentally appropriate program for young children.

**NEW QUESTION**

Observe several children of the same age. These might be children you work with and know well or children that you are observing for the first time. What traits do they share? How are they similar? Can you draw some conclusions about children of that particular age?

**KEY POINT**

Infants rapidly gain skills in all areas of development, relying on information about the world from movement and their senses. They acquire strong attachments to significant adults in their lives; stable, consistent, and loving care are vital for babies.

## Age-Related Commonalities among Children

Although children are each unique, they nonetheless have much in common. All children share the need for nurturing and trustworthy adults, for stability and security, for increasing autonomy, and for a sense of competence and self-worth. Similarly, there are common attributes and skills that characterize children at different ages during the early years. In the course of normal development, children reach developmental milestones in a fairly predictable manner and within a reasonable time range (Allen & Marotz, 2003). Following is a brief overview of some developmental characteristics of infants, one-, two-, three-, four-, five-, and six- to eight-year olds.

**Infants.** The first year of life is very crucial in establishing a foundation for all areas of development. Astounding changes mark the first year; within that time newborns, whose existence is totally dependent on adults, become mobile, communicating 12-month-olds. Professionals who care for infants need a sound understanding of the developmental changes that take place during infancy.

Newborns' earliest movements are reflexive, but they quickly develop into more purposeful activity. In addition, their senses operate remarkably well, providing a wealth of valuable information about this new world into which they have been thrust. By the middle of the first year, babies are reaching for and grasping objects, rolling over, and sitting up with support. During the latter half of the year, infants master the pincer grasp (holding objects with thumb and forefinger), crawling, pulling themselves upright, and perhaps walking alone. Through increasing skill in motor activity and use of all the senses, children learn about and make sense of the world.

Socially, infants signal their recognition of significant people, especially parents and caregivers. This burgeoning affinity shifts from following with the eyes to smiling and later to crawling after adults. By the end of the first year, babies show strong attachment to parents and caregivers and may show considerable fear or reluctance toward strangers. Infants are amazingly adept at communicating and demonstrate increasing understanding of language. They "converse" with adults through babbling and jabbering long before they can produce recognizable words. First words also appear by the end of the first year, usually relevant to social relationships, especially, "ma-ma" and "da-da" (Allen & Marotz, 2003; Gonzales-Mena & Eyer, 2001).

Infants need responsive adults who recognize and meet their individual needs in a consistent, nurturing, respectful manner. Caregivers of infants must be extremely sensitive to the importance of establishing a stable relationship through which trust and security are generated. They provide daily routines that are tailored to each child's individual rhythm and needs for care, food, sleep, play, and social interaction. Later, when babies begin to be mobile, caregivers must provide appropriate space for crawling and beginning walking. There must be interesting things to explore, yet it must also be safe and hygienic (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

**One-Year-Olds.** Toddlers, as one-year-olds are also called, have access to an expanding world of wonders to be explored. They gain increasing

Children's enthusiasm and eagerness to learn must be nurtured through a supportive environment and by sensitive teachers who understand their development.

skills in moving through this world, starting with a lurching, wobbly gait when they first begin to walk and quickly refining their walk so by the end of the second year it is quite smooth and steady and includes running, walking backwards, and negotiating stairs. Soon they also begin to combine their newly developed locomotion skill with pushing and pulling objects. They are adept at picking up objects and, with great glee, also love to drop or throw them. Their increasing control over their finger muscles can be seen in their participation at meal times; they enjoy self-feeding finger foods, wielding a spoon, and drinking from a cup, though these endeavors are not always negotiated successfully. They become more independent, wanting to do many things for themselves.

**KEY POINT**

One-year-olds' rapidly growing mobility, coupled with their expanding desire for independence and their curiosity about everything around them, lead them to become avid explorers of their environment. Their growing mastery of language and new ability to mentally represent objects and experiences help them move beyond the here-and-now experiences of infancy.

Language blossoms during the second year, becoming increasingly more intelligible and varied. Vocabulary grows from a few words to an impressive mastery of up to 300 words, and single words soon become two-word sentences. During the second half of the second year, toddlers gain the ability to internally represent objects and events. This is often seen in play, when they imitate the actions of others, engage in simple make-believe play, or dress up. Toddlers have great interest in other children, but their play is characteristically parallel rather than interactive. They focus on their own wants and needs and are not yet able to place these in the context of other children's wants and needs. Perhaps the greatest challenge for toddlers is the need to reconcile their continuing desire for closeness to their caregivers and their growing need for independence (Allen & Marotz, 2003; Gonzalez-Mena & Eyer, 2001; Honig, 1993).

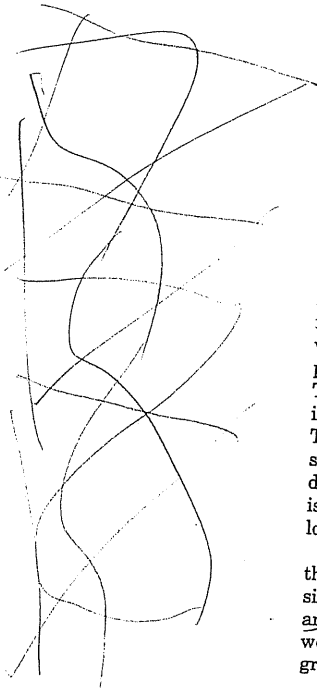
Caregivers of one-year-olds must continue to provide a safe, consistent, sensitive, loving, and supportive environment. The interactions, conversations, and give-and-take play between caregivers and children contribute immensely to toddlers' development. Caregivers must also be constantly vigilant because toddlers are very curious about everything around them and have very little awareness of safety. The daily schedule provided for one-year-olds is still dictated by individual rhythms and needs, but toddlers begin to exhibit greater similarity in their daily patterns; thus, caregivers may be able to schedule meals and naps for the group, while still remaining sensitive to individual differences (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).



Two-year-olds, in transition from babyhood to childhood, are just beginning to master many skills. These are particularly noticeable in the language and motor areas.

**KEY POINT**

Two-year-olds, in transition from babyhood to childhood, quickly master many skills. Their growing independence and assertiveness are both a source of enjoyment and a challenge for adults.



**Two-Year-Olds.** Some early childhood programs incorporate two-year-olds, especially older ones, into preschool groups, whereas others place twos into a separate toddler category. Twos are in a transitional stage, making the move from babyhood to childhood. They are in the process of acquiring and enthusiastically using many new skills, particularly the two that most visibly mark the distinction between baby and child—language and motor control.

During this year, most children increasingly gain body control, in their more self-assured walking and running that has lost its baby stagger, and in their new-found finger control that allows them to put together simple puzzles or paint with a brush. At the same time, they experience tremendous language growth. Their growing vocabulary, sentence length, and grammatical forms open up all sorts of possibilities because of this increased communication competence. Self-help skills are also improving, including the achievement of toilet training for the majority of children during this year. Just as important as learning motor, language, and self-help skills is the process of gaining independence through this mastery.

Two-year-olds undertake many activities for their sheer enjoyment rather than to reach a goal. Running is pleasurable in itself rather than as a means of getting somewhere fast; painting means involvement in a sensory process rather than an interest in producing a picture. Activities are also undertaken with enormous enthusiasm. Twos wholeheartedly throw themselves into activities, whether painting, squishing play dough, pouring sand and water, or reading books. They particularly enjoy sensory experiences, using touch, taste, and smell, as well as sight and sound. Two-year-olds are notorious for their desire to repeat, using newfound skills over and over again. This desire is normal and should be encouraged, for it builds competence and allows children to fully assimilate skills before moving on to new ones.

Two-year-olds are just beginning to gain some social skills, although association with peers is more characterized by playing side by side than by interacting. They are generally not involved in cooperation and sharing. In fact, young twos, with their limited self-control, may well express their growing independence and self-assertiveness by grabbing a desired toy from a peer or by throwing a tantrum. Tantrums,

Three-year-olds' budding skills allow them to enjoy an ever-widening array of activities and peer interactions.

in fact, are common among twos, reflecting, for instance, their limited verbal skills, which are not yet adequately able to express what they want. They are also not adept at delaying gratification; they do not have the ability to wait for something they want "right now" (Allen & Marotz, 2003; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Trawick-Smith, 2000).

Teachers of two-year-olds need to provide a supportive, consistent, and safe environment in which rapidly growing skills can be practiced and mastered. Frequent and enthusiastic praise conveys that adults value the acquisition of skills. Gentle guidance acknowledges children's growing sense of self while helping them develop self-control in relation to others (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

**Three-Year-Olds.** Three year-olds have truly left babyhood behind, not only in appearance—with the loss of baby fat—but also in added skills. Increased balance and control are evident in large motor, fine motor, and self-help areas. Threes like to use their new skills by being helpful and wanting to please adults. Their added competence does not mean, however, that they won't occasionally have accidents or revert to earlier behaviors when upset. Overall, however, their characteristic way of responding to school experiences is with enthusiasm and enjoyment.

KEY POINT

By age three, children are much more adept in motor, self-help, and language skills and are becoming more socially aware of peers. They enjoy helping and pleasing adults.

By three, children's speech is intelligible most of the time and consists of longer sentences. Language becomes much more of a social and cognitive tool. Three-year-olds engage in more extensive conversations, talking *with* and not just *to* people, and answer as well as ask questions. In fact, three-year-olds are usually full of questions, constantly asking "Why?" or "What for?" or "How come?" Vocabulary continues to increase dramatically, and grammar becomes more accurate.

This greater language facility helps increase peer interaction among this age group. Three-year-olds are much more socially aware than younger children, and their make-believe play, which began in the previous year by imitating simple personal and home routines, at times includes two or three children. Short-lived friendships begin to form, and children will play with each other as well as near each other. Social problem-solving skills are just beginning to emerge. With guidance, threes may share and take turns, but they still find such behaviors difficult (Allen & Marotz, 2003).



Four-year-olds need a stimulating environment in which to channel their abundant energy and curiosity.

Teachers of three-year-olds need to respect the growing skills and competencies of their charges without forgetting just how recently they acquired them. It is important to maintain patience and good humor, remembering that the enthusiasm with which threes use these skills is not always matched by accuracy and speed. Because three-year-olds enjoy helping as well as practicing self-help skills, such behaviors should be promoted and valued. The emerging social skills of three-year-olds should be encouraged in an atmosphere in which social exploration is safe and where playing alone or not having to give up a favorite toy is also acceptable (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

KEY POINT

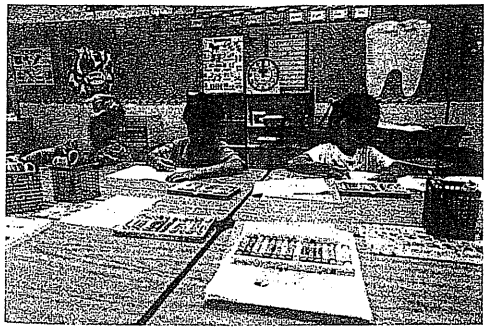
Four-year-olds have achieved considerable mastery in their motor and language abilities. They tend to be quite self-confident, often boasting or showing off. Social play is an important part of their lives.

**Four-Year-Olds.** Four-year-olds have achieved a maturity and competence in motor and language development that leads them to assume a general air of security and confidence, sometimes bordering on cockiness. "Children test limits in order to practice self-confidence and firm up a growing need for independence" (Allen & Marotz, 2003, p. 97).

Fours seem to be in perpetual motion, throwing themselves wholeheartedly into activities. They have mastered the basics of movement and now eagerly embellish on these. Climbing, pedaling, pumping on a swing, jumping over or off objects, easily avoiding obstacles when running, all contribute to greater flexibility and exploration in play. Four-year-olds like to try to show off with physical stunts. Improved muscle coordination is also evident through more controlled use of the fingers, such as in buttoning, drawing, and cutting with scissors. In addition, many self-care activities have become routines rather than challenges, as they were at earlier ages.

If increased competence leads to noticeable embellishments in motor activities, this is even more evident in the language area. By age four, most children's language usage has become remarkably sophisticated and skilled. This accomplishment seems to invite new uses for language beyond communication. Fours love to play with language, using it to brag, engage in bathroom talk, swear, tell tall tales, and make up silly rhymes. Four-year-olds are even more persistent than threes in asking questions.

For four-year-olds, peers have become very important. Play is a social activity more often than not, although fours enjoy solitary activi-



For five-year-olds, prolonged activity involvement and completion of projects become particularly important. These five-year-olds had an end product in mind when they began working with the art media.

ties at times as well. Taking turns and sharing become much easier because four-year-olds begin to understand the reciprocal benefits of cooperation. Their imaginative variations of movement and language skills extend into group play, which is usually highly creative and ingenious, touched by their sense of humor.

Teachers of four-year-olds need to provide an environment in which children have many opportunities for interactions with each other, with adults, and with a wide selection of appropriate and stimulating materials. Because of their heightened social involvements, fours need consistent, positive guidance to help them develop emerging social skills, for instance, in sharing, resolving conflicts, and negotiating (Allen & Marotz, 2003; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

**Five-Year-Olds.** Fives are much more self-contained and controlled, replacing some of their earlier exuberant behaviors with a calmer, more mature approach. They are competent and reliable, taking responsibility seriously. They seem to be able to judge their own abilities more accurately than at earlier ages, and they respond accordingly.

KEY POINT

Five-year-olds, compared to their younger peers, are much more mature, controlled, and responsible. Many skills have been refined so that at this age children are more interested in projects and activities that result in products.

Five-year-olds' motor activities seem more poised, their movement more restrained and precise than ever before. There is also greater interest in fine motor activities as children have gained many skills in accurate cutting, gluing, drawing, and beginning writing. This interest is spurred by the new desire to "make something" rather than merely to paint, cut, or manipulate the play dough for the sheer enjoyment of these activities. Five-year-olds' self-reliance extends to assuming considerable responsibility for self-care as well.

Language has also reached a height of maturity for fives, exhibited through a vocabulary that contains thousands of words, complex and compound sentence structures, variety and accuracy in grammatical forms, and good articulation. Language increasingly reflects interest in and contact with a broadening world outside the child's intimate family, school, and neighborhood experiences. The social sphere of five-year-olds revolves around special friendships, which take on more importance. By five, children are quite adept at sharing toys, taking turns, and playing cooperatively. Their group play is usually quite elaborate and imaginative, and it can take up long periods of time (Allen & Marotz, 2003).



Teachers of five-year-olds, after providing a stimulating learning environment and setting reasonable limits, can expect this age group to take on considerable responsibility for maintaining and regulating a smoothly functioning program. Fives need to be given many opportunities to explore their world in depth and assimilate what they learn through multiple experiences. One way in which children can discuss, plan, and carry out ideas stimulated by their experiences is through group projects (Helm & Katz, 2001).

KEY POINT

Six- to eight-year-olds in before- and after-school programs are very independent, though they still need support and structure provided by caring adults. Their mental abilities allow them to think much more logically and take into consideration the viewpoint of others, which becomes an important factor in their more involved peer relations.

**Six- to Eight-Year-Olds.** Before- and after-school programs are designed primarily for young elementary school children of working parents. The children in such programs have remarkably mature skills in all areas of development. Physically, they show well-developed and refined motor skills. Their thinking has become much more logical and systematic than it had been during the preschool years, and they are able to recognize and take into consideration the viewpoint of others. The language of school-aged children is impressively adultlike, and they love to use these language skills.

Six- to eight-year-olds exercise considerable independence and are able to follow rules and standards without the need for constant monitoring; yet they certainly still have a need for the nurturance and security of caring adults. They also have a need for the world of peers, within which they often form close friendships. Such friendships are, in most instances, with same-sex peers. For school-aged children, play is still a most important activity. It is more complex and organized than at earlier ages, incorporating both formal and informal games with rules. At this age, children enjoy projects they can initiate, implement, and carry through to completion, exercising their sense of industry.

Adults who work with six- to eight-year-olds in before- and after-school programs must provide a safe, nurturing climate. Caregivers should provide materials appropriate for the expanding interests of this group and allow children enough independence to pursue these in their own way. At the same time, adults should be available as a resource and to provide guidance and limits. Particularly after school, children also need opportunities to expend energy through large motor activity and games, which adults can arrange (Allen & Marotz, 2003; Click, 2000; Trawick-Smith, 2000).

KEY POINT

Positive self-esteem is a need shared by all children and is fostered by adults who convey to children that they are competent and worthwhile.

self-concept—Perceptions and feelings children may have about themselves, gathered largely from how the important people in their world respond to them.

self-esteem—Children's evaluation of their worth in positive or negative terms.

## Self-Esteem

One commonality shared by all children is the need to feel good about themselves. Young children are beginning to form a **self-concept**, perceptions and feelings about themselves gathered largely from how the important people in their world respond to them. One aspect of self-concept is **self-esteem**, children's evaluation of their worth in positive or negative terms (Essa & Rogers, 1992; Marshall, 1989; Samuels, 1977). Such evaluation can tell children that they are competent, worthwhile, and effective or, alternatively, incapable, unlikable, and powerless. It is particularly noteworthy that children who feel good about themselves seem to be more friendly and helpful toward peers (Marshall, 1989).

The child with good self-esteem has confidence in his or her ability to succeed and master his or her environment. What elements of the early childhood environment and what teacher behaviors support and nurture a child's growing sense of who he or she is and what he or she can do?

A healthy self-concept is vital to all areas of a child's development. Although readiness in the natural progression of development is triggered internally and furthered by appropriate external stimuli, successful mastery of new learning also depends on a child's feelings of competence and ability to meet new challenges. **Perceived competence** reflects the child's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a given task (Marshall, 1989). Successful experiences result in self-confidence that, in turn, boosts self-esteem. Thus, many appropriate yet challenging experiences help the child feel successful, confident, and capable (Essa & Rogers, 1992).

**KEY POINT**

Children's perceived competence reflects their belief in their own ability to be successful; such self-confidence contributes to positive self-esteem.

**perceived competence**—Children's belief in their ability to succeed in a given task.

The child needs to feel competent and able to face challenges as well as have a sense of **personal control**—the feeling of having the power to make things happen or stop things from happening. When children generally feel that what happens to them is completely out of their hands, particularly if what happens is not always in their best interest, they cannot develop this sense of control and will tend to see themselves as helpless and ineffective. All children need opportunities to make appropriate choices and exercise autonomy to begin to develop the perception that they have control, which also contributes to their emerging sense of responsibility for their own actions (Marshall, 1989).

**personal control**—The feeling that a person has the power to make things happen.

**KEY QUESTION**

As you observe children, identify a child who appears to be self-confident. How does the child express this confidence? Do you see a difference between this child and another who seems less assured?

The early years are crucial in the development of self-concept, since it forms and stabilizes early in life and becomes increasingly resistant to change (Samuels, 1977). Above all, children's positive concepts of themselves reflect healthy parent-child relationships that are founded on love, trust, and consistency. When early childhood teachers enter young children's lives, they also contribute to the formation of that concept.

**KEY POINT**

Children who have a sense of personal control and a feeling that they can make things happen see themselves as effective, which also contributes to self-esteem.

At the same time, if a child comes to school with a history of abuse or neglect, the teacher's contribution of offsetting negative experiences can help nurture self-esteem. Teachers strengthen children's positive self-esteem if they are sensitive to each child as an individual and to the needs of children for affection, nurture, care, and feelings of competence. Thus, teachers who understand children, know their characteristics, respond to them, and know how to challenge them in a supportive manner contribute to this positive sense of self. In essence, everything the early childhood teacher does has an impact on children's self-concept.



## The Brain and Children's Development

**KEY POINT**

Recent neurological research has validated many long-standing early childhood practices, including the need for stimulation to facilitate the amazing and rapid early learning that takes place, the importance of consistent and nurturing relationships, and the lasting effects of highly negative experiences.

Another commonality that all children share is the link between the fairly predictable sequence of visible development, as previously discussed, and the development of the brain. Over the past few years, the popular media has been full of reports of discoveries about the amazing brain of young children. Recent neurological research has helped to validate many of the beliefs and principles that early childhood educators have espoused for a long time. The rapid-fire development of brain cells in infancy, the amazing learning that takes place as a result of developing connections in the brain, and the lasting effects of negative experiences have all helped to underscore just how important the early years are. The most rapid brain development in relation to sensory and language development takes place during the first year of life, while cognitive development peaks by age two to three. Thus, the early years are crucial because the brain is most maleable; the brain's capacity to change decreases with age, especially after three (Perry, 2000; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Developmental neurobiologists explain how a young child's many experiences become integrated in the brain. The newborn's brain expects that certain experiences (for instance, exposure to light and sound) will occur and, once they do, begins to organize these experiences into structures on which future learning is built. In addition, neurobiologists show how new experiences trigger brain growth while modifying existing structures as needed to take in new information (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

There is a sequence of optimal experiences, tied to brain development, which control the mastery of skills in childhood. We have always known that babies follow a specific sequence, first crawling, then standing, walking, running, jumping, and so forth. Brain research has pinpointed the areas of the brain that develop to facilitate learning in motor, as well as language, cognitive, social, and emotional, areas. In addition, different areas of the brain are primarily involved at different ages; the more primitive parts of the brain are dominant during prenatal and early infant development, while increasingly more integrative parts of the brain, such as the cortex and frontal cortex, are involved as the child becomes more mature (Perry, 2000).

**myelin**—A white, fatty substance that coats nerve fibers in the brain, thereby increasing the speed at which nerve impulses are transmitted from cell to cell.

**myelination**—The gradual process by which myelin coats brain cells, thus facilitating the development of skills controlled by different parts of the brain as these become myelinated.

**Myelin** is one factor that affects when developmental changes, which are related to identifiable milestones in brain development, occur. Myelin is a white, fatty substance which insulates nerve cells and speeds up the rate at which nerve impulses are transmitted from one cell to another (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The development of new behaviors is facilitated when impulses between cells move more quickly. **Myelination**, the process by which myelin coats nerve fibers, takes place at different rates in different parts of the brain. Thus, for instance, cells in the area of the brain that control motor functions related to walking begin to be coated in myelin in the latter part of the first year; myelination thus facilitates the child's mastery of walking. Myelination of the cells involved in the mastery of different skills, therefore, have their own timetable of development.

Much of the recent neurological research strongly confirms what early childhood educators have always known, especially about the

growth of relationships in early childhood. Young children need to be lovingly touched, held, rocked, and cuddled. They need to experience language, music, and other friendly sounds. They need many sensory experiences that stimulate and broaden their repertoire of brain connections. They need to develop a special bond with a small number of significant adults who are positive, responsive, and predictable. In other words, they need to have numerous, repeated positive experiences on which to create templates or internal models of what the world is like. Through such experiences, very young children develop a picture of the world and, most important, build *attachment,* that special bond which is intimately linked to safety (Perry, 2000).

When young children do not have such experiences, particularly consistent and predictable care, they cannot fully develop that built-in template for relationships. They do not have that special one or two people who deeply care about them. They may never feel fully safe, because they have not developed a strong, trusting relationship with someone they can totally rely on. Such children may grow up never experiencing deep relationships, only relating to others on a shallow level. Lack of a strong, secure attachment to at least one caring adult can result in a child living in an uneasy or stressful state because needs are never satisfactorily met (Perry, 2000).

## Play

Another commonality among all children is the need for play, which serves as a means of learning about and making sense of the world. But more than that, play is essential to all aspects of children's development. "It is an activity which is concerned with the whole of his being, not with just one small part of him, and to deny him the right to play is to deny him the right to live and grow" (Cass, 1973, p. 11). Play promotes mastery as children practice skills; it furthers cognitive development as thinking abilities are stretched; it involves langauge, encouraging new uses; it involves physical activity; it helps children work through emotions; its inventive nature makes it creative; and it is often a socializing event. Beyond all that, however, it provides a way for children to assimilate and integrate their life experiences. In no way is play a trivial pursuit, but rather it is a serious undertaking necessary to healthy development for all children, (Frost, 1992).

**Stages of Play.** Play has been of interest to child researchers for many years. Mildred Parten (1932) provided one of the landmark studies, still considered valid today (Frost, 1992), in which young children's social play was categorized. She found an age-related progression in five types of play, and an earliest category that is not really play but observation of others' play. Although children at later ages engage in earlier forms of play, their play is typically more complex than it was when they were younger. Parten's six categories of social play are listed and explained in Figure 2-1.

Other researchers have viewed play from a different perspective. For instance, Sara Smilansky (1968) proposed play categories based on children's increasing cognitive abilities and measured by how children use play materials. This view is complementary to Parten's classifications

**KEY POINT**

Play provides many opportunities for children to practice skills, stretch thinking abilities, work through emotions, socialize, and be creative.

**KEY QUESTION**

Observe a group of young children at play. Look for examples of the various types of play discussed in this chapter. Do you see a relationship between age and type of play?

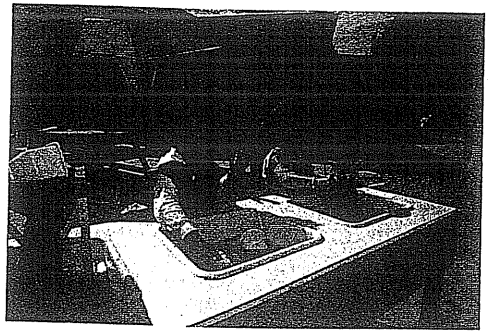
Children often engage in solitary play, playing alone and not involved in the activities of peers.



**FIGURE 2-1 Parten's Stages of Play**

**Parten's Categories of Social Play**

| Types of Play | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Unoccupied behavior | The child moves about the classroom going from one area to another, observing but not getting involved. | *Sebastian wanders to the blocks and watches several children work together on a structure. After a few seconds he looks around, then walks over to the art table, where he looks at the finger painting materials briefly but does not indicate a desire to paint. He continues to wander, going from area to area, watching but not participating.* |
| Solitary play | The child plays alone, uninvolved with other children nearby. Children at all ages engage in this type of play, although older children's solitary play is more complex (Almy et al., 1984; Rubin, 1977). | *Lorraine works diligently at building a sand mountain, not looking at or speaking with the children who are involved in other activities around her.* |
| Onlooker play | Quite common among two-year-olds, a child stands nearby watching others at play, without joining in. | *Rajeef stands just outside the dramatic play area and watches a group of children participate in doctor play, using various medical props.* |
| Parallel play | Children use similar materials or toys in similar ways but do not interact with each other. | *Kalie alternates red and blue Legos on a form board while Terrance, sitting next to her, uses Legos to build a tall structure. They seem influenced by each other's activity but do not talk to each other or suggest joining materials.* |
| Associative play | Increasingly evident as preschoolers get older, children interact and even share some of their materials, but they are not engaged in a common activity. | *Several children are in the block area working on a common structure. Jolynne runs a car through an arch she has built at one side of the structure; Arlen keeps adding blocks to the top, saying, "This is the lookout tower," while Akira surrounds the structure with a "fence."* |
| Cooperative play | Typical of older preschoolers, this is the most social form of play and involves children playing together in a shared activity. | *On arriving at school one day, the children find an empty appliance box in their classroom. At first they climb in and out of the box, but then a few of them start talking about what it might be used for. Jointly they decide to make it into a house, and their discussion turns to how this could be accomplished. While continuing to discuss the project, they also begin the task of transforming the box, cutting, painting, and decorating to reach their common goal. It takes several days, but the children together create a house.* |



The play of these children, engaged in similar activities but not really interacting with each other, can be described as parallel.

because it focuses on a different aspect of play. Smilansky's categories are shown in Figure 2-1.

It is important for teachers to be aware of the different types of play and to recognize that children develop increasing social and cognitive skills as they progress. In particular, this awareness helps set appropriate expectations for young children. For instance, infants need appropriate objects, space, and time for observation, manipulation, and exploration, which helps them learn about the properties of their environment. Toddlers need the kind of toys and props that help them use and integrate their growing ability to mentally represent experiences. Preschoolers need sizable blocks of time to engage in self- selected play and many open-ended materials that lend themselves to exploration and mastery (for instance, play dough, blocks, sand and water, Legos).

KEY POINT

Play can be categorized by its social (six stages) or its cognitive (four stages) characteristics.

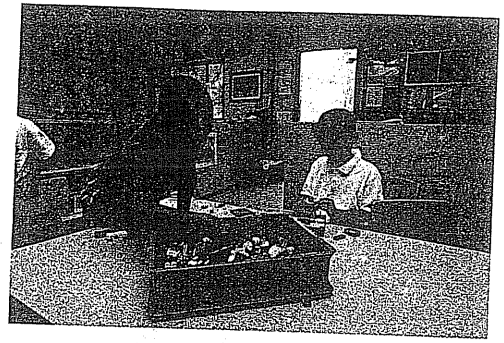
**FIGURE 2-2 Smilansky's Stages of Play**

**Smilansky's Categories of Cognitive Play**

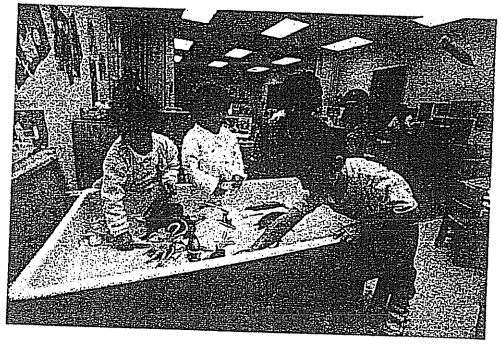
| Types of Play | Definition | Example |
|---|---|---|
| Functional play | Characteristic of infants' and toddlers' repetitive, motor play used to explore what objects are like and what can be done with them. | *Clark picks up a block, turns it, and looks at it from all sides. He bangs it on the floor, then picks up another block with his left hand and bangs the two blocks together. He alternates striking the blocks against each other and on the floor.* |
| Constructive play | Involves creating something with the play objects. | *Clark uses blocks to construct a tower. His activity now has a purpose.* |
| Dramatic play | The child uses a play object to substitute for something imaginary. | *Clark takes four blocks, puts one on each of four plates placed around the table, and says, "Here is your toast for breakfast."* |
| Games with rules | Involve accepted, prearranged rules in play. This stage is more typical of older children. | *In kindergarten, Clark and a group of peers play the game "Blockhead," agreeing on the game's rules.* |



Although these boys are engaged in the same activity and are sharing some of the materials, they are still working on separate projects, as is typical in associative play.



These children have worked together at the sand table to build a zoo for their animals. Their play can be described as cooperative.



In addition, time, space, and materials that lend themselves to social play should always be available, including dolls, dress-up clothes, and blocks. School-aged children, while appreciating such open-ended materials, also enjoy some simple organized games with rules. It is important, however, to avoid highly competitive activities, which only foster resentment and ill-will. We will discuss an alternative, cooperative games, in Chapter 13.

## CHILDREN—DIFFERENCES

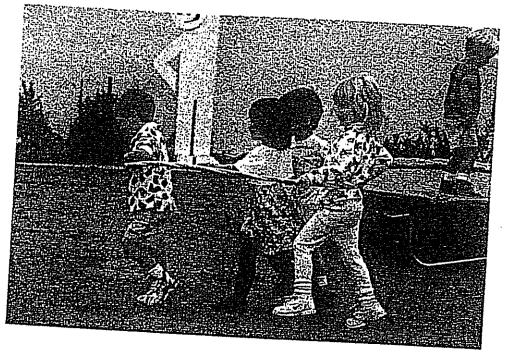
KEY QUESTION #2

Think about the same children you observed earlier for Key Question #1 and describe what makes each of them unique. How do they differ? Do you have any indications about what factors underlie these differences?

**temperament**—Children's inborn characteristics, such as regularity, adaptability, and disposition, that affect behavior.

Children have many characteristics in common and certainly share basic needs for affection, acceptance, consistency, respect, and appropriate challenges, yet there are many variations among children. The "profiles" of young children presented earlier reflect many common characteristics of these ages, but they will rarely describe any one child. While falling within the normal range of development, each child possesses a unique blend of attributes that makes him or her one of a kind.

Children's differences reflect both inborn and external factors that have molded who they are. Some children are born with an easy-going **temperament**; for instance, they have a moderate activity level, predictable schedule of sleeping and eating, and a positive attitude to-



Although children of the same age share many characteristics, there is also a wide range of differences among them. These children all are four-year-olds, but, as you can see, there is a great variation in their physical makeup. What are some factors that contribute to physical and personality differences in children?

ward and curiosity in new experiences. Other children have more difficult temperaments and, for example, are more irritable, unpredictable, and more difficult to calm down . . ., as found by Thomas, Chess, and Birch (1968) in their classic study. Although children are born with such temperamental characteristics, these gradually tend to affect the adults around them so that parents and teachers may begin to think of children as "difficult" or "easy" and expect and reinforce their behavioral traits. In turn, then, adults' perceptions of children contribute to children's self-perceptions.

KEY POINT

Children have inborn temperaments that contribute to individual differences. Some children are predisposed to be easygoing, whereas others tend to be basically difficult.

Children's individuality is also shaped by the cultural, ethnic, religious, and economic background of the family. It is important that early childhood teachers and caregivers be sensitive to family diversity and genuinely value different cultures and backgrounds. Children mirror their primary environment—their home and family—as, of course, they should. If teachers, whether consciously or unconsciously, denigrate what children experience and learn at home, they will convey that the family, including the child, is in some way inferior and undesirable. What a detrimental impact this would have on children's self-concept!

KEY POINT

Children's uniqueness also derives from the cultural, ethnic, religious, or economic background of their families.

## CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Some children are born with or acquire conditions that place them outside the typical range of development for their age. They might have a **developmental delay**, meaning that they accomplish tasks in one or more developmental areas at a considerably later age than their peers. Some children are considered **at risk** for delay, with a significant probability that problems will occur because of adverse environmental factors such as poverty or low birth weight. With appropriate help, children who have developmental delays may well catch up to age norms. Other children may have a **deficit or impairment**, indicating development that is in some way different (not just slower) from that of most children. Children with hearing or visual deficits, mental retardation, or motor disabilities are part of this category.

It has become more and more evident that children with special needs benefit from early intervention. In fact, the importance of providing services as early as possible has been underscored by national

KEY POINT

Children with developmental delays accomplish tasks at an age older than their peers, whereas the development of children with impairments is in some way different, not just slower.

**developmental delay**—A child's development in one or more areas occurring at an age significantly later than that of peers.

**at-risk children**—Because of adverse environmental factors—for instance, poverty or low birth weight—children considered at risk for developmental delay.

**deficit or impairment**—A problem in development, usually organic, resulting in below-normal performance.



policies that mandate such services for young children who have special needs. In 1975, Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act) was passed to ensure a "free and appropriate public education" for all handicapped children between the ages of 3 and 21. As part of this law, programs are required to seek the input and involvement of parents, in part articulated through an **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)**. The IEP is developed by a team that includes professionals and the parents. A decade later, in 1986, Public Law 99-457 (the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments) added provisions for children from birth to age five. Specifically, what was referred to as Part H of this law addresses the needs of disabled infants and toddlers. It calls for services to children under three who are experiencing or are at risk for developmental delays and requires an **Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)** for the child and family, developed by a transdisciplinary team. Public Law 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was passed in 1990, reauthorizing the earlier laws but reflecting a change in philosophy away from labeling children as "handicapped" and referring to them instead as "individuals with disabilities." In 1997, this law was further amended to provide comprehensive services for infants and toddlers (Part C) and preschoolers (Part B). Finally, Public Law 101-336, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), was passed in 1990, assuring all individuals with disabilities, including children, full civil rights, including appropriate accommodations in child care and preschool programs (Cook, Tessier, & Klein, 2000). These laws came into being because of the commitment, dedication, and hard work of parents and professionals whose advocacy eventually led to legal remedies for the plight of disabled children who too often were excluded from the educational system (Deiner, 1999).

**Individualized Education Plan (IEP)**—Mandated by Public Law 94-142, such a plan must be designed for each child with disabilities and must involve parents as well as teachers and other appropriate professionals.

**Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)**—Required by the 1986 Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments for handicapped children under the age of three and their families; the IFSP, often developed by a transdisciplinary team that includes the parents, determines goals and objectives that build on the strengths of the child and family.

KEY POINT

Legislation mandates services for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with special needs.

## Inclusion

One of the provisions of Public Law 94-142 is that children with disabilities be placed in the **least restrictive environment.** This means they should be placed in programs that are as close as possible to settings designed for nondisabled children, while remaining appropriate for their unique needs (Cook, Tessier, & Klein, 2000). This concept has led to the expansion of inclusion, the integration of children with special needs into regular programs. Inclusion is certainly not new, having informally been part of many early childhood programs throughout this century and more formally incorporated over the past several decades into Head Start programs (Cook et al., 2000). It is also important to recognize that inclusion may not be the best alternative for all disabled children; thus, a decision to integrate a child with special needs into a regular classroom should be made only after careful consideration.

An inclusive program is founded on the premise that young children, whether disabled or not, are much more similar than different. Children with special needs can benefit from a good inclusion program by experiencing success in a variety of developmentally appropriate activities, through contact with age-mates who can be both models and friends, and by exposure to the many opportunities for informal incidental learning that take place in all early childhood programs (Deiner, 1999). At the same time, children without disabilities benefit from in-

**least restrictive environment**—A provision of Public Law 94-142 that children with disabilities be placed in a program as close as possible to a setting designed for children without disabilities, while being able to meet each child's special needs.

KEY POINT

Many early childhood programs integrate children with special needs. Such inclusion, when carefully planned, provides benefits for all involved.

KEY QUESTIONS

If you are able, observe an early childhood program in which a child with special needs is integrated. Observe and talk to one of the teachers. What special accommodations have been made for this child? How does the child interact with the other children in the class? How is the child's independence encouraged? Does the child participate in a few, some, or all activities?

Many children with mild or moderate disabilities are effectively included in early childhood programs. The teacher may work individually with the child in some activities, but the child is a part of the large group in most aspects of the program.

clusion by learning that children who are in some way different from them nonetheless have far more commonalities than differences. An increasing number of young children with disabilities are enrolled in early childhood programs (Cook et al., 2000).

Although inclusion has many potential benefits, the benefits do not happen automatically. In other words, inclusion does not simply mean enrolling children with special needs in an early childhood program. Careful planning, preparation, modification, evaluation, and support are necessary for successful inclusion. Early childhood teachers, because they know a great deal about children and how best to work with them, have many skills needed for working with children with disabilities as well.

But placement of children with special needs in their classes also involves learning some additional skills. It often means having to acquire and use new teaching strategies, new terminology, and different evaluation tools. It also involves working with a wider range of professionals (for instance, speech and physical therapists or psychologists) and more focused involvement with parents. In addition, early childhood teachers may find themselves with unexpectedly strong emotional reactions, such as pity for the child, anger that the child has to suffer, fear of the disability, or self-doubt in their own abilities, which they must face and resolve.

One of the keys to successful inclusion is to view each child, whether disabled or not, as an individual with unique characteristics, strengths, and needs. This involves an attitude that sees *a child,* not a child with Down syndrome or a child who is blind or a child who stutters. For example, Ted may have Down syndrome but he loves to paint, enjoys listening to stories at group time, and gives terrific hugs. Similarly, Noni's visual impairment does not diminish her enjoyment of the sand table, her budding friendship with Connie, or her ability to make others laugh through her language play. And Manuel, while often tripping over words, can throw and catch a ball accurately. Many times he is the one who notices a colorful butterfly passing or the first buds of spring, and he has a totally winning smile. Working with a group of children means recognizing, encouraging, and building on each child's strengths. In this way, children's self-concept and self-assurance are boosted so they can meet the challenges posed by their disabilities.



## Characteristics of Children with Special Needs

It is beyond the scope of this text to discuss in depth such topics as characteristics of children with special needs, appropriate teaching methods, testing and assessment tools, and the unique needs of the parents of children with disabilities. Considerable training is necessary to fully master the skills and information of the relatively new field of early childhood special education. This field combines and integrates the traditional skills of teachers of young children with the specialized expertise of special educators, therapists, and medical personnel.

Most early childhood teachers, however, will inevitably find themselves in one or both of the following situations:

- One or more children with special needs will be included in their class.
- They will have concerns about a child who seems to experience consistent difficulties in one or more areas of development.

In the former case, it is important that teachers work with parents and specialists to make the inclusion experience successful. In the latter instance, teachers concerned about a child's functioning need to document their concerns and discuss them with the parents, as well as offer some concrete suggestions; for instance, how to begin the referral process so the child is seen by an appropriate specialist. (We will examine methods of observation and assessment in more detail in Chapter 6.) For both of these reasons, it is important that teachers of young children have some basic information about the characteristics of children with special needs.

KEY POINT

Motor problems can range from slight awkwardness to complete helplessness. Special equipment, careful classroom arrangement, and adaptation of activities allow children with motor disabilities to be included.

**Children with Physical Disabilities.** Children can experience a wide range of motor limitations, from being slightly clumsy to having virtually no muscular control. The causes of such disabilities can stem from orthopedic problems, genetic defects, brain dysfunctions, or central nervous system damage. One of the most common motor impairments is cerebral palsy, a central nervous system dysfunction that can cause children to be uncoordinated and awkward or can leave them totally helpless. Children with cerebral palsy often have problems in other areas of development, but the fact that a child is severely impaired physically does not mean that he or she is necessarily mentally impaired.

Some motor problems can be corrected surgically or with orthopedic aids such as casts, while many others can be improved through systematic physical therapy. For some children, improved functioning can be facilitated through adaptive equipment; for instance, a special chair that supports weak muscles, or a wheeled board on which the child can scoot to get around. Generally, specialists make determinations about corrective measures, although early childhood teachers will be able to carry out special procedures or help children adapt to new equipment. It is important to help children feel as independent and involved as possible. Some ways of encouraging independence and involvement include placing materials within their reach, keeping paths accessible to children in wheelchairs or using crutches, and adapting ongoing activities to facilitate as much participation as possible (Cook et al., 2000).

# EXPERIENCES

## CHAPTER 2

### DIANA, Head Teacher, Class of Three-Year-Olds

**You Be the Doctor**

Arianne was one of several children with special needs included in our classroom. Arianne's language and social development were both delayed. When she started school, she was very shy and quiet, hardly talking, and then only in a whisper. Most of Arianne's time was spent watching the other children. Only if a teacher was directly involved would she engage in solitary play. Group times seemed very uncomfortable for her. But, it was important to me that she develop a sense of group belonging, both for her social and language development.

We were unsuccessful for several months, trying various strategies to encourage greater participation. We decided to try an intervention based on encouraging social pretend play, giving her adult support as needed. Arianne had developed a special relation with one adult, Teacher Pam, and she was the one who took on the role of facilitator in the pretend play scenarios. We developed several themes, with appropriate props, based on Arianne's and the other children's common life experiences. These themes included taking care of babies, cooking, visits to the doctor, and grocery shopping.

At the beginning, we found that Arianne would be interested for a while, but then slip away as the other children took over the activity. For instance, when we made cookies, she readily joined the activity, but left when several other children became involved with great enthusiasm. Thus, for the next scenario, a doctor theme, Teacher Pam made sure that Arianne had an important role and that particularly competent peers were invited to participate. With verbal cues and support from Teacher Pam, Arianne, as the doctor, took center stage in the role play.

Teacher Pam, for instance, said, "Michael, you look sick. Come and lie down so Doctor Arianne can take care of you."

When Michael joined in the activity, Teacher Pam gave Arianne specific directions on how to treat Michael and gave her constant reinforcement about her role as doctor and about her attempts at speech. Later, Pam suggested a reversal of roles, and an enthusiastic Arianne became the patient while another child was the doctor.

Gradually, Arianne's social participation and language usage increased. Through other social pretend play themes, she joined in the play more readily, choosing her own roles, although Teacher Pam was still available to engage her and help her find the words for those roles. Pam's support and reinforcement became more subtle as Arianne became more involved and assertive in participating in play. By the end of the year, Arianne was far less an onlooker than a participant, spent longer time periods engaged in play, sought out peers on her own as play partners, and became much more verbal with teachers and children.

Most children enter social play spontaneously, but some need the gentle support of an adult to help them become a part of play. Often success in social play, as in Arianne's case, can pave the way for the confidence to master other skills.





**KEY POINT**

Children with cognitive disabilities, who are classified as slow learners or educable mentally retarded, can benefit from inclusive programs.

slow learner—A child with mild cognitive delay and general immaturity.

educable mentally retarded—A child who has noticeable delays in most areas of development, including cognitive, but can function quite well in a regular early childhood program.

fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)—Irreversible birth abnormalities resulting from mother's heavy alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Children are usually retarded and hyperactive, and may have small head size, and various limb or face abnormalities.

fetal alcohol effect (FAE)—Not as serious or noticeable as fetal alcohol syndrome, FAE, nonetheless, can leave children at a disadvantage in ability to learn and reach optimal development.

**KEY POINT**

Learning disabilities affect basic learning processes. Attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are sometimes associated with learning disabilities.

attention deficit disorder (ADD)—Difficulty in concentration on an activity or subject for more than a few moments at a time.

attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)—Manifested by short attention span, restlessness, poor impulse control, distractibility, and inability to concentrate.

**Children with Cognitive Disabilities.** When children's intelle abilities lag significantly behind their chronological age, they are sidered to have special intellectual needs (Deiner, 1999). Intelle functioning is conventionally measured through IQ tests (see Cha 6 for a fuller discussion), which indicate whether a child's score within the average range or is above or below average. Fifty perce all Americans fall within the average range.

About 16 percent are considered **slow learners**, having some delays manifest by such indicators as late talking and walking and eral immaturity. Another 7 percent fall into the **educable menta retarded** group, with noticeable delays in most areas of developm (Deiner, 1999). Both slow learners and educable mentally retarded cl dren are often integrated into regular early childhood programs. Cl dren classified as more seriously involved are generally placed i programs specifically designed for their needs. In public schools, the children may be integrated into regular programs at lunch or rece times or during art or music activities.

Children with cognitive deficits seem to have problems with mem ory and attention (Deiner, 1999). This has implications for expectation and for strategies used by the teacher. For instance, providing ample op portunity for repetition, many activities that use more than one sensor modality, numerous motor activities that reinforce concepts with action and an environment that is not overly stimulating and distracting can help children with cognitive deficits focus on activities. Because children with cognitive deficits are usually less mature than their peers, they may need help in joining in the social play of the class. The teacher's assistance can be helpful by modeling appropriate social behaviors to the child and by encouraging other children to be accepting.

**Children with Learning Disabilities.** The term learning disability can have many meanings. Such disabilities affect basic learning processes and may be seen in young children who have problems listening, thinking, or speaking; in school-aged children, learning disabilities become more apparent when children have difficulties with reading, writing, and math. Children with learning disabilities are of average or above average intelligence; their problem seems to be one of processing information. They often also have problems with motor control, particularly balance, coordination, body image, awareness of space, and directionality (Cook et al., 2000; Deiner, 1999).

Sometimes, though not always, learning disabilities occur in conjunction with **attention deficit disorder (ADD)** or **attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)**. It is important not to confuse the normal activity and exuberance of young children with ADHD. A child who is truly hyperactive—with a very short attention span, undue restlessness, poor impulse control, inability to concentrate, and great distractibility—needs medical help. Various treatments, particularly psychoactive drugs, have helped many children gain better control over their behavior; however, there is considerable concern in the medical community about the long-term effects of such medications (Weiss & Hechtman, 1986). Be aware that drugs do not cure ADHD but can help children manage their behavior more effectively (Deiner, 1999). Medication is effective for over 70 percent of children (Landau & McAninch, 1993).

# A CLOSER LOOK

## Children in Jeopardy

Many young children today come to early childhood programs with a fate over which they had neither choice nor say. Innumerable numbers of children have had their futures limited because of prenatal exposure to drugs, alcohol, or diseases such as AIDS. It is estimated that well over a million babies are born each year having been exposed to illicit drugs or to legal drugs such as alcohol and nicotine (Brady, 1994). Their circumstances often require that early childhood teachers take special safeguards or use strategies to help these children flourish in the early childhood environment.

In recent years, considerable media attention has focused on children prenatally exposed to such drugs as crack or cocaine. When drug-exposed children enter an early childhood program, they often need additional attention and supervision because many, though certainly not all, have developmental delays, are impulsive, fail to understand cause and effect, display out-of-control behavior, and have unpredictable mood swings which can result in aggressive outbursts. The stability and support provided by a high-quality early childhood program has proven effective for many drug-exposed young children. A responsive caregiver seems to be the most important factor in the lives of such vulnerable children (Zuckerman, 1991) because many have the added burden of an unstable home life; the early childhood program can meet this need for some children.

Awareness has also been raised about the effects of alcohol on unborn children. Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and the less severe manifestation, fetal alcohol effect (FAE), can result in behaviors such as impulsivity, hyperactivity, poor attention span, poor judgment, and difficulty in remaining on task (Rice, 1992). The most effective environment for children with FAS or FAE seems to be one that is structured and predictable. Consistency can help FAS and FAE children learn the parameters of environment more effectively.

Another contemporary special group of young children is those who were prenatally exposed to the HIV infection. Children with HIV and AIDS may well be enrolled in early childhood programs, and those who work with them need to understand the characteristics of their illness, how it is transmitted, and precautions that need to be taken, particularly since there are many misconceptions about AIDS. It is important that Universal Precautions, usually spelled out by local or state health codes, are taken. These dictate that blood and other body fluids be handled by someone wearing latex (e.g., disposable) gloves, that materials that come in contact with such fluids and materials used to handle them be disposed in a childproof container with a plastic liner, and that spillages are cleaned immediately with a disinfectant (Kelker, Hecimovic, & LeRoy, 1994). Taking such precautions are adequate to prevent transmission of the virus. Wadsworth and Knight (1996) also note that children with the AIDS virus may have damage to the central nervous system that can affect their senses, cognitive and motor abilities, and language development. Young children with AIDS or HIV need the sensitivity and care that a high-quality early childhood program can provide.

One caution must be mentioned. While there are some general characteristics that describe many children who were prenatally exposed to drugs, alcohol, or the HIV virus, each child's history, personality, behavior pattern, and development are unique. Thus, like with any child, the individuality of that child is what is most precious and important.





KEY POINT

Children with mild or moderate visual problems can function well in a regular early childhood program. Children with severe visual impairments will need considerable special assistance.

Many visual impairments can be corrected or reduced through corrective lenses.

If a child in your class has been medically diagnosed as having ADHD and is now taking medication, it is important that you carefully observe how the medication affects the child and report this to the parents. Particularly for children who spend many hours a day in a child care setting, the teacher's reports can be invaluable. We will discuss various methods of observation, which can help you in this task, in Chapter 6.

**Children with Visual Impairments.** There are varying degrees of visual impairment, with complete sightlessness as the most extreme. However, many children who are considered to be visually impaired are able to see imperfectly, less clearly than a normal person. Some visual impairments, especially if they are caused by a defect of the eye, can be corrected or reduced through surgery or corrective lenses. Others, particularly those stemming from brain or optic nerve damage, are most likely not correctable (Deiner, 1999).

Children with severe visual impairments are usually identified at an early age. Many children with less serious problems, however, may go undiagnosed, because most children do not routinely see an ophthalmologist and are simply not aware that something is wrong. It is important to look for signs of potential visual problems. Eyes that are frequently red or watery, have discharge, develop styes, or seem uncoordinated should be checked.

Some behavioral signs may also warn of possible visual problems. These include frequently rubbing the eyes, tilting the head, continually blinking, frowning, squinting, or complaining about headaches or dizziness. It is also important to observe a child carefully who persists in holding a book too close or too far, over- or underestimates distances when putting together manipulative toys, loses interest in activities such as group book reading (if this inattentiveness is unusual in other activities), or can't recognize familiar people from a distance. Any of these signs, particularly if they occur in combination with others, are reasons to discuss your concern with the parents.

If a child with a severe visual disability is enrolled in your class, there are some approaches you can use to maximize his or her involvement and learning. As with any sensory deficiency, it is important that acuity in the other senses be heightened to help the child learn about the world; thus, the senses of hearing and touch become particularly important. Every new word or concept should be associated with touch. Allow plenty of time for tactile exploration of new objects, particularly relating parts to the whole in more complex items (for instance, pegboard and pegs). Encourage the child to engage in physical activity and talk about what he or she is doing. Also discuss what you and the other children are doing as it happens. The environment should be free of clutter so the visually impaired child can get around without danger of tripping over an unexpected obstacle. All the children in the class can help maintain an orderly environment. Use auditory and tactile cues to help the child identify various areas of the room (the bubbling sound of the aquarium to identify the science area, for instance). A specialist who works with visually impaired children can be a great resource in finding ways to make the child as independent and involved as possible (Cook et al., 2000; Deiner, 1999).

**Children with Hearing Impairments.** Hearing is very much tied to communication because children learn to understand and talk by listening to and imitating others. Thus, a child with a hearing impairment usually experiences problems in language learning as well. Because language is also a primary tool in acquiring concepts about the world, a child whose language is limited by hearing loss may also experience cognitive problems. Severity of hearing loss, anywhere on the continuum from mild to profound, will affect the corrective measures as well as the strategies a teacher might use. Some children benefit from hearing aids, which amplify sounds. Others are helped to learn a combination of methods; for instance, sign language, using whatever hearing capacity they might have, and speech reading skills as part of a total communication approach.

total communication approach—Used with hearing impaired children, utilizing a combination of methods such as sign language, speech reading, and hearing aids.

Some children with mild hearing loss may not have been identified as having a problem. In addition, ear infections can affect hearing; thus, some children are at risk of losing some of their hearing capacity. Be alert to signs of potential problems. If a child frequently requests that you repeat, often seems not to hear when you speak to him or her, is inattentive or baffled at group times that require listening, or shows indications that his or her ears hurt, there may be cause for concern. Plan to observe such signs more specifically and then share your observations with the parents.

KEY POINT

Children with mild or moderate hearing problems can function well in a regular early childhood program. Children with severe hearing impairments will need considerable special assistance, usually including special equipment.

If a child with an identified hearing disability is enrolled in your class, the audiologist or speech therapist can provide guidelines for adapting the program to maximize learning, possibly including some of the suggestions listed here. Before talking to a hearing impaired child, make sure that you have the child's attention and wait for eye contact. While talking, always face the child, preferably at eye level, and don't cover your mouth. Whenever appropriate, use body language to augment your words. Also reduce background noise as much as possible to help the child focus on relevant sounds. Enrich the visual environment of the class by adding as many visual aids as possible; for instance, pictures of the day's routine activities and pictorial labels of classroom materials. If the child is learning sign language, try to learn as many of the signs as possible and help the other children in the class learn some as well (Deiner, 1999).

**Children with Communication Impairments.** Language is a complex process (we will discuss it in more detail in Chapter 12) that depends on a number of interrelated factors. It involves the ability to hear, understand, process information, speak, and articulate sounds so they can be understood by others. Problems in communication can stem from a variety of causes. For instance, a child's language learning might be delayed because of inadequate language stimulation in early life; poor communication could be a symptom of problems synthesizing information in a meaningful way; or poor articulation might be caused by a malformation in the structure of the mouth. If, compared to age-mates, a child in your class is particularly difficult to understand, has difficulty understanding what you say, or consistently refuses to talk, there may be a language or speech disability that should be discussed with the parents.

KEY POINT

The early childhood program can provide a language-rich environment for a child with a communication impairment.

Coordination with the speech therapist can ensure that what is accomplished in therapy is augmented in the early childhood setting.



In addition, a stimulating, consistent, and language-rich environment can encourage the child to use language. Structure activities that will result in success to build the child's sense of confidence. Encourage the child to participate in social activities by encouraging all forms of communication, even if it is nonverbal. When appropriate, create a need for speech; for instance, by "misunderstanding" the child's request made through gestures. Particularly if the child does not talk, maintain relevant commentary. If the child does talk, be a patient listener, giving your undivided attention. Never criticize the child's incorrect speech, or lack of speech, but praise appropriate speech when it occurs.

Communication may also be problematic if a child has little or no command of the English language. A child learning English as a second language does not, however, have a language deficit, because the child most likely is fluent in the family's native language. Strategies for helping children become bilingual communicators are discussed in detail in Chapter 12.

KEY POINT

Although display of some behavior problems is normal for young children, some have emotional deficits that require special attention.

**Children with Emotional or Behavioral Deficits.** As an early childhood teacher, you will inevitably be around children whose behavior is at times out of control. Most children will respond negatively to some circumstances or provocations, such as hitting out, using aggressive language, or being destructive. Such occasional behavior is normal and can be dealt with by using suitable guidance techniques. All children need positive guidance to help them gradually develop self-control and acquire appropriate social skills and attitudes toward other people. Because guidance is such an integral part of working with young children, we will devote two chapters to various aspects of guidance, including dealing with problem behaviors (see Chapters 14 and 15).

A small percentage of children have much more severe problems that require intensive therapeutic intervention. One such condition is **autism**, a socioemotional condition of unknown origin in which the child shows inappropriate, even bizarre, behaviors. It is not likely that a severely autistic child would be enrolled in an integrated classroom. However, if a child in your class seems particularly distant from or oblivious of others in the class, seems out of touch or disinterested in what is going on, generally reacts with inappropriate emotions or shows no emotion, frequently engages in self-stimulating behaviors, or repeats words rather than responding to them, talk with the parents and urge them to seek a professional diagnosis and help (Deiner, 1999).

autism—A socioemotional condition of unknown origin in which the child's social, language, and other behaviors are inappropriate, and often bizarre.

Some children are emotionally fragile because of life circumstances that put them at risk. Such factors as family and community violence, homelessness, abuse and neglect, and poverty can take a great toll on children's emotional well-being. A consistent, loving, thoughtful environment, provided by the early childhood program, can help give a measure of stability for such children. We will consider how to help children deal with stress in greater detail in Chapter 16.

KEY POINT

Children who suffer from chronic or long-term illnesses also have special needs.

**Children with Health Problems.** A range of chronic, long-term health conditions can cause various problems for children. In addition to the physical symptoms of the illness, which are often painful, children with health problems are frequently subjected to scary medical treatment and hospitalizations, may well be excluded from participating in

some activities, can be beset by anxiety and fears, and are absent from school more than other children. Thus, children with health impairments need special consideration, not only to ensure that their medical needs are met but also to help them cope as effectively as possible with their illnesses.

Children can be beset by numerous health impairments, too numerous to review here. If a child in your class has been diagnosed as having a chronic health problem, it is important to gather information about the illness. Parents, doctors, and therapists will be the best sources of information because they can give you not only general information about the illness but information about the child's specific needs as well. Another source is literature prepared by support or informational organizations related to specific illnesses (for instance, the American Diabetes Association or the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America). Be particularly aware of preventive measures that need to be taken; for instance, medication or periods of rest. If there is the possibility that the child may suffer an attack, as may happen with asthma or epilepsy, know what steps should be taken. If appropriate, at least one member of the staff should be trained in emergency procedures related to the child's condition.

It is also important to know what information the child has been given about the condition. What you say to the child should agree with what the parents or other professionals have told the child. In addition, an open atmosphere allows the child, as well as other children, to discuss fears, concerns, or questions. If a child is frequently absent from school, take steps to ensure that the child continues to feel part of the class. Involve other children in sending get-well messages or telephoning the child (if appropriate), visit the child at home or in the hospital, and send school activities that can be done at home (Deiner, 1999).

**Gifted Children.** Recently there has been increasing attention paid to the special needs of another group, those considered **gifted children.** As you read the word "gifted," you can probably conjure up an image of a child you have come across, one who, in some ways, seemed precocious and talented. Although we often can think of some characteristics of giftedness in specific children, it is much more difficult to define this word because different people have different concepts of its meaning. A broad definition of giftedness would include children whose performance is significantly above average in intellectual and creative areas. At the same time, it is also important to acknowledge that some children have the potential for outstanding performance that may only emerge from a supportive atmosphere.

Children may show a number of traits and abilities that provide clues to their giftedness. They are often precocious in various developmental areas, particularly in language. They may have an unusually large and advanced vocabulary; employ it appropriately in conversation on a wide variety of topics; use language in humorous and creative ways by making up elaborate stories, rhymes, and songs; and often begin to read and write earlier than their peers. Giftedness can also be seen in problem-solving ability as children like to play with ideas, come up with unusual solutions, and see more than one viewpoint. They are generally observant, catch on quickly to new concepts, and have a

**gifted children**—Children who perform significantly above average in intellectual and creative areas.

KEY POINT

Another group with special needs are gifted children, who perform above average in intellectual and creative areas. Such children need a stimulating and challenging environment.



longer than average attention span (Cook et al., 2000; Deiner, 1999). Children displaying such traits usually score significantly above average on intelligence tests, which is one (though certainly not the only) measure of giftedness.

Some children's gift is seen through special talent in art, music, or another creative area in which they are particularly advanced. One such child, three-year-old Karen, continued to astound teachers as she drew careful renditions of objects in her environment. On the playground Karen often lay on her stomach on the grass to observe bugs, which she then drew with meticulous detail.

Because gifted children often catch on quickly, they need a wide variety of challenging and rewarding experiences that help them develop positive attitudes about school and learning. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that gifted young children are, although advanced in some areas, still preschoolers with the social and emotional needs of those in their age group. Sensitive guidance can help them develop a good sense of self, recognition of individual differences and strengths, and appropriate social interaction skills. The interests of gifted children are similar to those of their age-mates, although they may want to learn more about a topic or delve into it in more depth. Thus, it is important to provide a variety of activities that allow children to enjoy involvement at different levels. At the same time, all of the children will benefit from exposure to novel, diverse, and enriching activities through classroom materials, books, field trips, and class guests.

## WORKING WITH PARENTS OF SPECIAL CHILDREN

KEY POINT

Families of children with disabilities also have some special needs that the early childhood program can help meet.

All parents need support, understanding, and reassurance, something that is particularly true of parents with children who have special needs. In addition to dealing with the common multifaceted aspects of parenting, parents of young children with disabilities often also experience greater emotional, financial, and physical strains. When a disabled child is involved in an early childhood program, it is particularly important that open and accepting communication be established between parents and teachers.

Teachers need to be sensitive to the various reactions that parents of children with disabilities may experience. Often parents feel a sense of grief for losing the "ideal" child they had been expecting before its birth. This grief can turn to anger, which parents might direct at themselves, the child, a doctor, or another professional who can be "blamed" for the disability. Some parents cope with their child's disability by denying that there is a problem, and they may, in fact, continue to seek out different professionals in hopes of finding the one who will tell them that the child's situation is normal or that he or she will soon "catch up." Parents may also experience guilt about something they perceive they had done wrong, perhaps before the child was even born. Gradually most parents come to accept the child's disability and view it from a more realistic perspective, although it is normal for them to continue to feel grief, anger, or guilt at times (Spodek & Saracho, 1994). Parents whose children are enrolled in your program may experience some of these feelings. It is important to acknowledge and accept their reactions by listening, providing practical advice, and offering information on community resources that can be of help.

Only relatively recently has the importance of the family in the lives of young children with special needs been legally acknowledged. Both Public Laws 94-142 and 99-457 are very specific in outlining the rights and roles of parents in determining the kinds of educational and therapeutic services their children will receive in programs in which public funding is provided for young children with disabilities. Specifically, these laws outline guidelines for development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for preschoolers and an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for children under the age of three. Both processes require thorough involvement of parents and teachers.

In addition to such legally mandated involvement of parents of children with disabilities, parents should be included and supported in many other ways. Exchange of relevant information between teachers and parents will help both better understand and work with the child. The school's philosophy of focusing on commonalities rather than differences among children should also provide support for parents. Sometimes parents of children with special needs are so centered on the disability that they do not see other aspects of the child's development with a clear perspective; parents can be helped to see just how similar their child is to other children. By recognizing the unique strengths and needs of each family, teachers can be the best possible resource by listening sensitively and openly, offering practical recommendations and support, and helping to maximize each child's potential.

## SUMMARY

1. Young children are alike in three common areas:
   A. "Profiles" that identify typical traits shared by the majority of children of different ages
   B. The need of all children for positive self-esteem
   C. The need of all children for play as a way of learning about the world
2. Factors that contribute to the wonderful diversity among children include inborn traits and external factors.
3. Some children have specific, special needs that make them unique. The early childhood program can help meet the needs of special children by:
   A. The inclusion of disabled and nondisabled children into the same program
   B. Recognizing characteristics of children with motor, cognitive, learning, visual, hearing, communication, emotional, and health problems, as well as gifted children

## KEY TERMS LIST

at-risk children
attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
attention deficit disorder (ADD)
autism
deficit or impairment
developmental delay
educable mentally retarded
fetal alcohol effect (FAE)
fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)
gifted children
Individualized Education Plan (IEP)
Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP)
least restrictive environment
myelin
myelination
perceived competence
personal control
self-concept
self-esteem
slow learner
temperament
total communication approach



## KEY QUESTIONS

1. Observe several children of the same age. These might be children you work with and know well or children that you are observing for the first time. What traits do they share? How are they similar? Can you draw some conclusions about children of that particular age?
2. As you observe children, identify a child who appears to be self-confident. How does the child express this confidence? Do you see a difference between this child and another who seems less assured?
3. Observe a group of young children at play. Look for examples of the various types of play discussed in this chapter. Do you see a relationship between age and type of play?
4. Think about the same children you observed earlier for KEY QUESTION #1 and describe what makes each of them unique. How do they differ? Do you have any indications about what factors underlie these differences?
5. If you are able, observe an early childhood program in which a child with special needs is integrated. Observe and talk to one of the teachers. What special accommodations have been made for this child? How does the child interact with the other children in the class? How is the child's independence encouraged? Does the child participate in a few, some, or all activities?

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

Select additional books, articles, and Web sites on topics discussed in Chapter 2.

Allen, K. E., & Marotz, L. (2003). *Developmental profiles: Pre-birth through age eight* (4th ed.). Clifton Park, NY: Delmar Learning.

Deiner, P. L. (1999). *Resources for educating children with diverse abilities: Birth through 8* (3rd ed.). Clifton Park, NY: Delmar Learning.

Shore, R. (1997). *Rethinking the brain: New insights into early development.* New York: Families and Work Institute.

## HELPFUL WEB SITES

American Academy of Pediatrics:
http://www.aap.org
Council for Exceptional Children:
http://www.cec.sped.org
Zero to Three/National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families:
http://www.zerotothree.org

For additional early childhood education resources, visit our Web site at

**http://www.earlychilded.delmar.com**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# CHAPTER 3

# The Families

As we discussed in the last chapter, children are central in early childhood education. Families have to be considered equally important, however, in part because children are integral members of their family systems, and, conversely, family values and culture are an inseparable part of children. Families are also at the core of early childhood education because the early childhood staff shares with families the responsibility for socializing young children. It is important to provide for children a sense of continuity between home and school experiences, which can best be assured through a carefully fostered partnership between the family and the early childhood program (Powell, 1998). That effort will be the focus of this chapter.

## A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Throughout this book, we will review a variety of theories to help you understand more clearly the many aspects of children's development and behavior. It is equally important to understand family functioning from a theoretical perspective. **Family systems theory** provides a useful approach to understanding the family as an ever-developing and changing social unit in which members constantly have to accommodate and adapt to each other's demands as well as to demands from outside the family. This theory provides a dynamic, rather than static, view of how families function.

From the perspective of family systems theory, the influence that family members have on each other is not one-way but rather interactive and reciprocal. Furthermore, it is impossible to understand the family by gaining an understanding of its individual members because there is more to the family than the "sum of its parts." It is necessary to view its interaction patterns and the unspoken "rules" that govern the members' behaviors. Healthy families work well together, communicate often, are able to make effective decisions, and can handle change. In addition, understanding the family means looking at its functioning within the larger context; for instance, the extended family, the community, and the neighborhood. The early childhood center becomes part of that larger context in which families function (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).



Each individual's development occurs in a broader ecological context, within different but overlapping systems. The **microsystem** is the most immediate system that affects the individual; it includes the family, classroom, or workplace. These components of the microsystem are linked together in the **mesosystem** through such relationships as parent-teacher interaction or employment practices that affect the family (for instance, employer-supported child care or paid maternity leave).

The **exosystem** includes broader components of the neighborhood and community that affect the functioning of the family; for example, governmental agencies or mass media. Finally, the broadest system to affect families is the **macrosystem**, which includes cultural, political, and economic forces (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983). From such an ecological perspective, the child and family are seen more clearly as part of and affected by many other systems, each of which influences their development and functioning.

Viewing children and families as parts of various systems helps us avoid seeking simple explanations and acknowledge the complex interactions that often underlie children's and parents' behaviors. We must take time to look at the many factors affecting behavior before jumping to conclusions. It is also important to recognize that family and school interact to affect children's development in myriad possible directions (Powell, 1998). This perspective makes good communication between home and school an imperative, not a choice. Finally, a systems approach helps us see the interrelatedness of all aspects of children's lives. We simply cannot assume that the child's home exists in one isolated "compartment," while the school is in another. In the same way, we cannot presume the families' lives can be segmented into isolated facets.

## THE CHANGING AMERICAN FAMILY

The family is, and always has been, the most important element in most children's lives. The family is where children experience the emotional and physical care and sustenance vital to their well-being. But the family has no simple definition or boundaries. Whereas several decades ago many young children might have been part of a "traditional" family—working father, housewife mother, and two or three children—today's youngsters live in any of a wide variety of family configurations (Fraser, 1989). Powell (1998) summarizes this change, and its implications for early childhood educators, as follows:

> Sweeping changes in the United States have shaped current ideas about relationships between families and early childhood programs. The growing ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity of the population increases the chances that children will be cared for by adults whose expectations and practices differ from those of the child's family members. Further, profound demographic and economic changes have led to concerns about the adequacy of support systems for families. (p. 61)

**family systems theory**—A view of the family as an ever-developing and changing social unit in which members constantly accommodate and adapt to each other's demands as well as to outside demands.

**microsystem**—According to family systems theory, that part of the environment that most immediately affects a person, such as the family, school, or workplace.

**mesosystem**—According to family systems theory, the linkages between the family and the immediate neighborhood and community.

**exosystem**—According to family systems theory, that part of the environment that includes the broader components of the community that affect the functioning of the family, such as governmental agencies or mass media.

**macrosystem**—According to family systems theory, the broadest part of the environment, which includes the cultural, political, and economic forces that affect families.

**KEY POINT**

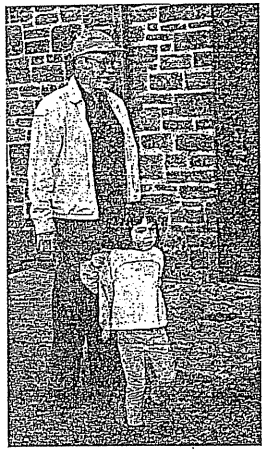
Family systems theory views the family as a dynamic, constantly changing system that interacts with other systems, for instance, those within the community.

KEY POINT

There is no simple or single definition of the family because families come in many forms.

KEY QUESTION

Think of your own family history. How has your family changed over the past two (or three or four) generations? Consider maternal employment, divorce, closeness to extended family, and other factors. Compare your family with that of other members of your class.



In two-earner families, parents often share child care responsibilities.

KEY POINT

Families also differ based on economic, racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, language, and geographic factors.

## Family Forms

A family may be made up of one parent and one child, or it may be part of an extended family of grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and many other relatives who are in frequent, close contact. Families may have one, two, or more parents; these may be the biological parents, stepparents, adoptive parents, or emotionally rather than legally related caregivers. A single parent may have never been married or be divorced, separated, or widowed; as part of this group, an increasing number of young children live with single fathers (Kinnear, 1999).

If a family has undergone a divorce, children may live with the same single or remarried parent all of the time, may alternate between two parents who have joint custody, or may see one parent for brief times during weekends or holidays. For some children, grandparents or other relatives take on the function of parents. Some divorced parents find alternate living arrangements, perhaps moving back with their own parents, sharing housing with another adult or single parent, or joining in a group housing arrangement. Because of divorce and remarriage, today's children may also acquire various natural and adoptive brothers and sisters, as well as half-siblings, step-siblings, or unrelated "siblings" in less formal family arrangements.

Whatever the family form, a wide range of people can make up children's network of significant family members, as defined by emotional as well as legal ties. It is necessary, as a teacher of young children, that you also consider and acknowledge these persons as part of a child's family. Anyone who is important in the child's mind should be considered as important by you as well.

It is also important to be aware of legal restrictions that might affect children's relationships with adults in their lives. During some divorce proceedings, one parent may file a restraining order against the other, legally limiting or forbidding contact with the child. Although such situations are usually upsetting, it is necessary to be aware of and make appropriate provisions for complying with any legal action. Keep in mind that the majority of children who are kidnapped are taken by a divorced parent who does not have custody of the child. Having a release form on file at the school is one important way of ensuring that only authorized persons pick up the child (Trotter, 1993).

## Other Family Variations

Not only is there great variation in family form and composition, but other characteristics differentiate families as well. Some of these include economic, racial, cultural, ethnic, religious, language, and geographic factors, and the sexual orientation of the parents. Such elements can not only affect family customs and traditions, but also reflect deeper meanings; for instance, defining values and relationships (Powell, 1998). In some cases, a family's uniqueness includes a mixture of cultures, religions, races, or generations. A teacher can learn about characteristics of various cultural, racial, or religious groups by reading, but it is very important to avoid making large-scale generalizations about a family based on group traits. Families are complex, and only through genuine interest can a teacher get to know them well. Effective



Families vary widely, something to which the early childhood teacher must be sensitive. Differences in culture, ethnicity, race, religion, language, and family composition are contributing factors. How can you, as the teacher of a diverse group of children, get to know the families and their values?

and frequent communication helps the teacher become aware of family attributes that can affect the child and family as participants in the early childhood program. (Note that in Chapter 13 we will discuss some guidelines for promoting understanding of cultural and ethnic variations in children and families; in Chapter 12 we will consider some issues in working with children and families who are bilingual or do not speak English at all.)

Increasing numbers of families from varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds enroll their children in early childhood programs. In fact, in 1997, one-third of children in the United States were from nonwhite, non-Anglo groups (Pollard, 1999). It is, therefore, particularly important for teachers to be sensitive to differences in values, cultural expectations, and child-rearing practices. Effective communication is especially important to help both parents and teachers achieve mutual understanding and appreciation, which, in turn, will help provide a consistent and positive experience for the children (Powell, 1998).

## Families in Poverty

KEY POINT

An estimated one-fifth of American children and one-fourth of preschool-aged children grow up in poverty.

Today, increased numbers of children grow up in poverty. . . . The estimated 21 percent of American children living in poverty includes 36.7 percent of black, 34.4 percent of Hispanic, 18 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander, and 15.1 percent of white children. This means that more than one-fifth of American children live in families that suffer such severe financial strain that they cannot meet their basic needs. The poverty rate for children under age six is even higher than for older children, and is double that of the adult population (Children's Defense Fund, 2000). A different way of underscoring this circumstance comes from a survey of eight industrialized nations, in which the United States had the highest child poverty rate; in fact, American children were two or three times more likely to be poor than children in the other countries studied (Children's Defense Fund, 1990).

Historically, many early childhood education efforts have been aimed at helping economically disadvantaged families, with Head Start and Early Head Start as the most extensive of such antipoverty

endeavors. While such programs initially focused almost exclusively on the children, more recently they have emphasized providing strong support to families as well. This includes information and education, concrete assistance (for instance, providing transportation), and emotional support. Careful research has shown that high-quality early childhood programs, particularly those in which family support has been included, have a dramatic effect, not only in terms of children's later school achievement, but also on their families (Chafel, 1990; Seitz, Rosenbaum, & Apfel, 1985; Zigler & Freedman, 1987).

The end of the 20th century has brought another element into the picture of child care, families, and families in poverty. The Welfare Reform Act of 1996, formally called the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, has set the expectation that recipients will receive welfare support for a limited time only and then must become employed. Since many welfare recipients have young children, the child care system has to absorb additional children as these parents enter the work force (Gnezda, 1996). The implications of this act are further discussed in Chapter 16.

## THE NEEDS OF FAMILIES

**KEY POINT**

One of the most important needs of working parents is for high-quality, reliable care for their young children.

The fact that a child is enrolled in an early childhood program indicates that the family has a need that the program is able to meet. The most common, and certainly the most obvious, family need is provision of child care while the parents are at work. The proliferation of child care centers and family child care homes over the past three decades has been in response to the dramatic increase in the number of working, single-parent, and two-earner-parent families.

But beyond the overall need for responsible and knowledgeable adults to provide care for children while their parents work, families have other needs that the early childhood center can help meet. Some of these needs concern helping the parents, as individuals, meet the demands of their multiple roles. Others revolve around coordination of home and school routines and practices. One note to keep in mind: Although it is an ideal to consider that early childhood teachers can meet everyone's needs—children's parents', co-workers'—sometimes this is just not possible in actuality. Setting realistic goals within the particular work setting can help establish priorities. There are other community services that may provide for other needs.

### Parenthood

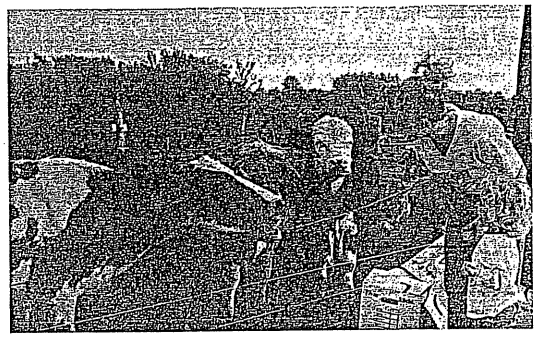
**KEY POINT**

Many parents are part of Erikson's stage of generativity, in which care and nurture of children is important.

We typically view parenthood from the perspective of children's development and how parents facilitate, support, and promote it. Rarely is parenthood seen from the viewpoint of parents and their needs. Erik Erikson (1963), whose theory of human development was one of the first to span adulthood as well as childhood, considers that the most important need of the mature adult in the stage of **generativity** is to care for and nurture others. The tasks of this stage are often carried out in parenthood, through which the adult is concerned with meeting the needs of the next generation. Implied in this process is growth of the adult as an individual that is separate from the nurturance extended

**generativity**—According to Erik Erikson, the stage of human development in which the mature adult focuses on the care and nurture of the young.





Parents also go through defined stages of parenting; for instance, explaining and clarifying the world to their children.

to children. This acknowledgment of adulthood as a period of continued development has been advanced in recent years by other writers (for instance, Gould, 1978; Levinson, 1978; Sheehy, 1976).

Parenthood as a distinct process has also been examined in greater depth. Ellen Galinsky (1981), after intensive research and interviews with scores of individuals, suggests that parents change and develop in their roles just as children do, by moving through six stages of parenthood. Each stage involves issues to be faced and a crisis that the parent has to resolve successfully. For instance, the parents of an infant are in the **nurturing stage,** forming a strong attachment with and integrating this newest family member into their lives. Parents of toddlers and younger preschoolers find themselves enmeshed in the **authority stage,** defining rules and their own roles. Toward the end of the preschool years, parents enter the **interpretive stage** in which they are confronted with the task of explaining and clarifying the world to their children.

Galinsky is particularly concerned with the "images" that parents create, images of what they expect the child to be like before it is born, images of how they and their children will act and interact, or images of the loving relationship they expect. These images, especially what they wish to recreate or what they would like to change, emerge from parents' past experiences. Often, however, images and reality are different. Growth occurs when parents modify images so they become more consistent with reality or adjust their behavior to come closer to the image.

Galinsky emphasizes throughout her book that parents frequently feel their responses and emotions are unique, unaware that other parents also encounter them. Yet, as she points out, during each of the stages of parenthood, parents face predictable issues and strong emotions. It helps parents to discuss and recognize their shared experiences as well as to have opportunities to observe the behaviors of others' children. It is also helpful when professionals explain common reactions and feelings; for instance, to a child's first day of school. In working with children, then, it is very important to acknowledge that parents undergo personal development that parallels their children's

**KEY QUESTION**

Sometimes the needs of families conflict with those of the program. Which elements of the early childhood program could pose a potential conflict? How might these be resolved? Read "Ethics Case Studies: The Working Mother" in *Young Children,* November 1987, page 16, for insight into the suggestions of professionals to resolve such a conflict.

**nurturing stage**—Stage of parenting defined by Ellen Galinsky into which the parents of an infant fit, as they form an attachment with and integrate the new baby into the family.

**authority stage**—Stage of parenting defined by Ellen Galinsky typifying parents of young preschoolers who are defining rules as well as their own parenting role.

**interpretive stage**—Stage of parenting defined by Ellen Galinsky typifying the parent of an older preschooler or school-aged child who faces the task of explaining and clarifying the world to the child.

**KEY POINT**

Galinsky identifies stages of parenthood that are distinct from, but overlap with, their children's stages of development.

growth but that has separate issues and conflicts that need to be resolved.

## Empowerment

**KEY POINT**

A goal of some early childhood programs is to promote empowerment of the parents, to help them achieve a sense of control over their lives.

**empowerment**—Helping parents gain a sense of control over events in their lives.

When parents feel confident and competent in their abilities as mothers and fathers as well as members of the larger community, their children benefit. Unfortunately, some parents feel that they are powerless in controlling what happens to them and to their children. An important role that early childhood programs can serve for families is to promote **empowerment,** a sense of control or power over events in their lives. This is particularly important as families deal with a variety of agencies and professionals; for instance, school, welfare, and political systems.

Parental empowerment has been a direct aim or an unexpected outcome in some programs designed for low-income families (Dunlap, 2000; Ellsworth & Ames, 1998). As cited in one report of such a program, "Intangible but crucial shifts in attitude took place in parents who were often severely demoralized at the start" (Nauta & Hewett, 1988, p. 401). Parents began to see that they could have an impact. Professionals can use a wide variety of techniques to help parents attain this sense of control, including approaches described in a number of excellent publications, such as Alice Honig's *Parent Involvement in Early Childhood Education* (1979).

One of the forces behind the concept of parental empowerment has been the move toward viewing parents and teachers as equals. Not too many years ago, the pervasive attitude was that professionals were experts, whereas parents were the passive recipients of their expertise (Powell, 1998). Such a view does not provide parents with the security that they know their child best and that they should be full participants in any decisions that affect the child. Parents need to be treated with respect, their opinions should be solicited and taken seriously, and they must be integrally involved in decisions about the child. In addition, when early childhood professionals give parents child development information, parents have tools with which to make informed decisions about their children's needs. Thus, involving, consulting with, and providing relevant education for parents can have a far-reaching impact by helping parents recognize their own importance and competence (Swick, 1994).

## Coordinating Family Needs and the Program

**KEY POINT**

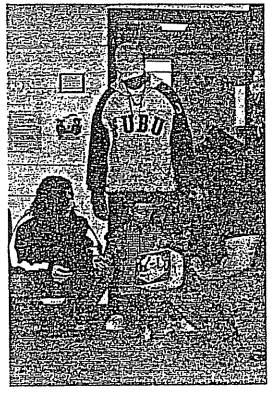
Coordinating the needs of parents with the needs of children and the program can be a challenge for early childhood teachers.

Helping parents reach their potential as effective adults may be a goal in some programs that work extensively with families, particularly those from impoverished backgrounds. In all early childhood programs, there are additional points of contact between parents and teachers, at times revolving around seemingly mundane matters, but nonetheless important. A flexible, good-humored attitude can help establish and maintain positive home-school relationships.

Parents' busy lives, or unforeseen events, are sometimes at odds with the schedule and routine of the early childhood center. For instance, one mother expressed concern that the center's afternoon snack, provided at 3:30, was served too late and that the child was not interested in dinner at 5:30. Another parent preferred that her child not take a nap at school, because when he slept during the day, he was just not ready to sleep at home until quite late in the evening. Other problems may keep a parent from arriving until after the center has closed; for instance, car trouble, a traffic snarl, or unexpected overtime at work.

All of these situations can cause conflict but also provide an opportunity to evaluate what is best for the child, the parents, the other children, and the teachers. Sometimes such predicaments can be resolved fairly easily, but there are times when the needs of the child, the parent, or the school directly conflict. There is no simple answer, for instance, to weighing whether a child should take a nap, particularly when he appears to need it, or not take a nap because a delayed evening bedtime keeps his mother from getting the sleep she needs. Teachers must carefully weigh their own professional judgment of what is best for the child and take into account the child's need for sleep, the potential effect of being sleepy and cranky on the ability to function well at school, and the fact that the child would be treated differently from the other children by not napping (Ethics Commission, 1987). One way of resolving such conflicts—whether it is a matter of discussing naps, snacks, or pick-up time—is communication, our next topic.





Viewing parents and teachers as equals, each contributing relevant information and expertise, helps empower parents.

## COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

**KEY POINT**

Effective home–school communication is important to parents, teachers, and children.

Effective, positive communication with families is vital to providing a consistent and congruent experience for young children, but there is no simple formula for assuring that such contact does indeed take place. Each family is unique and brings to the early childhood program distinctive strengths and needs. Just as the teacher deals with each child as a unique individual by employing a variety of teaching and guidance methods, so must a flexible approach be maintained in communicating with families to meet their individual requirements.

There are many bits of information that need to be shared by teachers and the family. For instance, both sides will benefit from mutually discussing the child. In addition, there is often more general information about various aspects of the program that must be shared with families. The type of information to be conveyed often determines the communication method used. Communication, as we will discuss, can be carried out using both individual and group methods. Most early childhood centers utilize a combination of these approaches.

## Individual Methods of Communicating with Families

The best way to get to know each family is through individual interaction and contact. Informally, such contact can take place daily; for instance, when children are dropped off and picked up from school. More formally, scheduled conferences between the teacher and parents or other family members provide an avenue for the exchange of information.

# EXPERIENCES

## CHAPTER 3

### LEE, Parent Program Coordinator

**Busy Parents**

Today's moms and dads are doing it all: they work, they go to school, they maintain a home, many are partners in a marriage, and, of course, they are parents. Times have definitely changed. Parents just have less time than parents of two decades ago, so our entire approach to involving parents in their children's child care program has had to be modified.

Actually, the great majority of what you'd consider parent education, as well as communication between parents and teachers and parents and parents, happens before and after school. The informal networking that goes on at those times covers a lot of ground. But there are times when it is more fruitful to reach a large group of parents rather than to talk to many parents about the same topic individually. What we have found is that there are certain "burning" issues that come up at certain times of the year, issues about which a number of parents need information.

Our most successful group parent functions have revolved around such issues. So, when we consider having a parent meeting, the first prerequisite is the relevance of the topic to a sizable group of parents. Once we have identified such a topic, we work with three other elements: time, food, and child care. We talk to parents to find out when the most convenient time for such a meeting would be. Almost always, parents want to meet about the time the center closes, so they don't have to come back in the evening. It is also helpful for us to serve a substantial snack. Food is a great way of enticing people to an extracurricular function. Finally, we always provide child care so parents don't have to worry about having to get a baby sitter or dealing with their children while trying to listen to the topic under discussion.

One of the most popular parent meeting topics, year after year, has to do with transitions. Parents whose children are moving from our center to kindergarten or first grade, whose children are moving from our infant and toddler program to a preschool class, or whose children are moving into our kindergarten class have many questions. Major changes such as these often raise doubts and anxieties. So, we share information about how within-center changes are made, and we invite public school representatives to discuss the transition to public kindergarten or first grade. Parents have opportunities to ask questions and often misconceptions are clarified. We generally hold our transition meeting in April.

Earlier in the year we also hold a meeting to discuss the assessment of children. Parents are very interested in knowing how we evaluate their children and what we do with the information. We share with parents our philosophy and show them examples of the kinds of information we look for. Since we use a portfolio approach to keeping records about the children, parents are generally reassured when they recognize that we use an individualized method that does not "compare" children to each other. A group meeting to discuss general information is then followed by opportunities for parents to speak briefly with their child's teacher and set appointments for more in-depth conferences.

Parents, teachers, and other staff members of child care programs are busy people. Finding the most relevant topics and most appealing methods to bring these people together takes some ingenuity, but successful parent functions can be rewarding for all those who are involved.





**Informal Contact with Families.** At the beginning and end of each day, at least one teacher should be available to exchange a few words with family members who drop off or pick up their children. Such informal interactions can make teachers more sensitive to the needs of children and families, can establish a mutual trust, can convey a feeling of caring and interest to parents, and can heighten parents' involvement in the program. "By being open, receptive, and chatty, teachers encourage parent interest and commitment" (Reiber & Embry, 1983, p. 162).

Daily informal contact between teachers and parents is important for another reason when very young children are concerned. "During the time the parent is away, the infant is busily going about the business of growing up. Each new achievement . . . should be shared with parents" (Wilson, 1999, p. 90). In addition to being given information about the child's achievements and activities, parents of infants also must be kept informed about their children's routine activities, such as eating, sleeping, and toileting. A consistent form, which caregivers fill out throughout each day, can help parents see at a glance what the child's day was like.

Because frequent school–family contacts are important, it makes sense to structure the schedule so that staff are free to participate in such exchanges. Informal dialogues at the start and end of the day tend to be the most pervasive form of family involvement in early childhood programs (Gestwicki, 2000), especially those primarily involving working parents. In programs where children arrive by bus or come in car pools, the teacher needs to make an extra effort to maintain contact with parents, for instance, through notes or telephone calls (Gestwicki, 2000).

Another informal means of contact with parents is through occasional telephone calls. These provide a comfortable way of talking to parents, particularly if the calls are made often enough so they do not signal "a problem." Some schools send home "happy notes," brief, personalized notes that share with the parents something positive that happened during the day, or use journals that are sent back and forth between home and school with notes from both parents and teachers. Finally, a recent addition that some teachers and parents use as a way of touching base is through electronic mail (E-mail). E-mail, however, may not be private; therefore, sensitive information should not be shared in this way (Couchenor & Chrisman, 2000).

**KEY POINT**

Parents and teachers often use the beginning and end of the day as a time for brief, informal communication.

**KEY QUESTION**

Visit an early childhood program. What evidence of communication with parents do you see? Look at bulletin boards, notes, pictures, and other written material. What kind of interaction do you notice between parents and teachers? What "messages" about the school's concern for parents do parents get from this communication?

**Formal Contact with Families.** Informal daily contacts between teachers and family members can create a mutually respectful and nonintimidating atmosphere. When teachers and parents feel comfortable with each other, communication will more likely be honest. In addition to such day-to-day encounters, more formal opportunities should be structured, when a sizable block of uninterrupted time is set aside for in-depth discussion. Such formal contacts can take the form of a parent-teacher conference or a home visit.

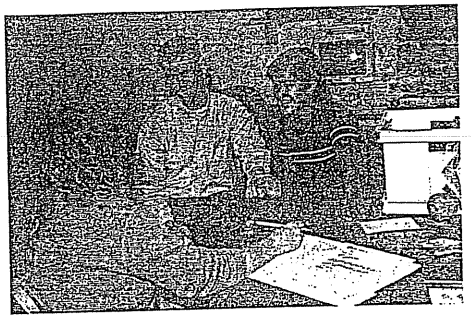
A **parent-teacher conference** is a regularly scheduled meeting that can satisfy different objectives. It can focus on getting acquainted, sharing information about the child and presenting a "progress report", or, at the initiation of either teacher or parents, solving problems or discussing specific issues. Conferences often have negative connotations for the participants, who may view them as a time to share complaints and

**KEY POINT**

More formal parent-teacher communication takes place through parent conferences and home visits. Both should be planned to facilitate a positive exchange of information.

parent-teacher conference—A one-on-one interaction between the teacher and the child's parent(s).

Regularly scheduled conferences, where teachers and parents share information and insights, should be positive and affirming.



problems, even as a "last resort" when all else fails. Nonetheless, routinely scheduled conferences should be positive, affirming, and supportive.

A conference should never be an impromptu event. The teacher needs to be well prepared ahead of time, reviewing relevant information and thinking about how best to present it. In fact, preparing for conferences should be an ongoing process, beginning when the child first enters the program. It is helpful if the teacher is ready with some anecdotes to support what the parents are told as well as to convey to them that the teacher knows the child well. It is also important to think through what questions to ask of the parents to help the teacher better understand and work with the child.

At the same time, the teacher should facilitate a relaxed and easy forum for conversation. Sometimes sharing something with the parents—for instance, a picture painted by the child or a favorite recipe for play dough—contributes toward creating a positive atmosphere.

home visit—A one-on-one interaction between the teacher and the parent(s) of the child that takes place in the child's home.

Another type of formal individual contact between teachers and family is a **home visit.** Home visits share some of the same objectives and procedures with parent-teacher conferences, but they contribute some added benefits as well. A teacher who visits a family at home conveys a sense of caring and interest in the child's world beyond the classroom. Children are usually delighted to introduce their room, toys, pets, and siblings to the teacher and are made to feel very special that the teacher is visiting them at home. Parents can observe firsthand the interaction between the child and the teacher and may become more relaxed with the teacher who has shown this special interest. In addition, teachers can observe firsthand the family's home environment and parent-child interactions as a way of better understanding the child's behavior. In some instances, especially once a sense of trust has been established, home visits can become an extremely important source of support; for instance, for teen-aged parents.

Although there are very important benefits in conducting home visits, they are also quite time consuming and may (though certainly not inevitably) intimidate the parents. A teacher's commitment to learning as much as possible about the children in the class and their families has to be weighed against the investment of time involved in home visits and the parents' potential anxiety (Gestwicki, 2000).



Parents and teachers may, at times, disagree. Communication to help each other see the others' point of view can help ease such tensions.

**When Problems Come up between Parents and Teachers.** Ideally, parents and teachers cooperate fully to provide congruent, positive experiences for children at home and at school. Unfortunately, there are times when this ideal is not always realized. In fact, parent-teacher disharmony is quite common (Galinsky, 1990). Parents and teachers may disagree, particularly when they feel rushed and tired or when they are preoccupied with other aspects of their lives. In addition, both may harbor some unacknowledged negative feelings; for instance, disapproval of working mothers, jealousy or competition for the child's affection, or criticism of the other's child guidance approach (Galinsky, 1988; Galinsky, 1990). Although the child is the common bond between parents and teachers, there are many other factors that affect their moods and impinge on their interactions. The job stress experienced by parents as well as by teachers can certainly spill over into the brief contact between them as children are dropped off or picked up at school during what Ellen Galinsky calls the "arsenic hour" (1988).

KEY POINT

There are some strategies that can help when problems arise between parents and teachers.

Galinsky (1988) offers some concrete suggestions for working more effectively with parents. She suggests that when teachers become upset with parents, it is often because teachers' underlying expectations are somehow not realized; teachers need to examine whether what they expect is realistic or not. Similarly, teachers should scrutinize their attitudes toward the parents, looking for hidden resentments or prejudices. Teachers also need to make an effort to see the situations from the parents' point of view, asking themselves how they might feel if they were in the parents' shoes.

It can be very helpful to teachers to develop a support system, whether within their own program or even outside of it, that allows them to express and explore their feelings in an accepting and safe atmosphere. Teachers must also recognize and convey to parents the limits of their role. This includes being familiar with community resources to which parents can be referred when a problem is beyond the scope of the teacher's role and expertise.

There is no simple formula for effective parent-teacher communication. The parent-teacher relationship is founded on trust and respect that grow out of many small but significant daily contacts. Greeting parents by name; sharing brief, positive anecdotes about their children;

writing personalized notes; making phone calls to parents the teacher does not see often; and being sensitive to parents' needs all contribute to a good relationship (Morgan, 1989).

**KEY POINT**

Effective methods of communicating with groups of parents include newsletters, memos, bulletin boards, and group meetings.

**KEY QUESTION**

For several parents whose children are enrolled in an early childhood program about their contacts with the teachers and the program. What is their overall attitude about contact between home and school? Do they feel it is important or not important . . . positive or negative . . . present or absent . . . supportive or lacking in support? What do they expect from the teachers? Do they feel communication between parents and teachers is important for their children?

## Group Methods of Communicating with Families

In addition to personalized, individual contact between parents and teachers, early childhood programs generally also utilize other communication methods for getting information to the parents as a group. These methods can serve a functional purpose; for instance, to let parents know that the school will be closed the day after Thanksgiving. They may also take on an educational role; for example, to give parents insight into an aspect of child development. We will review three such methods—written communiques, bulletin boards, and meetings.

**Written Communiques.** Newsletters, memos, or other written material can be an effective way of getting information to all families. It is, of course, important to match written information to the reading abilities of the parents. If many or all of the families in the program are non-English-speaking, for instance, communiques should be written in the parents' primary language.

It is also important that all such materials be neat, attractive, and accurately written. A sloppy, misspelled, and ungrammatical letter conveys that the message is probably not very important and that the teacher does not care enough about the families to produce a thoughtful document. Today, many schools have access to a computer, which makes it simpler than ever to compose attractively arranged letters or newsletters, to check the grammar and spelling, and to incorporate graphics.

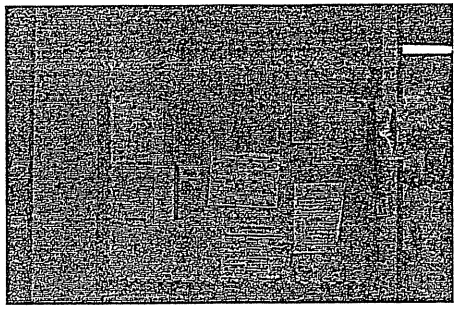
Many programs produce a regular newsletter that may contain announcements, news of what the teachers have planned for the upcoming time period, new policies, relevant community information, child development research ummaries, columns by local experts, and other information of interest to families. A newsletter is only effective if it is read. Thus, its length, the information included, and the writing style need to be carefully considered.

Another form of written communication that can convey a great deal of information to parents is a school handbook, which parents are given when they enroll their children in the early childhood program. Such a handbook should contain relevant information about school policies and procedures, fees, hours of operation, holidays, sick child care, birthday routines, and other important matters. At the same time, it should include a clearly articulated statement of the school's philosophy.

**Bulletin Boards.** Bulletin boards can be a useful means of conveying information, or they can be a cluttered mass of overlaid memos that no one bothers to look at. To be effective, a bulletin board should be attractively laid out, its contents need to be current, and posted items should not compete with each other for attention. Furthermore, if family members know that only current and important items will be posted on a specific bulletin board, they are more likely to pay attention to it.

Bulletin boards can be used for a variety of purposes. They can be informative; for instance, letting parents know that the children will be





A bulletin board can be an effective way to convey information to parents as a group. This bulletin board, for instance, is organized and the information is current. What other methods can help ensure good communication with parents?

taking a field trip the following week or that a child in the group has chicken pox. Many centers include a notice of the day's activities on a bulletin board, which lets parents know the highlights of their child's day. Bulletin boards can also be educational, conveying relevant information in a way that appeals to those who look at it.

At one center, for instance, the teachers wanted to follow up on comments from several parents that their children were just scribbling rather than drawing something recognizable. The teachers wanted to help parents understand that children's art follows a developmental pattern. They matted selections of the children's pictures, arranged them attractively on bulletin boards organized by the children's ages, and interspersed the pictures with quotes from experts on children's art. The pictures supported the quotations, thus conveying the messages that children gradually move toward representational art and that there are comon steps children go through in their development of art. Many parents commented on how helpful they found this bulletin board message. It proved to be a most effective teaching tool!

**Meetings and Other Group Functions.** Group gatherings can provide another effective way of reaching family members. (See "Experiences" on page 68.) Such functions can take the form of meetings, the traditional forum for formal parent education, or they can be social. In addition, parent discussion groups may be part of the early childhood program. When planning any kind of group function, however, keep in mind that family members are busy people who will weigh the benefits of attending a school program against other demands on their time. In fact, for some parents the pressure of one more thing to do might be so stressful that it would outweigh the advantages of the program. Because each family's needs are different, the early childhood program must facilitate communication with parents in many different ways and be prepared to individualize ways of meeting these needs.

If the director and staff feel that parent meetings can serve a positive function in meeting the needs of some of the families, they must ensure that what they plan will interest potential participants. One way to assess what might be relevant to parents is to conduct an interest survey. A brief form can solicit preferences about topic choices, time

**FIGURE 3-1 Parent Interest Survey**

Dear Parents:

We would like to plan some family events for this year and want your suggestions. Please help us by sharing your preferences about the following:

(Please rate these as follows: A = yes, definitely interested; B = moderately interested; C = not at all interested.)

1. **Type of event:**
___ Parent meeting on a specific topic (topic choice below)
___ Parent discussion groups on specific topics
___ Family social function (picnic, dinner, party, and so on)
___ Fund-raiser to benefit your child's class

2. **Topic choice** (for meetings or discussion groups):

| | |
|---|---|
| ___ Child behavior/guidance | ___ Television |
| ___ Child nutrition | ___ Good toys for children |
| ___ Learning to read | ___ Balancing family/work |
| ___ Self-esteem | ___ Working mothers |
| ___ What happens at school? | ___ Child development |

3. **Best day** (circle your choices): M T W Th F Sa

4. **Best time:**

| | |
|---|---|
| ___ Lunch time | ___ Afternoons |
| ___ After work | ___ 7:30–9:00 P.M. |

5. **Other matters:** Will your attendance be influenced by:

| | |
|---|---|
| ___ Provision of child care | ___ Provision of meals/snack |

Thank you for your help!

and day, and type of meeting (see Figure 3-1 for a sample form). If the teachers or the director plan parent functions without input from the parents, these functions may well fail to match the interest of the parents and result in very low attendance (Gestwicki, 2000). Also, parents are often more likely to come to a meeting if a meal or snack is included and if child care is provided. However, keep in mind that if children have already spent 9 or 10 hours at the center, adding 2 evening hours may be more than is reasonable.

Parent get-togethers may focus on having a speaker with expertise on a topic of common interest, or they may revolve around discussion led by a facilitator. It is important to remember that parents' shared experiences are a valuable source of information and support. Thus, if the main part of the program includes a speaker, time should also be allocated for discussion.

One particularly enjoyable way of presenting some topics is to illustrate them with slides or videotapes taken of the children at the school. Such subjects as children's play, social development, or developmentally appropriate toys can be enhanced with such visuals. In addition to gaining insight into an aspect of their children's development, parents will feel great pride in seeing their youngsters depicted on the screen.

Small groups are generally more effective than large groups in facilitating participation (Gestwicki, 2000). A common interest can also encourage a more intimate atmosphere for a meeting; for instance, involving parents whose children will enter kindergarten, or moving from the infant room to the toddler program the following year, or just the parents of children in one class rather than those from the entire early childhood center.

Some centers generate considerable enthusiasm for social events during which parents and teachers have the opportunity to exchange information in a relaxed atmosphere. These can include holiday parties, meals, or an open house, and they can involve all family members. One university program sponsored a potluck dinner for families, staff, and student teachers each semester. Prearranged seating assured that students sat with the families of children they were observing. This event attracted almost all of the families and proved to be enjoyable as well as valuable for all involved.



## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

**KEY POINT**

Family involvement in the early childhood program has positive benefits for children, families, and the school.

We have been discussing various ways in which communication between teachers and families can be maintained. However this communication takes place, it implies involvement on the part of the family. Let's look at family involvement in more detail now.

**family involvement**—The commitment of parents to the early childhood program through a wide variety of options.

Family involvement in the early childhood program is a multifaceted concept, embracing a wide range of options and levels. It can mean that parents and other family members are passive recipients of information; parents may be more intensely engaged by serving as volunteers in the program; or, at an even more complex level of involvement, they can be participants in the decision-making process of the program (Honig, 1979). Whatever the level, however, ample research has shown that such involvement has positive benefits for children as well as for families (Dunlap, 2000; Powell, 1998).

**KEY QUESTION**

How can parental involvement benefit the early childhood program? List some concrete ways in which parents might contribute to the program.

There is a reciprocal relationship between the family and the early childhood program, each providing support and help to the other as they are able. Family involvement will vary according to each family's ability to contribute and to its needs. Some families invest a great deal of their time and energy in the program, whereas others need all their resources to cope with the stresses they face. Some families support the program by participating in and contributing time to various school activities; others seek support from the program in facing their personal strains. The early childhood staff must be flexible to be able to recognize each family's capabilities and needs and to set expectations or provide support accordingly.

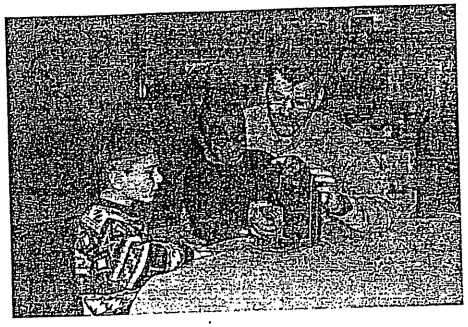
Families can be involved in their children's programs in many ways. We will look at some of these; specifically, family members as resources, as volunteers in the classroom, and as decision makers.

### Families As Resources

**KEY POINT**

Family members may serve as resources to the program by contributing special talents, interests, and abilities; as volunteers, or as members of a policy board, in a decision-making capacity.

Family members have many talents and abilities to contribute to the program. Many early childhood programs invite parents or relatives to participate on occasions when their job skills, hobbies, or other special expertise can augment and enrich the curriculum. For instance, a teacher may invite Ronnie's mother, who is a dentist, to help the children understand the importance of good dental hygiene and care; the



Family members other than parents can also share their special interest or talents with children in the early childhood program. The children were fascinated with the big camera brought in by this photographer, who is the uncle of one of the children.

teacher may take the children to visit the bakery owned by Annie Lee's uncle, because the class is discussing foods; she can ask Junior's father to show the children how he makes pottery; or she may invite Ivan's mother and new baby brother when the class talks about babies and growing up. All family members—parents, siblings, grandparents, other relatives, even pets—can be considered part of the program, extending its resource base.

Family members can also help out with maintenance and construction tasks that are part of the program. In some schools, parents routinely take home the dress-up clothes and other classroom items to wash or clean. In others, regularly scheduled clean-up days bring teachers and family members to school on specified weekends to deep clean the facility, materials, and equipment. Family members with carpentry skills may construct or repair equipment. Others may develop learning materials and games at home that will expand the activity options available to the children.

There are other ways in which family members can serve as program resources. For instance, they can help orient new families to the early childhood program, serve as role models, and provide support to other families. Their suggestions and ideas can enrich the program. Family members can also be extremely effective in providing local and state support for legislation that affects children and families. They can help provide program visibility in the community if the school is seeking outside funding. Family support can be a potent force in maintaining a high-quality early childhood program.

## Family Members in the Classroom

Family members may also volunteer as teacher aides. Programs such as parent-cooperative preschools require parent involvement. Some Head Start programs have also required that parents spend time in the classroom, although forced participation can be counterproductive (Honig, 1979). In most programs, particularly child care centers, parents participate occasionally, or not at all, because parents are usually working while their children are at school. Some teachers relish such involvement; others feel skeptical and reluctant, fearing a clash with

Skpheci



the parents' child-rearing practices, feeling stress about being under constant observation, or worrying that the children will get overexcited (Gestwicki, 2000).

Having parents in the classroom can have many benefits for children, parents, and teachers. Children can benefit from having their parents participate in the classroom, feeling pride and a sense of security as they see their parents and teachers working together. For parents, such firsthand experience can provide insight into how their children spend their time at school, a basis for observing their own children in relation to age-mates, and a chance to note guidance techniques used by teachers. Teachers can benefit from the support parents offer, the added pair of hands that can allow expanded activity possibilities, and the opportunity to gain insight into parent-child interactions (Gestwicki, 2000).

## Family Members As Decision Makers

Some programs ask parents to serve on an advisory or policy board. Head Start and other federally funded programs, for instance, invite parents to participate in parent advisory councils, as outlined by federal regulations. Many not-for-profit child care or preschool centers also require a governing board of which parents are members. Effective decision-making boards can promote a true partnership between families and the school program (Dunst & Trivette, 1988), providing support for the school, empowerment of parents, and increased mutual understanding.

## PARENT EDUCATION

KEY POINT

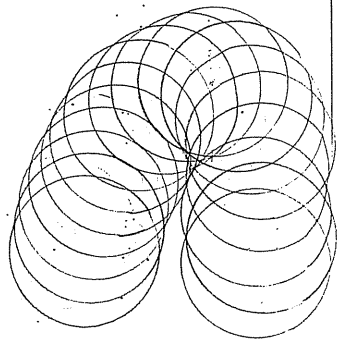
Parent education can take many forms to meet the many different needs of families.

All forms of family involvement potentially serve an educational function, as parents have the chance to gain insights into their children's development and the school's program. Often, however, early childhood programs provide specific **parent education** aimed at enhancing parent-child relations and improving parenting competence. Given the numbers of children who grow up in abusive homes, and in abject poverty, some professionals even consider that high-quality parent education programs should be mandatory to prevent needless impairment of children through abuse, neglect, and deprivation (Anastasiow, 1988). Evaluation of many parent education programs aimed at economically disadvantaged families has indicated that such programs can be very effective, although much still remains to be learned through systematic research (Powell, 1998). In addition, there is limited evidence that parent education enhances the parenting skills of middle class families as well (Harris & Larsen, 1989).

**parent education**—Programs aimed at enhancing parent-child relations and improving parenting competence.

The scope of parent education programs is not easy to capture in a single definition because there is great diversity in the field. Douglas Powell (1986) spells out some of the contrasts in parent education:

> Some programs focus on family-community relations while others teach parents how to stimulate a child's cognitive development. Some programs prescribe specific skills and styles in relating to young children while other programs help parents determine what is best for them. Some programs are designed primarily to disseminate child development information to parents while others attempt to foster supportive relationships among program



# A CLOSER LOOK

## What Do We Know about the Quality of Child Care?

The *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers* report (Helburn et al., 1995) paints a bleak picture of child care in America today. The results of this large-scale study indicate that the quality of most centers is poor to mediocre and quality is even lower in infant/toddler centers. Very few centers were considered to be excellent, with 24 percent of preschool and 8 percent of infant/toddler programs receiving such a rating. At the other end of the scale, 10 percent of preschool and 40 percent of infant/toddler programs were rated as less than minimal.

The authors of the study found these results disturbing enough to conclude that quality in most American child care centers is sufficiently poor to affect young children's emotional and cognitive development. Regardless of their family backgrounds, children in lower-quality child care were found to be less competent in social ability, language, and other developmentally related skills than those in higher-quality programs. The difference was even more marked for children already at risk.

A follow-up study conducted when the children of the original research were in kindergarten and second grade found that these differences persisted. The advantage in cognitive and social skills of children in higher-quality child care programs continued into elementary school. Children who had been in higher-quality early childhood programs also continued to have fewer behavior problems (Peisner-Feinberg, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, & Kagan, 1999).

This study confirmed many previous studies' findings about the variables that contribute to quality in child care, many of which we examined in Chapter 1. The most significant factor was higher adult–child ratios. Also important was the staff's education level, especially specialized training. In addition, the prior experience of the administrator and teachers, wages were correlated with quality. Interestingly, states with higher licensing standards had fewer poor-quality centers.

One of the most provocative findings of this research is that, while such a high percentage of programs were rated by professionals as being mediocre or poor, 90 percent of parents considered their children's centers to be very good. This is clearly an overestimation of quality on the part of parents. What might be the reason for this discrepancy? The researchers speculate that one reason is the difficulty of monitoring a child care program because parents have relatively little opportunity to observe in the facility. Another reason may be that some parents have never seen high-quality child care and thus have no basis for comparison. Parents may also feel they have no choice; therefore, it is easier for them to consider that their children are cared for appropriately. Because this study found little difference in the cost between high- and low-quality child care, the researchers conclude that parents simply are not demanding quality, although they state that quality in their children's care is important to them.

This study underscores a number of important issues. Good child care is not easily available to most families; thus, a majority of children are getting less than adequate care. Adverse outcomes are associated with this poor-quality care, which puts the future of America's children in jeopardy. The need the future of the country in jeopardy. The nation must make a strong commitment so all children and their families have access to quality child care. This commitment involves educating parents to help them both understand and demand appropriate quality for their children. You as an early childhood educator can be a force in ensuring that the children you work with experience a quality program and you can help educate parents about what quality means.





participants. Some programs are highly structured while others let parents select activities they wish to pursue. In some programs the staff serve as child development experts while other programs adhere to a self-help model with staff in nondirective facilitator roles. There are important differences in the use of professionals, assistants or volunteers, program length (weeks versus years), and program setting (group- versus home-based). (p. 47)

Although parent education can take many forms, parent get-togethers or meetings are one frequently used forum. The content of such programs can vary widely, determined by parent interest and need. Couchenor and Chrisman (2000) suggest six popular topics for parent education programs. These include the value of play for young children, Developmentally Appropriate Practice in early childhood programs, positive guidance, limiting television, homework, and healthy sexuality development. This chapter's "Experiences" box also suggests that school transitions offer a topic of interest to many parents. In addition, program topics can revolve around common problems at various stages of children's development, nutrition, health, self-care, family crisis and stress, children's fears, and how to foster self-esteem. Finally, the family's involvement in and promotion of children's education includes many areas of interest to parents.

Programs can be presented by the early childhood staff based on their own expertise, or by local resource persons. It is important that presenters be well informed on the topic chosen and that they provide accurate information. In addition, a variety of packaged parent education materials are also available. Such packages may include extensive manuals and provide the facilitator with all the necessary resources to conduct the program. Examples of such programs include STEP—Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (Dinkmeyer, McKay, & Dinkmeyer, 1980), PET—Parent Effectiveness Training (Gordon, 1976), and Active Parenting (Popkin, 1983).

## SUMMARY

1. Family systems theory is a way of viewing the family as a dynamic unit.
2. The American family has undergone many changes recently. Consider some of these changes by looking at the following:
   A. Variety in family forms
   B. Other factors that contribute to family diversity
   C. Families in poverty
3. Families have specific needs that the early childhood program can address. Consider issues related to family needs, including:
   A. The needs of adults in a unique stage of development, separate from their children's development
   B. The need to feel empowered, in control of their lives
   C. Coordination of the needs of the family with the early childhood program

4. Two-way communication between families and the early childhood program is an important element in providing consistency for children. Consider the following methods of communicating with parents:
   A. Communicating with individual parents informally, on a day-to-day basis, and formally, through conferences and home visits
   B. Communicating with groups of parents, through written communiques, bulletin boards, and meetings
5. Families can be involved in the early childhood program in a number of ways—as resources, in the classroom, and as decision makers.
6. One function of the early childhood program is parent education, which can take a variety of forms.

## KEY TERMS LIST

authority stage
empowerment
exosystem
family involvement
family systems theory
generativity
home visit
interpretive stage
macrosystem
mesosystem
microsystem
nurturing stage
parent education
parent-teacher conference

## KEY QUESTIONS

1. Think of your own family history. How has your family changed over the past two (or three or four) generations? Consider maternal employment, divorce, closeness to extended family, and other factors. Compare your family with that of other members of your class.
2. Sometimes the needs of families conflict with those of the program. Which elements of the early childhood program could pose a potential conflict? How might these be resolved? Read "Ethics Case Studies: The Working Mother" in *Young Children*. November 1987, page 16, for insight into the suggestions of professionals to resolve such a conflict.
3. Visit an early childhood program. What evidence of communication with parents do you see? Look at bulletin boards, notes, pictures, and other written material. What kind of interaction do you notice between parents and teachers? What "messages" about the school's concern for parents do parents get from this communication?
4. Ask several parents whose children are enrolled in an early childhood program about their contacts with the teachers and the program. What is their overall attitude about contact between home and school? Do they feel it is important or not important . . . positive or negative . . . present or absent . . . supportive or lacking in support? What do they expect from the teachers? Do they feel communication between parents and teachers is important for their children?
5. How can parental involvement benefit the early childhood program? List some concrete ways in which parents might contribute to the program.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Select additional books, articles, and Web sites on topics discussed in Chapter 3.

Couchenor, D., & Chrisman, K. (2000). *Families, schools, and communities: Together for children.* Clifton Park, NY: Delmar Learning.

Gestwicki, C. (2000). *Home, school and community relations: A guide to working with parents* (4th ed.). Clifton Park, NY: Delmar Learning.

Powell, D. R. (1989). *Families and early childhood programs.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

## HELPFUL WEB SITES

National Parenting Network:
http://www.tnpc.com

Families and Work Institute:
http://www.familiesandwork.org

The Fatherhood Project:
http://www.igc.org/fatherhood


For additional early childhood education resources, visit our Web site at
**http://www.earlychilded.delmar.com**

CHAPTER

4

# The Teachers/Caregivers

This chapter will focus on you . . . you as an individual, you as a teacher or caregiver, you as a member of a profession. However, everything discussed in this book is relevant to you as a teacher. You are the one who integrates knowledge about the development of children, about the importance of families, about creating a healthy and stimulating environment, about child-sensitive curriculum planning, and about appropriate and nurturing guidance to provide the best possible care and education for young children. Thus, in this chapter we will explore important aspects of teaching and the profession of early childhood education.

## THE EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER AND CAREGIVER

Before beginning a discussion of early childhood teachers, it is important to make some distinctions in terminology. Unfortunately, no universally accepted categories and titles define those who work with young children, although some have been proposed, as we will discuss later. Often labels conjure up stereotypes and do not reflect different educational and experiential backgrounds found in the field (Phillips & Whitebook, 1986).

Throughout this book the terms **early childhood teacher** and **early childhood educator** will be used synonymously. Other terms are also applied to those who work with young children, particularly **caregiver** and **child care worker**. Traditionally, the distinction has been made that a caregiver—for instance, someone who works in a child care center—cares for the physical and emotional needs of infants, toddlers, or children whereas the teacher serves an educational function. "However, this distinction is not a particularly clear one, for the line between education and nurture in the early years is not a distinct one" (Spodek & Saracho, 1982, p. 401).

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Certainly the early childhood teacher "cares for" and the caregiver "teaches" young children. Which teacher has not tied shoelaces, wiped noses, or dried tears? And which caregiver has not helped children learn how to zip a coat, assemble a puzzle, or share the tricycle? Teaching and caregiving functions seem not only inherent but also integrally related in both roles to the point where a distinction is impossible to make (Willer, 1990).

Lilian Katz has, in fact, included these among the four roles she delineates as functions of teachers of young children: caretaking, providing emotional support and guidance, instructing, and facilitating. The caregiving role, similar in many ways to the role of the mother, diminishes as the child gets older (Katz, 1980).

The distinction between the teacher and the caregiver, then, is more than a general description of what they do, for their roles certainly overlap. What does distinguish teachers, according to Katz (1984b), is their professionalism, the way they use their knowledge and standards of performance. Teachers possess advanced knowledge in child development and early childhood education that they apply when they have to make judgments and decisions on a moment-by-moment basis. At the same time, they also share with other professionals a commitment to maintaining the high standards set by the profession through its organizations. But there really is no simple or single definition of a good teacher of young children. In a summary of six in-depth interviews that searched for a definition of "the good preschool teacher," Ayers (1989) concludes that there is "a kaleidoscope of possibility, for there are endless good preschool teachers" (p. 141).

**early childhood teacher or early childhood educator**—A specifically trained professional who works with children from infancy to age eight.

**caregiver or child care worker**—Term traditionally used to describe a person who works in a child care setting.

**KEY POINT**

A professional early childhood teacher is distinguished by professionalism, knowledge and standards, judgment, and ability to translate theoretical information into practical application.

## Qualities of the Good Early Childhood Teacher

If asked what qualities a good teacher of young children possesses, most of us would come up with an intuitive list of characteristics such as warmth, sensitivity, energy, sense of humor, flexibility, or patience. Empirical research, however, is not particularly clear-cut in showing a consistent relationship between teacher effectiveness and personal qualities. This is partly due to problems in the methodology of such research, inconsistency in what is being measured, difficulty in distinguishing between teaching style and teaching techniques, and even lack of agreement about what constitutes "good" teaching (Feeney & Chun, 1985; Katz, 1984a).

Some clues about what makes a good teacher of young children can be gleaned from early childhood educators and researchers based on their experience and insight. Sally Cartwright (1999), an early childhood educator and writer, outlines some important qualities of good early childhood teachers: "As I talked with teachers and friends, we agreed it's more than love for children, more than training and experience that make a good teacher. We felt a teacher's maturity and deeply held values are of major importance, and the most important values are kindness, courage, and integrity, in that order" (p. 4). This list represents an interesting set of characteristics which distinguish a dedicated teacher of young children. Cartwright further explains that maturity includes inner security, self-awareness, and integrity, particularly honesty



and fairness in dealing with children. In addition, the good teacher has a good knowledge base, including a theoretical framework for his or her work and a broad general font of information. Finally, he or she lists warmth, respect, and trust in the children, unconditional caring, intuition, detachment, and a good sense of humor as important characteristics of good teachers of young children.

Those who care for infants and toddlers also need special qualities, beyond "liking babies." Balaban (1992) includes in her list of important personal qualities the ability to anticipate and plan; provide an interesting environment; elicit language, problem solving, and play; protect, listen, and watch; smooth "jangled feelings"; comfort; cope; facilitate social interactions; facilitate parent-child separation; and care for the whole family.

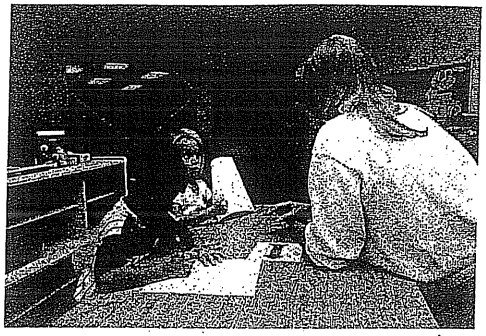
**KEY POINT**

Teachers evolve through several stages that are related to their level of experience.

## Teachers' Developmental Stages

Although the idea of developmental stages is commonly understood and used by teachers of young children, the notion of sequenced steps of development among teachers is not as readily considered. Yet Katz (1977) concludes that teachers also undergo a series of stages, each with unique developmental tasks and training needs. It is helpful to realize that others begin their teaching experiences with similar feelings of inadequacy or anxiety and that these evolve into more advanced stages as competence develops.

- **Stage 1: Survival**—The beginning teachers' main concern through the first year or so of teaching is usually focused on whether they will survive. The realization of the great responsibility they have for the group of children, as well as the discrepancy between the success they expect and the reality of the classroom, result in anxiety and feelings of inadequacy. In general, they are acquiring information about what children are like and what can be expected of them. At this stage, the teacher's main need is for support, encouragement, and guidance, provided on-site, as needed.
- **Stage 2: Consolidation**—Having recognized that they can indeed survive, teachers begin to focus on specific tasks. As they consolidate the information gained from their first year or two, they move their attention more specifically to problem children or to situations that deviate from the general norm. Their needs at this time are for continued on-site training that supports exploration of alternatives to deal with the problem situations.
- **Stage 3: Renewal**—By now, teachers in their third or fourth year begin to seek some new approaches and ideas as they tire of the way they have been doing things for the past several years. The search for renewal can be met through meetings with colleagues, professional organizations and conferences, professional books and journals, and visits to other programs.
- **Stage 4: Maturity**—This final stage is reached by different teachers at different points and represents a coming to terms with themselves and their profession. Now they ask deeper and more abstract questions, looking at the broader implications of their



work in the context of the larger society. Their experience makes these questions more meaningful. Mature teachers need opportunities to read widely, interact with others, and participate in seminars and other forums where such questions are addressed by others searching for similar insights.

## STAFFING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

The early childhood teacher, of course, works within a system along with others who share the tasks of the program. Staff members, from the director to the custodian, contribute toward making the program successful. There can be a variety of staffing patterns depending on the type, size, and philosophy of the program as well as on its funding source. A half-day preschool attended by 15 children may, for instance, be staffed by one owner/teacher and one part-time assistant. However, a not-for-profit child care program in which 160 children are enrolled might involve a board of directors, a director, a curriculum coordinator, a parent coordinator, 12 head teachers, 28 full- and part-time assistants, a variable number of volunteers, a secretary, a cook, a custodian, a list of substitute staff, and various community professionals who serve as resource persons. Figure 4-1 schematically illustrates the staffing patterns of these two hypothetical programs.

**KEY POINT**

The size and complexity of a program will affect the size and complexity of the staffing pattern.

The distribution and allocation of responsibility also varies in different programs. Some exhibit a hierarchical structure, fashioned as a pyramid, where power trickles down from the top and each layer in the structure defers to those above. Thus, in some classrooms that follow this model, one teacher is designated as the head or lead teacher and other staff work under her or him, following that teacher's direction and guidance.

**KEY POINT**

Early childhood programs can have various staffing structures and lines of staff authority and responsibility.

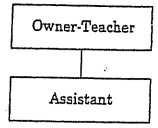
Yet, in the early childhood field there is often an alternative to this pyramid structure because of the strong interdependence and interconnectedness among staff members, who frequently make decisions by consensus. This can be depicted as a web that allows for more flexible and dynamic relationships than the hierarchical model in which the power structure tends to be static and individuals' responsibilities depend on their position in the structure (Dresden & Myers, 1989). More recently, the term **career lattice** has been suggested as an appropriate

**career lattice**—Recognizes that the early childhood profession is made up of individuals with varied backgrounds; a lattice allows for both horizontal and vertical movement among positions, with accompanying levels of education, experience, responsibility, and pay.

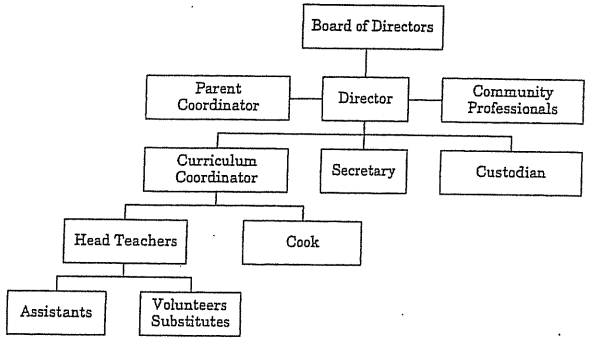


**FIGURE 4-1 Organizational Chart Showing Staffing Patterns**

**Program 1:** Half-day preschool for 15 children




**Program 2:** Not-for-profit child care center for 160 children

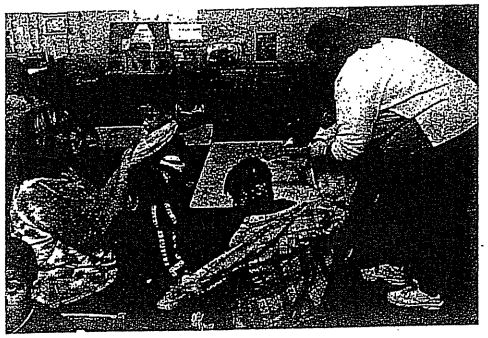



**team teaching**—An approach that involves coteaching in which status and responsibility are equal rather than having a pyramid structure of authority, with one person in charge and others subordinate.

symbol for the uniqueness and diversity seen in the early childhood profession. A lattice allows for both horizontal and vertical movement among positions, with accompanying levels of education, experience, responsibility, and pay (Bredekamp & Willer, 1992).

In other programs, classes are cotaught by team teachers who share responsibilities. **Team teaching** is based on a relationship of trust and communication between the two teachers, something that takes time to build. A good team finds many bonuses in this relationship through added flexibility, creativity, problem-solving capabilities, and focus on what each member of the team enjoys most or does best. In addition, the collaboration between the two provides the children with a model for cooperative behavior (Thornton, 1990).

Whatever the structure, it is sensible to find out ahead of time what the lines of responsibility are in terms of providing direction, feedback, evaluation, and resources. By learning the lines of authority and communication, you, as a teacher in a program, will know who to seek out for guidance and information, with whom to discuss problems, and where ultimate responsibility for various decisions lies. Whatever the organizational structure of the program, smooth functioning depends in part on a clear understanding of responsibilities and lines of communication and on cooperation among the staff (Click, 2000; Sciarra & Dorsey, 2003). We will now briefly examine some of the positions and their responsibilities held by staff members in early childhood programs.



In many programs, teachers share responsibility equally for the functioning of the classroom through a team-teaching approach.

## Director

The director performs a variety of tasks, depending on the size and scope of the program. In small programs, the director may double as a teacher for part of the day, whereas in large programs the role may be purely administrative. This staff member is usually responsible for financial, personnel, policy, and facility decisions; provides community linkages; handles licensing and regulation; and is the ultimate decision maker in the chain of responsibility in all matters that pertain to the program. The job description often also involves staff selection, training, monitoring, and evaluation. In programs that depend on grants and other outside sources of funding, the director may spend much time writing proposals and meeting with influential decision makers. But a director is often also a plumber, a carpenter, and a counselor because he or she holds the ultimate responsibility for whatever needs to be taken care of!

KEY POINT

The role of the director will depend on the size and nature of the program.

## Teaching Staff

Those who work directly with children may hold a variety of titles. In its position statement on nomenclature for early childhood educators, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) suggests four levels (NAEYC, 1984).

- **Level 1: The early childhood teacher assistant** is in a preprofessional position and works under direct supervision of the professional staff. This person holds a high school diploma and must show a genuine liking for children, dependability, and an interest in improving skills.
- **Level 2: The early childhood associate teacher** can implement program activities independently and be responsible for the care and education of a group of children. This person has demonstrated competency in the job, for instance, through an associate degree in early childhood education or a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential (to be discussed under the topic "Training and Regulation" later in this chapter).

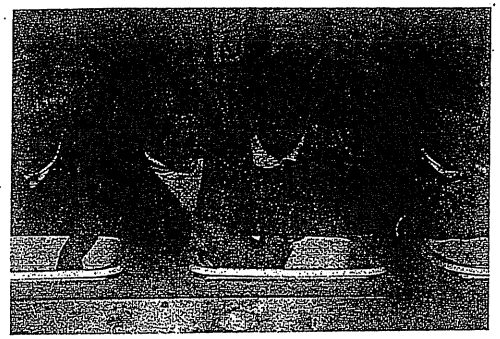
KEY QUESTION

Review the four levels of early childhood educators suggested by NAEYC. What are the advantages of such a hierarchy? What are the disadvantages? Since these levels are not extensively used at this time, what needs to happen for wider adoption of such a system?

KEY POINT

Although a four-level hierarchy of teacher positions has been suggested, most programs do not include such an elaborate classification system.





- **Level 3: The early childhood teacher** may perform functions similar to those of the associate teacher, but has a higher level of education and greater theoretical knowledge of child development and early childhood education.
- **Level 4: The early childhood specialist** is involved in supervision, training, administration, or curriculum design. The person at this level has a baccalaureate or advanced degree in child development or early childhood education; specific coursework in supervision, administration, and curriculum design; and appropriate teaching experience.

Although these levels are suggested as a way of clarifying roles and expectations, most early childhood programs do not have such an elaborate staff classification system. We will look at two common teaching positions in more depth.

head teacher—The person in charge of a class who is ultimately responsible for all aspects of class functioning.

KEY POINT

In many programs, head teachers and assistant teachers with distinct responsibilities are identified for each classroom.

**The Head Teacher.** It is the responsibility of the **head teacher,** lead teacher, or master teacher to plan and implement the daily program. This involves knowing each child and family well and individualizing the program to meet each one's specific needs. The head teacher usually also takes responsibility for the physical environment of the classroom, setting up equipment, rotating materials, and ensuring a good match between what is available and the children's skill level. The head teacher generally maintains records for the children in the class; is usually involved in parent interactions, both informally at the start and end of each day and formally through conferences or meetings; and takes charge of other staff members who work in the class by providing direction, guidance, and feedback.

assistant teacher—Also called aide, helper, auxiliary teacher, associate teacher, or small-group leader; works under the guidance of the head teacher in providing a high-quality program for the children in the class and their families.

**The Assistant Teacher.** Also called aide, helper, auxiliary teacher, associate teacher, or small-group leader, the **assistant teacher** works with the head teacher to provide a high-quality program for the children in the class and their families. Depending on the assistant's skill level and experience, this teacher may share many of the head teacher's responsibilities; for instance, participating in curriculum planning, leading large and small group activities, being involved in parent interactions,

# EXPERIENCES

## CHAPTER 4

## ALEX, Kindergarten Teacher

### "The Wicked Stepmother"

We had been talking about various fairy tales and "Cinderella" was the topic of discussion. The children retold the story and looked at its various aspects. As the conversation touched on Cinderella's stepmother, five-year-old Connie said, "That's just like a stepmother. They're so mean!"

"Yeah," said another child. "Stepmothers are really bad."

Other children chimed in, confirming that, indeed, stepmothers are terrible people. This bothered me because I knew that some of the children in the class were part of blended families, and stepparents were an integral part of their lives. How could we neutralize this fairy tale stereotype that had new meaning in today's society?

I said nothing at that time, but gave it some thought over the next couple of hours. Later in the day, we had another group time and by then I decided on my approach.

"Remember, earlier we were talking about Cinderella and her stepmother? Some of you thought that all stepmothers, like Cinderella's, were mean people."

The children again agreed with this statement.

"But you know, I don't think *all* stepmothers are mean. I want to tell you about my stepmother. After my mother died, my dad remarried another woman, who is now my stepmother. And you know what? She is really nice. She is kind and special and does lots of nice things for me. She loves me and I love her. She's a stepmother . . . my stepmother . . . and she's a wonderful person. So, I can't agree with you that all stepmothers are mean."

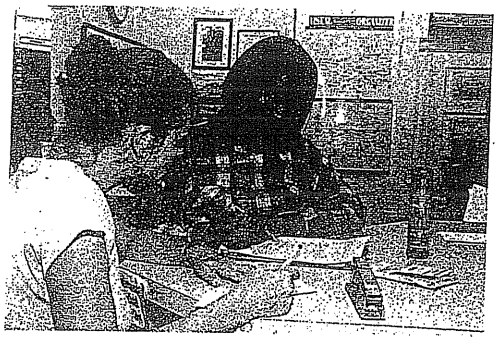
The children gave this some thought and discussed the implications of what I had said. Gradually, they verbalized that labels should not be applied to all the people in a group. People differ. We talked about the word "stereotype." We considered that not all stepmothers or, for that matter, all stepsisters were selfish and cruel like the characters in "Cinderella."

Some time into the conversation, one of the children whose parents were both divorced and remarried joined the discussion. He told the group that he had two moms and two dads, one of each being a stepparent, and that they were really nice people. The other children listened thoughtfully.

Teachers sometimes have to divulge some of their own personal experiences as a way of helping children gain a more balanced perspective. In this case, a sensitive teacher's sharing of his own family background helped the children move beyond what could have developed into a destructive stereotype.







The support staff in an early childhood setting is extremely important in ensuring that the program runs smoothly.

and arranging the environment. Because of the assistant teacher's close working relationship with the teacher, open and honest communication and mutual respect are vital between the two. In some schools, an assistant teacher may serve as a "floater," moving among classrooms to help with special activities or during specific times of the day.

## Support Staff

**KEY POINT**

Most early childhood programs, depending on their size and scope, have some support staff who help with the maintenance and functioning of the program.

Depending on the size and scope of the center, usually some persons serve in a support capacity. These might include (although they certainly are not limited to) persons involved in food preparation, maintenance, and office management.

Large programs often have a cook who is in charge of meal preparation, shopping, and sanitation and maintenance of the kitchen. The cook may also plan meals, if that person has an appropriate background in nutrition, or may participate in classroom cooking projects. A dietitian may serve as a consultant to the program to ensure that children's nutritional needs are appropriately met through the program's meals. In smaller programs, particularly those not serving lunch or dinner, the teaching staff or director may take responsibility for snack planning and preparation.

One of the most important yet difficult tasks of any center serving busy and active young children is maintenance. Daily cleaning, sweeping, vacuuming, sanitizing, and garbage disposal are vital though usually unpopular functions. Large programs may have a custodian as part of the staff, whereas others hold contracts with a janitorial service. Often the expense of a maintenance crew or custodian has to be weighed against other important needs, and the teaching staff finds that its responsibilities include many maintenance chores. Most centers compromise by having the staff maintain a modicum of cleanliness and order while a cleaning service is responsible for intermittent deep cleaning of the facility.

Other support staff take care of office needs. Large programs often have a secretary who maintains records, answers phone calls, manages typing needs, and may handle some accounting tasks. In smaller programs, such tasks may fall to the director. Some programs may employ a part-time accountant or have a receptionist in addition to the secretary. Programs that are part of or housed with other agencies may share custodial and secretarial staff.

## Volunteers

Some centers avail themselves of volunteers to help with various aspects of the early childhood program. Volunteers can include parents, student teachers or interns, members of such organizations as the Junior League, foster grandparents, and other interested community members. To use volunteers most effectively, however, there has to be a well-planned orientation, training, and monitoring component that helps the volunteer understand the program, its philosophy, and its operation. Although volunteers can provide a wonderful additional resource to a program, the reality is that volunteers are not as plentiful as the potential need for them.

KEY POINT

Some programs utilize volunteers, have a board of directors who are involved in the decision-making process, and call on community professionals to expand the services of the program.

## Board of Directors

Particularly in not-for-profit centers, some type of policy-making, governing board holds the ultimate responsibility for the program. This board of trustees or **board of directors** may be a very powerful force, making all pertinent decisions that the director then carries out, or it may only be a nominal group, where almost all decisions are left up to the director. Ideally, a board of directors' role falls somewhere between these extremes (Sciarra & Dorsey, 2003).

Boards of directors are usually made up of community persons who come from a variety of spheres of expertise and influence, most of which are not likely to be related to early childhood education. It is wise, however, to include one child development expert on the board. The director serves as a liaison, helping the board understand the rationale for decisions made based on child development knowledge, while utilizing their expertise in areas in which the director is not as well versed. Boards can be very effective in areas such as fiscal management, fund-raising, construction and expansion projects, or lobbying for children's rights.

**board of directors**—Policy-making or governing board that holds ultimate responsibility, particularly for a not-for-profit program.

## Community Professionals

The resources of a center can be expanded through other professionals in the larger community; for instance, health and mental health professionals, social workers, and therapists. In some instances, families are referred to the early childhood program by a community agency; thus, the program and referring agency can work together to maximize the help provided to the child and family. In other cases, the early childhood program may help connect families with community agencies and professionals to provide needed services. It is important for teachers to recognize the "boundaries of their own professional expertise and know when other professionals need to be consulted" (Sciarra & Dorsey, 1990, p. 369).

# TRAINING AND REGULATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

As we have discussed, many individuals contribute toward providing a good early childhood program through their levels and types of expertise. Such expertise stems from different types of training. In addition,

KEY POINT

In addition to college and university training programs, early childhood professionals can receive training and certification through the national Child Development Associate program.



a variety of regulations and quality controls apply to early childhood programs and the personnel who staff them. We will look at training through academic programs and at one alternative training avenue and then review regulations, licensing, and accreditation of programs.

## Academic Teacher Training Programs

Because you are reading this text, you are most likely involved in an academic early childhood program whose aim is to prepare qualified teachers and directors of programs for young children through a combination of coursework and practicum experiences. Such programs exist at 2-year associate degree, 4-year baccalaureate degree, and postgraduate degree levels. In some states such programs can lead to state licensure to enable graduates to teach up to second or third grade in public schools. In more advanced degree programs, greater depth and more theoretical and research knowledge become increasingly important variables. In fact, guidelines for early childhood professional preparation are outlined in position statements from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1995a). (We will be discussing this association in more detail later in this chapter when we consider professionalism.) In addition, NAEYC has developed a position statement about early childhood professional development (NAEYC, 1994) that delineates six professional categories based on educational attainment, ranging from a person with a doctoral degree to someone currently in training. It is interesting to note that those who teach young children are relatively well educated; about two-thirds of teachers and more than one-half of assistant teachers have taken at least some early childhood or child development course-work (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989). Nonetheless, there is concern that the most qualified teachers leave the field to be replaced by less qualified staff (Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber, & Howes, 2001).

Child Development Associate (CDA)—An early childhood teacher who has been assessed and successfully proven competent through the national CDA credentialing program.

## Child Development Associate Program

In the 1970s, an alternative model for the training of early childhood teachers was initiated through the **Child Development Associate (CDA)** program. Just as successful completion of an academic program leads to a

degree, so does successful completion of the CDA program lead to a professional credential as a Child Development Associate. The CDA credential is available for professionals who work with different age groups and in various settings: preschools, infant/toddler programs, bilingual programs, programs including children with special needs, and family child care. Over 100,000 individuals have received a CDA credential, with approximately 80 percent coming from Head Start programs. The National Survey of CDAs (Henry, 1995) found that over 95 percent remained committed to early childhood education after receiving their credentials, providing an anchor of stability in a field that suffers from a high turnover rate.

A CDA is an early childhood professional who successfully meets the following six goals (Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition, 1996).

1. Establish and maintain a safe, healthy learning environment.
2. Advance physical and intellectual competence.
3. Support social and emotional development and provide guidance.
4. Establish positive and productive relationships with families.
5. Ensure a well-run, purposeful program responsive to participant needs.
6. Maintain a commitment to professionalism.

The CDA has been described as an alternative avenue toward professionalism for people who have traditionally been excluded from higher education, specifically those from low-income backgrounds (Peters, 1988). Attaining this credential often encourages a CDA to pursue further education.

**KEY QUESTION:**

Obtain the requirements for the CDA credentialing process (from your instructor or from the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition, 1718 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20077). Compare these to the ones required by the program in which you are enrolled. What are the points of similarity and the differences?

## The TEACH Program

The Teacher Education And Compensation Helps (TEACH) Program is another option in many states for those wishing to enhance their education and training in the field of early childhood education. TEACH was started as part of the early childhood system in North Carolina, with the aim of improving the quality of child care through added education and compensation for those who work with young children, although it has now been adopted by many other states. Child care teachers and administrators who participate receive education that leads toward a certificate (including CDA), or a degree in early childhood education. States that have incorporated TEACH in their early childhood system have found that the added monetary investment in the care and education of young children is worth the results in higher quality, an educated child care work force, lower staff turnover, and increased pay and benefits for staff. Scholarships are provided through the TEACH Program toward the cost of tuition, books, and travel, and a wage increase is built in once a teacher has completed the agreed upon amount of education (www.ncchildcare.org, 1991).

## Regulation and Licensing

Minimum standards for early childhood teachers are generally described in local or state licensing regulations. Some states require little



or no training for those who work with and care for young children; others designate more stringent criteria that specify minimum levels of training in early childhood education and child development and appropriate experiences. Keep in mind that minimum standards are just that—minimums. Professional early childhood educators usually far exceed the minimum, and the children in their care, their families, the overall early childhood program, and the teachers themselves are the beneficiaries of this professionalism and expertise.

Of course, licensing criteria provide guidelines for far more than teacher qualifications. They can cover a wide range of topics related to health, sanitation, safety, child-adult ratio, group size, acceptable guidance and curriculum practices, meal and sleeping arrangements, and so forth. Minimum standards for various aspects of programs for young children are spelled out by all states, although there is considerable variation in what is deemed acceptable. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, in its position statement, "Licensing and Public Regulation of Early Childhood Programs," encourages states to adopt requirements that reflect what research tells us about good care for young children and to enforce such regulations vigorously and equitably (NAEYC, 1997a). Programs that receive federal funding may need to adhere to specified federal regulations as well. Some programs, particularly those that are part of the public school system, may be regulated by a separate agency with different guidelines and regulations to follow.

**KEY POINT:**

All programs must adhere to the minimum standards set by state and local licensing regulations, but some programs strive for a higher level of excellence by undergoing accreditation through the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs.

## Accreditation

To indicate that they strive for a high level of excellence rather than minimum criteria, many early childhood programs have undergone the voluntary accreditation process of the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, the accreditation division of the NAEYC, started in 1985. By Fall 2000, over 7,500 programs had been accredited and another 7,500 had begun the first stage toward accreditation (NAEYC, 2000b).

Programs seeking accreditation engage in a self-evaluation, which is reviewed by a validator, who spends time on-site, and a three-person team of early childhood professionals. Specific components of 10 criteria are assessed as acceptable or unacceptable. These 10 criteria

include interactions among staff and children, curriculum, staff-parent interactions, staff qualifications and development, administration, staffing, physical environment, health and safety, nutrition and food service, and evaluation. The quality of child-staff interactions and the developmental appropriateness of the curriculum are judged as the most important determinants in the final decision (NAEYC, 2000b). A self-report study of accredited programs confirmed the positive impact of accreditation and also indicated that the process facilitated improvements, which, in turn, led to even higher quality (Herr, Johnson, & Zimmerman, 1993).

## PROFESSIONALISM

This book stresses the importance of the early childhood years, early education, and your role as an early childhood educator. To fully realize that importance, however, you must see yourself as a member of a profession. A profession is different from a job by virtue of some specific characteristics; for instance, a defined code of ethics, a specialized knowledge base involving theoretical principles, specialized training founded on that knowledge base, and universal standards of practice that stem from that knowledge base (Caulfield, 1997).

Those who have written at great length about early childhood professionalism, recognizing that there are many inconsistencies and problems to be faced, do not always agree on the degree to which the field meets the criteria of a profession. Increasing dialogue through conferences and written works has helped to focus more sharply on relevant issues—for instance, low pay and shortage of qualified early childhood teachers—as well as on strategies for combatting these (we will discuss some of these later in this chapter). Nonetheless, the expanding concern about professionalism, evident at both national and local levels, should propel early childhood education toward its goals, which include a better definition and greater focus.

Although in many ways the early childhood field has moved toward professionalization, there is concern that professional status is not universally acknowledged by those who work in the field and by the public at large. Those who work with young children need to develop a clearer concept of who they are, what they do, and the importance of their role. At the same time, there is a need for public recognition of the value and status of early childhood educators. As a student embarking on a career in early childhood education, you are in a unique position to develop from the start a sense of professionalism that is furthered by every course you take, every day you spend with children, and every conference you attend. Your competence and recognition of the importance of your role will enhance not only your work with children and families, but also your contributions to the early childhood profession.

### Ethics

One of the hallmarks of a profession is its recognition of and adherence to a **code of ethics.** Such a code embodies guidelines for behavior, facilitates decision making, and provides the backing of like-minded professionals when the practitioner takes a "risky but courageous stand in

**code of ethics**—Agreed-upon professional standards that guide behavior and facilitate decision making in working situations.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### Code of Ethics

It does not take long for new teachers to find out that many of the decisions they face do not have clear-cut answers and often require judgment of a moral or ethical nature. The needs of the four groups with which early childhood professionals interact—children, families, colleagues, and the community and society—must be considered carefully in many decisions. It is to guide such decisions that NAEYC has developed a core set of standards in its *Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment,* which outlines ideals and principles in relation to each of these groups (NAEYC, 1997a).

The foremost guiding principle, which supersedes all others, specifies that "above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative, intimidating, psychologically damaging, or physically harmful to children." This underscores the responsibility of those who work with young children to act on any concerns, including ones related to child abuse and neglect. In addition, the code reflects how important it is for teachers to have a sound knowledge of the fields of early childhood education and child development and to use that knowledge in appreciating, respecting, and supporting each child.

The code also addresses the importance of developing a trusting relationship with the families of the children. This includes recognizing and respecting each family's strengths, values, and decisions. It also involves the importance of helping families better understand their children and the significance of a developmentally appropriate program. In addition, an ethical relationship with families includes open access to the child's classroom, information about the program's philosophy and policies, and participation in decisions that directly affect the child. The code also specifies the need to protect the rights of families and respect their privacy with confidentiality.

Ethical responsibilities to coworkers, employers, and employees are also outlined by the code to support a caring, cooperative workplace. The last set of responsibilities involves the community and society. Early childhood professionals are encouraged to work cooperatively with other community agencies and professionals and to use their expertise to be a voice on behalf of children and families. The ideals and principles set forth in the *Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment* provide a framework for practice that promotes commitment to high standards, thoughtful decision making, and, as a result, high-quality programming for children and families.

the face of an ethical dilemma" (Katz, 1988, p. 77). Under the leadership of Stephanie Feeney, the NAEYC has adopted a Code of Ethical Conduct that delineates ethical responsibilities to children, families, colleagues, and the community and society (NAEYC, 1997a).

This code recognizes that many of the day-to-day decisions made by those who work with young children are of a moral and ethical nature. Early childhood teachers, for instance, may find themselves in situations with conflicting values in which it is not clear whether the rights of the child, the parents, the school, other children in the program, or the teachers are most important. A code of ethics provides common principles for dealing with such dilemmas, principles based on the value of childhood as a unique stage of life, on knowledge of child development, on appreciation of the importance of family and cultural ties, on respect for the dignity and value of children and adults, and on helping individuals reach their potential through trusting, positive relationships.

Because children are particularly vulnerable, those who work with them have an important responsibility that is supported and defined by a code of ethics. As you enter the early childhood profession, it is important to read and utilize NAEYC's Code of Ethical Conduct, which is available in a brochure from the organization (NAEYC, 1997a).

KEY POINT

The field of early childhood education has a defined code of ethics, adopted by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

## Professional Organizations

One sign of a profession is the existence of organizations to which members belong and of professional journals that members read. Such organizations and their literature provide its members with support and a sense of common interest and purpose. Early childhood education has several pertinent organizations and journals. We will briefly discuss the two major groups in the field.

KEY POINT

There are numerous professional organizations that early childhood students and professionals can join.

KEY QUESTION

What are the advantages of belonging to a professional early childhood organization? Review several issues of professional journals such as *Young Children* or *Childhood Education* to gain a sense of what organizations such as NAEYC or ACEI have to offer.

1. **The National Association for the Education of Young Children** (NAEYC), the largest early childhood organization, is a powerful voice for children, families, and teachers. NAEYC is dedicated to improving the quality of early childhood programs for children from birth through third grade and their families, improving the working conditions of those who work in such programs, and building public support for high-quality early childhood care and education. Through its 75-year history, NAEYC has increased in size so that now its diverse membership includes over 103,000 individuals and nearly 450 local, state, and regional groups that are NAEYC Affiliates (NAEYC, 2000a). One of the ways in which NAEYC works toward its goals is through its publications—the bimonthly journal *Young Children,* and numerous books and other resources. In addition, NAEYC holds an annual conference that is attended by thousands of early childhood professionals each November.

**National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**—Largest American early childhood professional organization, which deals with issues of children from birth to age eight and those who work with young children.

2. **Association for Childhood Education International** (ACEI) is a professional organization that covers a wider spectrum of educational issues by covering ages ranging from infancy through early adolescence. It also focuses on international and intercultural issues. The ACEI publishes the journal *Childhood Education* five times a year and sponsors an annual study conference.

**Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI)**—Professional organization that focuses on issues of children from infancy to early adolescence, particularly those involving international and intercultural concerns.



In addition, numerous organizations focus on more specialized groups; for instance, those involved in for-profit child care, Montessori, Head Start, church-sponsored programs, home care (the National Association of Family Day Care), early childhood special education (for instance, the Early Childhood Division of the Council for Exceptional Children), and others. There are regional, state, and local organizations, such as the Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA); branches of the organizations described previously; and some nonaffiliated, local organizations that meet the needs of a group of people in the community.

As a student entering the early childhood profession, you might consider becoming a member of a professional organization. Some colleges or universities have student member sections of NAEYC or ACEI. By becoming a member, you can keep abreast of new developments, have the opportunity to meet and participate in a support network with others in the same field, and attend workshops and conferences at the local, state, or national level. Information about organizations is readily available through your instructor or those who work in the field.

## SOME CURRENT ISSUES AND DILEMMAS

Early childhood education is, in many ways, a field of contradictions and extremes. Those who try to define it often find themselves in a dilemma, not clear on what to include and what to exclude. Where does a program fit that barely meets minimum standards, and what about the program that genuinely strives for excellence in meeting the needs of its children and families? Are the kindergarten teacher, the infant care provider, the Head Start teacher, the preschool master teacher, and the home care provider included? Are the preschool teacher who holds a masters degree in early childhood education and the high school graduate who works in a child care center equals in the same field? Can the child care provider who earns minimum wage for the eight hours a day spent caring for children be lumped together with the kindergarten teacher who earns a public school salary for nine months of teaching?

How can the teacher's job description that calls for someone who "likes children" be compared with the one that requires "a degree in early childhood education or child development"? How can the lack of licensing requirements for teachers of young children in many states be rectified with educators' insistence that those who work with young children need specific training? In fact, is there a good reason to justify why you are enrolled in an academic program while others with no academic training may equally qualify for a position?

These questions and others are at the heart of the dilemma facing the early childhood profession. We will review some specific issues and look at some possible ways of addressing these. Although we will divide some of these issues into categories such as teacher shortage and low pay, these are not separable concerns that exist independent of each other.

KEY QUESTION

Talk to several teachers of young children. What do they view as the most rewarding parts of their job? What most frustrates them? Compare their answers with your own goals and expectations.

### An Historical Perspective

It might be helpful to look at the road travelled by the field of early childhood education to gain a perspective on its current status. Early

childhood education today is inextricably linked to the role and status of women in the United States.

Between the mid-18th and mid-19th centuries, "womanhood was redefined, its image re-created and reimagined, its social function reviewed, its links to child rearing and socialization forged, and its authority over the moral and cultural development of the nation rationalized" (Finkelstein, 1988, p. 12). When, in the latter half of the 19th century, the kindergarten became firmly established as an American institution, women had found their niche in an environment that was not quite domestic, yet not quite public either.

The early 20th century pioneers of the early childhood movement, while building a scientific basis for child study, continued to see women as the guardians of the young with a specialized role in upholding moral and cultural standards, a noble role above concerns for economic and material comforts. Unfortunately, this legacy of "unselfishness" has followed early childhood educators into the 21st century, endowing them with a realization of the importance of their work, yet placing them in a low-paying profession that has low status in our social structure (Finkelstein, 1988).

KEY POINT

The history of women over the past two centuries is closely linked with the development of the field of early childhood education.

## Teacher Shortage

KEY POINT

The high demand for quality programs for children of working parents, plus the low pay and status of those who work in these programs, have resulted in a serious shortage of early childhood professionals.

Over the past several years, increasing attention has been focused on the shortage of qualified early childhood teachers. The need for child care services is projected to grow 32 percent during the first decade of the millennium. This is more than double the rate of growth projected for the entire economy. The increased demand for child care reflects demographic changes, since the population of women of child-bearing age has been increasing, and these women participate in the labor force at a greater-than-ever rate (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000a). In addition, welfare reform is placing more women into the labor force, and often they need child care in order to work.

There is also a shortage of public school teachers, compounding the demand for early childhood staff (Recruiting New Teachers, 2000). In addition, fewer college students are opting to pursue education careers, seeking instead more lucrative job opportunities. Finally, our society is experiencing a decreasing number of people entering the work force as the "baby bust" generation, those born during the years when the national birth rate declined, reaches maturity (Galinsky, 1989).

The contribution of these societal factors to the early childhood teacher shortage tells only half the story, however. What is more serious is the high rate of turnover among teachers of young children. The recently published *Then & Now: Changes in Child Care Staffing, 1994–2000* (Whitebook et al., 2001) followed a group of child care center teachers and directors over a six-year period to examine turnover and its impact. The researchers concluded that the child care work force is alarmingly unstable, including higher-quality programs. Of those who participated in the study in 1994, 76 percent were no longer in the same job in 1996, and 82 percent had left their jobs by 2000. They found that the yearly turnover rate averaged 30 percent, ranging from zero to 100 percent, depending on the center. Director turnover was also very high, with over half the centers losing their director by



1996 and two-thirds having a new director by 2000. Only about half of the teachers and directors in the original study stayed in the field of child care.

This high turnover rate appears directly related to low pay, illustrated by the inverse relationship between rate of pay and percentage of turnover. Those at the lower end of the pay scale changed jobs at twice the rate as those at the higher end. At the same time, however, there is less turnover among teachers with early childhood training. A follow-up survey of CDAs who had earned their credentials during the preceding five years indicated that more than 95 percent of the respondents continued to teach (Henry, 1995). Although this does not provide direct evidence that these teachers were still at the same work site, they continued in the profession. However, in the early childhood teaching population at large, more than one-third of those who work with young children change occupations each year (Galinsky, 1989).

High staff turnover takes its toll in several ways. The National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook et al., 1989) found that in centers with a high turnover rate, children spent less time in social activities with peers and tended more to wander aimlessly. In addition, separation from parents becomes more critical when caregivers change frequently (Galinsky, 1989). Very young children are particularly vulnerable to teacher turnover. Toddlers who lose their primary teacher were found to be more withdrawn and more aggressive two years later (Howes & Hamilton, 1993). Teachers also suffer when their coworkers change frequently because they have to assume the additional burden of orienting and training new staff (Whitebook, 1986).

Resolutions to the issue of high staff turnover, and the related issues of low pay and teacher burnout, are being pursued by professionals and professional organizations. Some of their recommendations will be discussed later in this section.

KEY POINT

Low pay and poor benefits for early childhood teachers are directly tied to affordability of child care for parents.

## Low Pay

Staffing shortage would undoubtedly be much less of a problem if early childhood teachers were paid adequate salaries and if they received appropriate recognition and status. For most teachers of young children, however, monetary rewards are not equal to their professional training and value. Although there is a wide variation in pay, early childhood teachers are generally paid poorly.

Low pay feeds into a vicious cycle: poor pay causes qualified teachers to seek work elsewhere; as a result, jobs are often filled by unqualified staff; they, in turn, reinforce the low status in which early childhood education is held and negate the need for higher pay (Katz, 1984a). There is a clear relationship between pay, retention of staff, and quality of program. Centers that pay higher wages are able to retain qualified teachers and directors. Highly skilled staff stay in their jobs if they earn higher-than-average wages and work with other staff who are also highly trained. Not surprisingly, when there is a significant number of qualified staff in a center who are paid higher-than-average wages, the center is more likely to sustain high quality in its program (Whitebook et al., 2001).

The Center for the Child Care Work Force has been tracking the staffing shortage and teacher turnover for a number of years. Each phase of its study has confirmed that teacher salaries are lower than salaries for other workers with equal education and, in fact, often did not keep pace with increases in the cost of living. Nonetheless, those who remained in their jobs, as well as those who left for better paying work, reported great satisfaction from working with young children (Whitebook et al., 2001).

Another issue tied to low pay is the lack of benefits offered to employees of child care programs. The National Child Care Staffing Study found considerable variation in the types of benefits offered. For instance, health benefits were offered by more than 60 percent of nonprofit centers, whereas the percentage dropped to 16, 21, and 24, respectively, for independent for-profit, chain for-profit, and church-sponsored nonprofit child care programs (Whitebook et al., 1989). Generally, early childhood programs sponsored by larger institutions such as hospitals, public school districts, or universities benefit from the policies of their sponsoring agencies (Galinsky, 1989). In a similar way, employer-sponsored child care programs often also receive their company's benefits package.

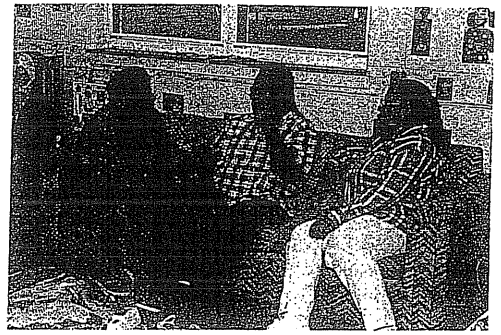
The reason for the low remuneration earned by early childhood teachers is directly tied to the issue of affordability of child care. Because staff wages and benefits constitute the largest expenditure in early childhood programs, the cost to parents is most affected by how much is allocated to that portion of the budget; the higher the teacher salaries, the greater the cost. Part of this balance is the issue of child-adult ratio: the more children per adult, the lower the cost because fewer adults have to be hired. However, high child-adult ratios are associated with higher levels of teacher stress and decreased responsiveness to children (Phillips & Howes, 1987; Whitebook, Howes, Darrah, & Friedman, 1982).

Yet, the answer is not simply a matter of raising the cost of child care charged to parents. Although some families can afford to pay higher rates to ensure high-quality care offered by well-trained and well-paid professionals, many others cannot. Two-thirds of employed women are either the sole support of their families or are married to men who earn extremely low wages. Families pay as much as one-fourth of their income on child care (Galinsky, 1989). Experts contend that the cost parents pay for child care includes a hidden subsidy—the low wages teachers receive (Willer, 1990).

Increasingly, professionals argue that early childhood education needs to be publicly subsidized, similar to the way that elementary, secondary, and higher education are supported. Professionals have begun to take steps toward improving America's child care through a series of comprehensive recommendations published in *Not By Chance: Creating an Early Care and Education System for America's Children* (Kagan & Cohen, 1997). This report's co-author, Sharon Lynn Kagan, has been actively involved in developing models for alternative ways of generating revenues for early childhood programs. Such models are being tested in several states; their aim is to raise child care quality by increasing the required educational background, along with pay, for early childhood teachers, making then on par with public school teachers' salaries (Kagan, Brandon, & Joesch, 2000).



The needs of teachers of young children must be an important priority in early childhood programs. Scheduled time and a pleasant place to relax can contribute to teacher satisfaction. What other factors can improve working conditions for teachers of young children?



KEY POINT

Some early childhood teachers experience burnout.

burnout syndrome—Condition experienced by professionals as a result of undue job stress, characterized by loss of energy, irritability, and a feeling of being exploited.

## Burnout

Intricately tied to staff shortage, staff turnover, and poor salaries is teacher burnout. Burnout is complex, resulting from multiple causes. It is characterized by job dissatisfaction, stress, loss of energy, irritability, and a feeling of being exploited. The **burnout syndrome** involves a person's inability to cope with continuous, ongoing stress, and is accompanied by a loss of energy, purpose, and idealism (Schamer & Jackson, 1996).

Low salaries and minimum benefits contribute to burnout, but so do other factors. Some of these include long working hours, unpaid overtime, time spent outside working hours in curriculum planning or parent functions, expectations for maintenance duties, lack of breaks, the constant intensity of working closely with children, high child-adult ratios, and lack of power in the decision-making process. Sometimes a change in working conditions, a seminar, or a support group can help a teacher regain a feeling of commitment and renewal.

Although burnout is a final outcome for some of those who work in early childhood programs, many others find great job satisfaction, which balances some of these negative aspects. The opportunity to contribute to and observe the development of their young charges provides a great source of pleasure to early childhood teachers. In addition, they find other aspects of the job gratifying. These include opportunities for reflection and self-development, satisfying staff relations, job flexibility, a level of autonomy, and staff interdependence (Whitebook et al., 1989).

KEY POINT

More than 95 percent of early childhood teachers are women, and male teachers leave the field at an even greater rate than female teachers do.

## Men in Early Childhood Education

A somewhat different issue concerns the predominance of females in early childhood education, representing between 95 and 97 percent of practitioners. There have been, and continue to be, male teachers of young children who have a high commitment to the education and well-being of young children. For some children who grow up in single-parent homes without a father figure, a male teacher can fill a particularly special role (Cunningham, 1998).

Yet, men leave the field of early childhood education at an even greater rate than women do. Some male teachers who changed careers

reported that they were subject to subtle prejudicial attitudes from parents, female coworkers, and administrators. They were considered not as good as women because they had never been mothers. Suspicion that was initially based on vague stereotypes intensified by highly publicized cases of sexual abuse in child care settings (Sumsion, 1999).

It is more likely that economic reasons preclude more men from entering the field of early childhood education, or cause them to more readily leave the field if they do spend some time as preschool teachers. Robinson (1988) found that 85 percent of his sample of male early childhood teachers were married with at least one child and were the major wage earner of their families. Low pay compelled them to look elsewhere for work. Another reason that men leave the field is a perceived lack of status; in almost any other job, men can find more respect and greater prestige than in child care (Cohen, 1990). The absence of a substantial number of men in the field is undoubtedly a contributing factor to low salaries. Thus, it has been argued that "recruiting more men would enhance the professional self-image of early childhood education" (Seifert, 1988, p. 114).

## Empowerment and Activism

We have raised several urgent issues that face those in the early childhood profession. It is heartening that increasingly more professional and political effort is being devoted to solutions to these issues. Articulate public statements, relevant publications, thoughtful research, and energetic political advocacy and lobbying are making an impact. There is no question that the needs of young children and families, the importance of high quality in child care, and the needs of early childhood teachers are becoming highly visible public matters. From the halls of the Capitol in Washington, DC, to legislative buildings across all of the states, early childhood education and child care have become high priorities. This is, in many ways, an exciting time to be entering the field!

Changes in the current realities of early childhood education can be brought about through joint political action and the empowerment of teachers (Dresden & Myers, 1989). Training for advocacy is being incorporated into higher education programs at all levels, as students learn how policies are made, how the political system operates, and how they can affect it. You may well be taking a public policy course as part of your program of study, something that probably would not have been part of the curriculum 15 or 20 years ago. Parents are also often enlisted to support public policy endeavors.

What is clear is the resolve of professionals and professional organizations to push for change. Interest in and support for quality child care comes from many sectors both within and outside of the field of early childhood education, including parents, teachers, administrators, resource and referral agencies, related service providers, professional organizations, teacher trainers and educators, researchers, civic and religious groups, business and labor organizations, volunteer service organizations, philanthropic organizations and foundations, and civic leaders. A coalition including members of such constituency groups can be a powerful force in beginning to address issues. The earlier mentioned publication, *Not By Chance,* is part of the Quality 2000 Initiative, a set of inventive initiatives crafted by many early childhood professionals. The eight recommendations from this effort provide a platform for hope for the future of the field and, in fact, the future of America's young children (Kagan & Neuman, 1997). These recommendations include three related to program quality, developmentally appropriate outcomes for children, and family engagement and inclusion, which are all important elements in improved early childhood programs. The other five recommendations are relevant to our discussion of the issues facing early childhood professionals, such as yourself, and will be discussed in somewhat more detail here.

**KEY POINT**

The issues and dilemmas facing early childhood education and its teachers are being addressed through vigorous advocacy and lobbying to help bring about change through political action and empowerment of teachers.

**KEY QUESTION**

Professional organizations such as NAEYC have been active in advocating improved working conditions and status for those who work with young children. Review the "Public Policy Report" and "Washington Update" in several issues of *Young Children* to see what kinds of issues are being discussed.



1. **Staff credentialing** is a critical element in this plan. The recommendation calls for licensing of individual teachers, distinct from the licensing of programs. A career ladder with accompanying academic preparation in early childhood education or child development are proposed. The recommendation calls for separate licenses for early childhood administrators, teachers, and associate teachers as well as making a provision for entry-level aides.
2. **Staff training and preparation** are crucial to the plan as well. The quality of staff credentials will depend on the quality of the training programs. The recommendation suggests that all training meet at least the CDA competency areas we discussed earlier in this chapter. Training also should include development of leadership and managerial skills.
3. **Program licensing** is often cumbersome and uneven. It is recommended that licensing be streamlined and designed to complement licensing of individuals; that regulations be strictly and fairly administered; that exemptions, of which there are many, be eliminated so that *all* programs that care for children are subject to the same standards; and that national licensing guidelines be developed to promote greater consistency across the country.
4. **Funding and financing** is recognized as one of the major challenges in the goal of providing high-quality child care programs. The cost cannot be assumed by parents only, but needs to be shared by employers, government, and community organizations. The actual cost of quality early childhood services needs to be estimated, different revenue-generating mechanisms need to be identified, alternative approaches for distributing funds to parents must be developed, and coordinated funding initiatives have to be created. Work toward these goals is underway by dedicated and creative professionals who are beginning to address some of the serious issues inherent in changing our current system to the proposed system.
5. The **governance structure** for early childhood education is haphazard and often ineffective. This recommendation calls for more consistent, rational structures; using both state and local boards, which would cover a broad range of topics and have the responsibility for ensuring high-quality, integrated services for children and families.

The *Not By Chance* report, recognizes the crisis of child care in America and presents some bold, hopeful steps for initiating change.

Some states are making a strong commitment to young children by adopting parts of the *Not By Chance* recommendations. You, as an early childhood professional, will benefit from these efforts, as will the children you care for.

## PARENT SUPPORT FOR THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSION

In the last chapter, we discussed the role and responsibility of early childhood teachers toward parents. As indicated, the teacher-parent relationship is a reciprocal process. While teachers provide many services for parents, parents can also be extremely effective advocates for the early childhood education profession. One of the most effective lobbying efforts to promote increased funding allocation for early childhood programs in one state was the appearance of a large group of parents who spoke from their perspective about the importance of that funding. The legislators found the 200 taxpayers who came to promote this bill quite convincing!

Parental support, however, does not begin in the political arena. First and most important, parents must have a sound appreciation of early childhood educators and a clear understanding of the issues they face. Such understanding is promoted in a high-quality program in which teachers act professionally and are articulate about their field. When parents recognize that the quality of education and care their children receive is inextricably tied to improving the status and working conditions of their children's teachers and caregivers, they will be better able to help bring about changes.

**KEY POINT**

Parents can be a good source of support for early childhood teachers.

## SUMMARY

1. Early childhood teachers can be described by some identifiable personal qualities. Consider some predictable stages in their development.
2. The staffs of early childhood programs can include a number of individuals in a variety of roles, including the director, teaching staff, volunteers, support staff, board of directors, and community professionals.
3. A variety of training possibilities and regulating entities are associated with early childhood programs.
   A. Early childhood teachers might receive training through academic channels or through the Child Development Associate program.
   B. Early childhood programs are licensed through local or state regulations, which set minimum standards.
   C. Many programs undergo voluntary accreditation through the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs.
4. Professionalism in early childhood education is noted by such criteria as a code of ethics and the existence of professional organizations.



5. Although early childhood education presents you with exciti challenges, as a student entering this career, it also presents so issues and dilemmas:
   A. Some of the problems faced by early childhood educators a rooted in the historic antecedents of the field.
   B. Early childhood education faces some serious concerns, i cluding teacher shortage, low pay, burnout, and scarcity men in the field.
   C. Through advocacy and empowerment of early childhood pr fessionals, these issues are beginning to be addressed.

## KEY TERMS LIST

assistant teacher
Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI)
board of directors
burnout syndrome
caregiver
career lattice
child care worker
Child Development Associate (CDA)
code of ethics
early childhood educator
early childhood teacher
head teacher
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
team teaching

## KEY QUESTIONS

1. Review the four levels of early childhood educators suggested by NAEYC. What are the advantages of such a hierarchy? What are the disadvantages? Since these levels are not extensively used at this time, what needs to happen for wider adoption of such a system?
2. Obtain the requirements for the CDA credentialing process (from your instructor or from the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition, 1718 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20077). Compare these to the ones required by the program in which you are enrolled. What are the points of similarity and the differences?
3. What are the advantages of belonging to a professional early childhood organization? Review several issues of professional journals such as *Young Children* or *Childhood Education* to gain a sense of what organizations such as NAEYC or ACEI have to offer.
4. Talk to several teachers of young children. What do they view as the most rewarding parts of their job? What most frustrates them? Compare their answers with your own goals and expectations.
5. Professional organizations such as NAEYC have been active in advocating improved working conditions and status for those who work with young children. Review the "Public Policy Report" and "Washington Update" in several issues of *Young Children* to see what kinds of issues are being discussed.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Select additional books, articles, and Web sites on topics discussed in Chapter 4.

Bowman, B. T., Donovan, M. S., & Burns, M. S. (Eds.). (2001). *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Stone, J. G. (2001). *Building classroom community: The early childhood teacher's role.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

*Young Children,* the journal published by NAEYC, is an excellent resource for all kinds of early childhood information.

## HELPFUL WEB SITES

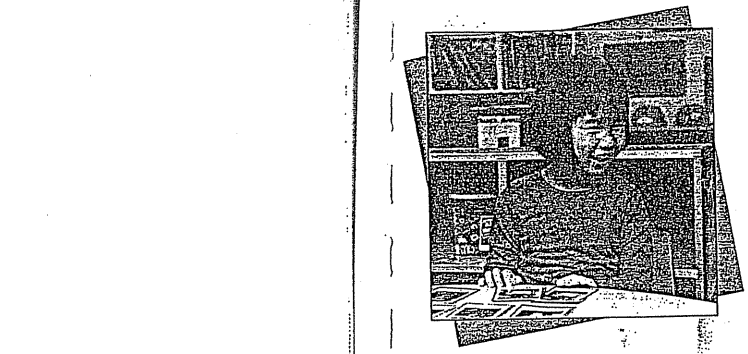
National Association for the Education of Young Children:
http://www.naeyc.org

NAEYC's Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment:
http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/pseth98.htm

Center for the Child Care Work Force:
http://www.ccw.org

For additional early childhood education resources, visit our Web site at

**http://earlychilded.delmar.com**



CHAPTER 5

# Rationale Supporting Early Childhood Education

How we approach the education and care of young children depends, to a great extent, on what we believe children are like. Programs for preschoolers are often structured around some underlying assumptions about the nature of children. For instance, a belief that children learn actively by exploring their environment would result in a different type of early education program than one based on the idea that children learn passively by being taught specific information and skills. Similarly, a belief that children are basically unruly and need strict control so they will learn appropriate behavior would result in a different guidance approach than the notion that children generally strive toward social acceptance from others by conforming to reasonable expectations.

As you continue to learn more about early childhood education, you will begin to see why theory is so important. We will introduce some of the most influential theories in this chapter, although, as you read on, you will begin to recognize that the field follows the teachings and beliefs of some theorists more than those of others. What is important about theory is that it provides a framework within which we view children and how they learn. Early childhood educators view children as active learners who learn best by exploring the world around them. Such a belief provides direction for how we structure curriculum, environment, guidance techniques, and all our interactions with children. In fact, one of the guiding documents of the field, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood* (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), is solidly based on the teachings of key theorists such as Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Lev Vygotsky, all of whom you will meet in this chapter.

We will begin this chapter with a quick trip back in history, as a way of providing context for the path the field has followed to where it is today. After that, we will review key

theorists. This historic and theoretical overview will provide the foundation and rationale on which early childhood education has been built.

## A LOOK BACK—CHILDREN THROUGH TIME

Interest in the care and education of young children goes back thousands of years. Our Western tradition is traced to ancient Greece, where the writings of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle reflect a keen sensitivity to the needs of children and the importance of appropriate education in shaping their character. The Greeks saw human development as a transformation from the imperfect state of childhood to the ideal of adulthood (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). The Greek tradition, including education for girls as well as for boys, was carried on for several hundred years into the height of Roman times.

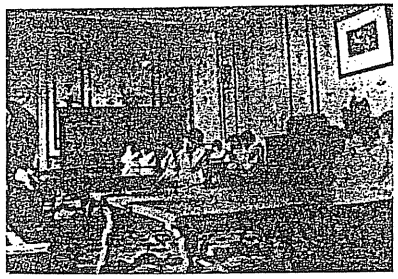
KEY POINT

The concept of childhood and the treatment of children through history have always been tied to economic, religious, and social factors.

Many of the early, enlightened ideas about children were lost, however, during the Middle Ages, when even the concept of childhood seemed to have been misplaced. Children became little more than property and were put to work, for instance, in the fields or tending animals, just as soon as they were big enough. "This period in history was arduous for children (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000). Schools and formal education as a way of passing on cultural traditions had virtually disappeared in Europe except in a few places, particularly in Islamic Spain, where learning was highly valued.

Various religious, political, and economic forces provided the impetus for the move out of these Dark Ages, often improving the treatment of children, but at other times exploiting them. Martin Luther, for example, advocated public education for all children in 16th-century Germany as a way of promoting religious salvation. In other parts of Europe, some social and political reformers, angered by the injustices that provided an opulent lifestyle for the nobility at the expense of the starving peasants, developed ideas that focused on children and their education as one way of overcoming such inequities.

By the 18th century, as the industrial revolution swept both Europe and America, the economic search for cheap labor led to the abuse of many children in factories. They were kept at spindles or levers up to as many as 16 hours a day, while being fed and housed minimally. Such blatant exploitation also led to reforms, eventually including universal public education and laws prohibiting child labor (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000; Wolfe, 2000).



Early childhood programs have an extensive and rich history, both in the United States and in other parts of the world.



KEY POINT

During the 20th century, the view of early childhood as an important part of human development has been particularly promoted.

The 20th century, while a relatively short period in history, represents an active time in the formation of early childhood education. For one thing, education for all children came to be increasingly accepted, reinforcing the idea that childhood is a separate and important period. Education in the United States, in the eyes of such progressive educators as John Dewey, was a training ground for democracy, a way of equalizing social inequities by imbuing children from a young age with democratic ideals. Philosophers and scientists, who proclaimed the early years as specially relevant, also contributed to the field. Among these, Sigmund Freud focused unprecedented attention on earliest experiences as the foundation of personality.

A third contribution came from the development of scientific methods of observation that led to the **child study movement**, out of which grew many university preschool laboratory programs designed to facilitate the careful study of young children. Still another contribution to today's field is the notion of early childhood education as a means to social reform. Important programs were developed throughout this century with the idea of rescuing the poor from poverty. A common purpose motivated those who helped move young children out of factories and into schools at the turn of the century, and those who developed the Head Start philosophy of the 1960s.

**child study movement**—Occurred earlier in the 20th century in the United States when many university preschools were established to develop scientific methods for studying children.

Finally, another change that has profoundly affected early childhood education today is the rising need for child care arrangements, which we discussed in Chapter 1. Although recent changes in the economy and family life have brought the proliferation of child care programs available today, such programs are not new. During World War II, many women were required to work and needed arrangements for care of their young children, which were often publicly subsidized (Braun & Edwards, 1972; Carter, 1987; Greenberg, 1987; Siegel & White, 1982; Weber, 1984).

KEY QUESTION

Historic events have a great impact on our view of children and how we treat them. What social and political events have taken place during your life that have had an impact on young children and their education? Also ask this question of a relative or friend who was born in an earlier era.

History and the context of each period have generally determined how children are viewed. Because children are vulnerable and dependent, their image and treatment have been shaped by the needs of the times and by influential thinkers and writers. Today we view children much more benignly than during many periods of the past. We acknowledge that the childhood years are unique and important, we provide children with special environments, and we promote education as a social and personal necessity. Today's view of children is based to a greater extent on theory and research rather than on the religious or political ideas that, in part, dictated the image of children in the past. Let us now turn to some of the important figures in the historical account of early childhood education. The section that follows will then review influential theorists whose conceptualizations have further refined our ideas of young children.

## INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN THE HISTORY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Many, many individuals have contributed to our current view of young children and their care and education. We will touch on the works of only a few of them in this text. Some developed their ideas because of

their direct work with children, often the poor and underprivileged; others' theories emerged out of political and philosophical concerns about the problems of society and how reforms could be brought about. Let us now meet some of the people who have contributed to our views, particularly as these relate to the early years.

## Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778)

**KEY POINT**

Rousseau advanced the notions that children are innately noble and good, that their way of learning is different from that of adults, and that they should be removed from the corrupting influences of society.

Rousseau was not an early childhood educator, but his ideas have certainly influenced the field. As a philosopher writing in the context of the corrupt French society of his time, Rousseau developed the idea that society actually hindered human beings from developing according to their nature. Society, with its hierarchy of the few who were rich and powerful, only imposed misery on the masses, a state that is not natural. Rousseau, in fact, considered anything natural and primitive to be good. Thus, he argued, if children could develop without the artificial trappings of civilization, they would be able to achieve their true potential of being moral and good.

According to Rousseau, young children are innately pure and noble, but they need to be protected from the evil influences of society to maintain this goodness. It is through close contact with nature that they can develop their senses and form their personalities. In a protected rural environment, they learn from what is concrete, not from the abstract, through trial and error and experimentation. Such learning is natural and satisfying, leading to happiness, because children will know nothing of the artificial needs that society creates. Rousseau recognized that children's mode of thinking and learning is different from that of adults and considered good education to be based on the stage of development of the child, not on adult-imposed criteria. A child-centered, uncorrupted education will, eventually, result in adults who are moral and interested in this common good of society.

Rousseau never worked with children—in fact, he actually abandoned all of his own children to foundling homes—but he wrote extensively about his philosophy in his novels and essays. Today we agree with Rousseau that children have a unique nature that needs to be nurtured and protected. We also recognize the need to provide an appropriate environment for young children, in which their development can be maximized. Although his highly idealistic view of childhood and human nature was never fully adopted by those who followed Rousseau, he nonetheless had a great influence on later early childhood educators, as we shall soon see (Braun & Edwards, 1972; Carter, 1987; Grimsley, 1967; Weber, 1984).

## Johann Pestalozzi (1746–1827)

**KEY POINT**

Pestalozzi believed that young children learned actively, from concrete experiences, a philosophy he implemented in the schools he established.

Pestalozzi was deeply influenced by Rousseau's educational ideas. He felt that all people, even the poorest, had the right to an education as a way of helping them develop their moral and intellectual potential. He believed in education according to nature and considered that learning for young children is intricately tied to concrete experiences and observation. Unlike Rousseau, however, he stressed the important role of the mother in children's earliest years.



Who's who in ECE? People in the field of early childhood education are, clockwise from top, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Pestalozzi, Fredrich Froebel, Maria Montessori, Lev Vygotsky, Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, and B. F. Skinner.

Also unlike Rousseau, Pestalozzi actually worked with children, developing educational methods that are still used today. For instance, he stressed the importance of recognizing individual differences among children and the relevance of children's self-activity rather than rote as the basis of learning.

What made Pestalozzi successful as an educator of young children, however, was his powerful personality and his selfless and passionate dedication and commitment.

> His life was devoted to human relationships, a life of the mind, but more a life of feeling and service. . . . His educational doctrine . . . must be followed with devotion, self-forgetfulness, deep and loving concern for children and for the essence of childhood. (Braun & Edwards, 1972, p. 60)

One of the schools he established became world famous, drawing visitors and students from all over Europe. He is considered to be the first to actually teach young children of preschool age, marking the beginning of the kindergarten movement (Braun & Edwards, 1972; Ulich, 1967; Weber, 1984).

## Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852)

KEY POINT

Froebel, who is credited with beginning the kindergarten, placed great emphasis on the importance of play.

Froebel was one of the visitors at Pestalozzi's school, observing it with some mixed feelings. He greatly admired Pestalozzi's skills but was concerned over his inability to articulate his methods. Froebel, however, was better able to put into words his educational principles. Like his predecessors Rousseau and Pestalozzi, Froebel believed in the interrelatedness of nature and the child's developing mind. He also advocated that education should harmonize with the child's inner development, recognizing that children are in different stages at various ages. He saw childhood as a separate stage that was not just a transition to adulthood but a stage with great intrinsic value in its own right.

Froebel also strongly stressed the important role of play in young children's development, not merely as a preparation for adult work. He saw play as a pure and natural mode of learning through which children achieve harmony. Froebel developed a carefully programmed curriculum and specific materials. He is, in fact, credited with developing blocks, now a standard early childhood material. His program was centered on play and sensory awareness. Art activities, games, finger plays, songs, blocks, stories, crafts, and other similar endeavors were part of Froebel's kindergartens. His classes were not held in a traditional classroom but in a "garden for children," hence the German word **kindergarten** (Braun & Edwards, 1972; Carter, 1987; Ulich, 1947; Ulich, 1967; Weber, 1984).

**kindergarten**—German word, literally meaning "garden for children," coined by Friedrich Froebel for his program for young children.

## Maria Montessori (1870–1952)

KEY POINT

Montessori, working with slum children in Rome, developed a successful method of early education that is still widely followed today.

A true feminist of her time, Maria Montessori was the first woman to become a medical doctor in Italy. Her psychiatric interest led her to work with retarded children. She felt that their problems were often educational more than medical, and she proved her point when a number of these institutionalized children easily passed regular school exams after she had worked with them. In 1907, the city of Rome asked Montessori to take charge of a children's day nursery that was attached to a housing tenement for the poor. The housing authorities basically wanted someone who would keep the children off the stairs and prevent them from dirtying the newly painted walls. But Montessori found in this "casa dei bambini" (children's house) the opportunity to explore her teaching methods with normal children.



Montessori's methods were based on the principle that young children learn in a way that is fundamentally different from how adults learn. She was particularly impressed with the great capacity of children to learn so much during the first few years of life. She called this capacity the **absorbent mind**, analogous to a sponge soaking up liquid. She felt that all children have a fundamental, inborn intellectual structure that unfolds gradually as they develop, although individual differences are due to different environmental experiences.

**absorbent mind**—Maria Montessori's term to describe the capacity of young children to learn a great deal during the early years.

If children's absorbent minds are exposed to appropriate learning experiences in the developmental stages, their minds will grow. This is especially true during **sensitive periods**, times when children are most receptive to absorbing specific learning. For instance, during one sensitive period, children are especially receptive to developing sensory perception; during another, they are concerned with a sense of order in their environment; in yet another, their energies focus on coordination and control of movement.

**sensitive periods**—Maria Montessori's term describing the times when children are most receptive to absorbing specific learning.

Montessori developed a curriculum that takes advantage of these sensitive periods by making appropriate experiences available to children at times when they are most ready to learn from them. She used the term **prepared environment** to describe this match of the right materials to children's stages of development. Her school included many learning activities that she herself developed to help children acquire skills. Some of these related to **sensory discrimination**, matching and sorting by size, shape, sound, color, smell, or other dimension; others helped children learn practical skills such as polishing shoes or setting a table. More advanced materials were aimed at teaching reading, writing, and math skills through hands-on manipulation.

**prepared environment**—Maria Montessori's term to describe the careful match between appropriate materials and what the child is most ready to learn at any given time.

**sensory discrimination**—Involvement in an activity in which one of the senses is used to distinguish a specific feature or dimension of similar materials; it might include matching or sorting by size, color, shape, sound, smell, or taste.

Much of Montessori's philosophy and approach, particularly her self-correcting materials and strong sense of respect for children, have had an enduring impact on early childhood education. Whether by design in contemporary Montessori schools or by common acceptance in other programs, Montessori's influence is still strongly felt today (Chattin-McNichols, 1992; Gettman, 1987; Lascarides & Hinitz, 2000; Simons & Simons, 1986).

## Other Leaders in America's Early Education Movement

KEY POINT

The history of early childhood education in America is full of strong, determined women who shaped the field into what it has become today.

The history of American early childhood education, particularly during the first half of the 20th century, is filled with stories of determined, creative, strong women whose work helped to lay the groundwork for what the field has become today. One of the founders of the American early childhood education movement was Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, whose efforts led to establishment of the kindergarten. Another leader was Caroline Pratt, who opened the Play School in New York where young children were "free to be creative and learn through play" (Peltzman, 1998, p. 99). Patty Smith Hill continued work on behalf of kindergartens, unifying and restructuring kindergarten and primary education. Under her leadership, educators began to incorporate what was being learned scientifically about young children into the curriculum. Lucy Sprague Mitchell was another influential proponent of educational research and

its use in designing programs for young children. She is perhaps best known for co-founding what was later to become the Bank Street College of Education, which we will discuss later in this chapter. Another well-known figure in the history of the field is Abigail Adams Eliot, who was one of the founding members of the professional organization that was to become NAEYC. She is among the acknowledged founders of the nursery school movement, whose strong sense of respect for children permeated their work. Finally, Lucy Wheelock, founder of Wheelock College and a prolific author, lecturer, and activist, was another leading figure in the kindergarten movement. These women and many other individuals helped shaped early childhood education and its predominant underlying philosophy into the field it is today.

## INFLUENTIAL THEORISTS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Although many of the predecessors of early childhood education developed a theoretical or philosophical viewpoint about how children develop, it was not until our century that such ideas were founded on a more empirical base through systematic observations and supporting research. Today, the major way in which we view these different concepts is through theories that are based more on empirical information.

A **human development theory** is a way of describing what happens as individuals move from infancy through adulthood, identifying significant events commonly experienced by all people and explaining why changes occur as they do. It is useful to have a grasp of different theories as you develop your own professional identity and beliefs. This not only gives you a way of assessing your personal values but offers some alternative views about how children develop and should be treated (Thomas, 1990b). We will now look at just a few of the most influential developmental theorists whose ideas have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the field of early childhood education today.

**human development theory**—A way to describe what happens as individuals move from infancy through adulthood, identifying significant events that are commonly experienced by all people, and explaining why changes occur as they do.

### Erik Erikson (1902–1994)

**KEY POINT**

Erikson's psychosocial theory, which spans childhood and adulthood, focuses on specific social tasks that need to emerge for healthy development in each of eight stages.

Erik Erikson, beginning his career in the early decades of the 20th century in central Europe, was a follower of Sigmund Freud. Erikson refined aspects of Freud's theory into his **psychosocial theory**. According to Erikson, each stage of development is defined by a conflict, which leads to opportunities for personal growth. These conflicts, in addition to centering on the person alone, also revolve around relationships with others. Erikson's was the first theory that spanned both childhood and adulthood through, what he considered, eight universal stages. The first four are particularly important because they describe significant tasks that occur in the life of the infant and young child. We will focus on those four in more detail.

**psychosocial theory**—The branch of psychology founded by Erik Erikson, in which development is described in terms of eight stages that span childhood and adulthood, each offering opportunities for personality growth and development.

1. **Trust vs. Mistrust** (birth through approximately 18 months). The basic theme of infancy is the development of trust. This comes about when children's needs for food, warmth, sleep, and nurturing are met consistently and predictably. This stage revolves around the importance of feeding, although Erikson incorporates all aspects of the baby's existence, including sleep and elimination, in this foundation. The helpless infant must rely on the caregiver to provide satisfaction of needs. When children are not cared for adequately, they develop a sense of mistrust in others and in themselves, and they move to future stages by seeing the world as threatening, unpredictable, and hostile.

**Trust vs. Mistrust**—The first stage of development described by Erik Erikson, occurring during infancy, in which the child's needs should be met consistently and predictably.



2. **Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt** (approximately 18 months through 3 years). Toddlers begin to assert their growing motor, language, and cognitive abilities by trying to become more independent. At the same time, they are still very dependent and must reach a balance between reliance on caregivers and the desire to try new things. One potential conflict revolves around toilet training. Success in this stage means that children have increasing self-control, feel good about their own abilities, and also begin to learn the boundaries of the social world. If children are made to feel ashamed of their efforts, they will develop a sense of self-doubt. In early childhood programs, children need to be allowed to exercise their growing independence within the safety of a loving and supportive environment that does not withdraw bodily cuddles and comforts just because the toddler is mobile and naysaying!

**Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt**—The second stage of development described by Erik Erikson, occurring during the second year of life, in which toddlers assert their growing motor, language, and cognitive abilities by trying to become more independent.

3. **Initiative vs. Guilt** (approximately 3 to 5 years). The preschoolers' social and physical world expands dramatically in this stage, and they are full of curiosity and desire to try new activities, alone as well as cooperatively with peers. At this age, children enjoy imitating adults, a way of learning about and incorporating adult roles and expectations. Children also acquire an understanding of male and female roles through the subtle expectations of the parent of the opposite sex. If children receive no guidelines or if they are not allowed to explore, satisfy their curiosity, and try new ventures, they will develop a sense of guilt and failure. Thus, in the early childhood setting, it is important to allow children to initiate and try out a variety of experiences and activities and to provide appropriate guidelines within which children can learn the rules and expectations of society.

**Initiative vs. Guilt**—The third stage of development described by Erik Erikson, occurring during the preschool years, in which the child's curiosity and enthusiasm lead to a need to explore and learn about the world, and in which rules and expectations begin to be established.

4. **Industry vs. Inferiority** (approximately age 6 to puberty). By the end of the preschool years, children begin to focus on the development of competence. They like to plan, carry out, and complete projects, unlike younger preschoolers who are more concerned with the exploratory process of their activities. This period is particularly important in the development of habits of workmanship, persistence, greater understanding of social rules, and citizenship. Children who do not develop an adequate sense of industry will settle for mediocrity and do less than they are able, with a resulting sense of inferiority. Older preschoolers and school-aged children should be allowed time, space, materials, and support to engage in the kinds of activities that build a sense of industry.

**Industry vs. Inferiority**—The fourth stage of development described by Erik Erikson, starting at the end of the preschool years and lasting until puberty, in which the child focuses on the development of competence.

Erikson describes four other stages that build on the foundations of the ones we have described. Although all stages occur at critical times in development, they never completely disappear. Thus, trust is still important beyond infancy, children continue to struggle with the

**KEY QUESTION #2**

Observe an early childhood program. What evidence do you see of the influence of one or more theorists (for instance, Piaget, Erikson) or the behaviorists? Ask one of the teachers if he or she draws on any particular human development theories and compare to your observation.

balance between autonomy and dependency, and initiative and industry are relevant even beyond the early years, though in a more mature form. Erikson emphasizes the importance of play in meeting the tasks of autonomy and initiative during the early years. Erikson's stages highlight some of the important issues for young children and the balance we must provide to help them achieve healthy development (Erikson, 1963; Maier, 1990; Tribe, 1982; Weber, 1984). Gratz and Boulton (1996) suggest that Erikson's stages also provide a suitable framework for teachers of young children to examine and evaluate their own professional development.

**KEY POINT**

Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, one of the most influential on early childhood education, describes how children's thinking is unique in each of four stages.

## Jean Piaget (1896–1980)

One of the most influential forces in early childhood education today is the theory of Jean Piaget. Piaget's **cognitive developmental theory** presents a complex picture of how children's intelligence and thinking abilities emerge. Piaget did not suggest specific educational applications of his work, but educators have transformed his theory into actual models more than any other.

**cognitive developmental theory**—The theory formulated by Jean Piaget that focuses on how children's intelligence and thinking abilities emerge through distinct stages.

Piaget based his theory of cognitive development on his background and training as a biologist. He conceptualized cognitive development as similar to how all organisms function physiologically, adapting to and organizing the environment around them. A common example illustrates our own biological adaptation to the physical environment: If the temperature becomes too warm or too cold, we sweat or shiver to adapt. In a way similar to this physiological adaptation, we also adapt mentally to changes in the environment. At the same time we adapt, we mentally organize what we perceive in our environment so that it makes sense to us.

In a cognitive sense, **adaptation** is involved any time new information or a new experience occurs. A person must adapt to incorporate any new information or experience into the psychological structure. When something new presents itself, however, the existing mental structure is "upset"—put into **disequilibrium** because this new information or experience does not exactly fit into the old structures.

**adaptation**—Jean Piaget's term for the process that occurs any time new information or a new experience occurs.

**disequilibrium**—According to Jean Piaget, the lack of balance experienced when existing mental structures and a new experience do not fit exactly.

To return to balance or **equilibrium**, adaptation takes place through the complementary processes of assimilation and accommodation. **Assimilation** occurs when the person tries to make the new information or experience fit into an existing concept or schema. **Accommodation** takes place when the schema is modified or a new concept is formed to incorporate the new information or experience. "Accommodation accounts for development (a qualitative change) and assimilation accounts for growth (a quantitative change); together they account for intellectual adaptation and the development of intellectual structures" (Wadsworth, 1984, p. 16). An example of assimilation and accommodation can be imagined through a visit by a group of young children to a zoo. Raymond, seeing a panther for the first time, says, "Look, there's a black leopard." He has fit the new animal into an existing mental structure because he is already familiar with leopards and just assumes that the panther is a leopard of a different color. He is using assimilation, making the new information fit into what he already knows. Monique, however, has never visited a zoo and has seen some wild animals only on television or in books. Seeing unfamiliar llamas, she considers what these might be. They resemble horses, but Monique immediately dismisses this category because she knows that horses have smooth hair and shorter necks. She also dismisses camels because she knows they have humps on their backs. She decides finally that this must be an animal she does not know and asks the teacher what it is. Monique is using accommodation, creating a new concept into which this new information can be fitted.

**equilibrium**—According to Jean Piaget, the state of balance each person seeks between existing mental structures and new experiences.

**assimilation**—According to Jean Piaget, one form of adaptation, which takes place when a person tries to make new information or a new experience fit into an existing concept.

**accommodation**—According to Jean Piaget, one form of adaptation, which takes place when an existing concept is modified or a new concept is formed to incorporate new information or a new experience.



**Organization** is a process that is complementary to adaptation. While adaptation allows for new information and experience to be incorporated into existing mental structures, organization defines how such information and experiences are related to each other. Piaget considers that organization is a basic tendency of all human beings. We all strive to organize our experiences to make them understandable, connected, coherent, and integrated. Intelligence is not just a collection of facts but a way of incorporating these into a framework and context that makes sense.

**organization**—According to Jean Piaget, the mental process by which a person organizes experiences and information in relation to each other.

Consider a pedal. By itself it is a small, flat, rectangular item made of red plastic. However, in proper context, fitted on a tricycle, the pedal takes on an entirely different meaning as it allows the child to turn the wheels that, in turn, make the tricycle move. Organization allows us to expand the visual cues about the pedal to include information about its function as part of a whole.

Piaget called the cognitive structures into which we adapt and organize our environment **schemata** (schema is the singular form). Schemata are concepts or mental representations of experiences. We constantly create, refine, change, modify, organize, and reorganize our schemata. One popular analogy of schemata is an index card file. Babies are born with only a few "index cards," but, as they receive new information through their senses, they have to create new cards to incorporate these experiences. Increasingly, their store of information becomes more complex and they create "dividers" in their files into which information can be categorized and organized through some common features.

**schemata**—(schema is the singular form)—According to Jean Piaget, cognitive structures into which cognitive concepts or mental representations are organized.

Although the formation, adaptation, and organization of new schemata are ongoing processes in cognitive development, that development is typified by distinct abilities at different ages. As a **stage theorist**, Piaget (like Erikson) conceived of qualitatively different characteristics and accomplishments in cognitive ability during various stages of development. Each stage is built on and incorporates the accomplishments of the previous one. Maturation sets limits on when children are capable of achieving specific cognitive abilities.

**stage theorist**—Any theory that delineates specific stages in which development is marked by qualitatively different characteristics and accomplishments and where each stage builds on the previous one.

Thus, the infant, dependent on movement and the senses, learns about the environment through those avenues. By age two, however, a distinctly new ability emerges, the ability for mental **representation** of objects, even though they are not present in the immediate environment. This new ability allows the preschooler to move beyond the limits of the immediate physical environment and include past experiences, imaginary ideas, and symbols. While the preschooler's dramatic acquisition of language skills opens up a world of new possibilities, this age group is still limited by the observable characteristics of objects. Reasoning is not yet logical, although by about seven years children

**representation**—According to Jean Piaget, the ability to depict an object, person, action, or experience mentally, even if it is not present in the immediate environment.

**logical thinking**—According to Jean Piaget, the ability that begins to emerge around age seven in which children use mental processes to solve problems rather than relying solely on perceived information.

**abstract thinking**—According to Jean Piaget, the ability to solve a variety of problems abstractly, without a need to manipulate concrete objects.

**object permanence**—Part of Jean Piaget's theory, the recognition that objects exist, even when they are out of view; a concept that children begin to develop toward the end of their first year of life.

**sensorimotor period**—Piaget's period covering infancy.

**preoperational period**—Piaget's period covering the preschool years.

**concrete operations period**—Piaget's period covering the elementary school year.

**formal operations period**—Piaget's period covering adolescence.

begin to apply **logical thinking** to concrete problems. Finally, by adolescence, the young person may be able to apply logic and **abstract thinking** to a wide range of problems.

These changes in thinking ability are the basis for the four periods of cognitive development described by Piaget (Figure 5-1). Although Piaget's stages focus on evolving cognitive abilities, their principles are applied much more widely, to social and moral as well as to physical and mathematical learning.

Early childhood teachers need to be aware of the implications of these stages as they work with young children. Understanding of the characteristics and growing abilities of infants in the sensorimotor period is important for infants and toddlers but also has relevance for those who work with preschoolers. For instance, some young preschoolers may not yet have completely grasped **object permanence**, the recognition that an object continues to exist even if it is out of sight. Thus, the toddler who peels off the collage material to re-find the paste underneath is not naughty but is testing a principle that most children grasp during the earlier sensorimotor stage. Similarly, the preschool teacher needs to understand the concrete operations period for the precocious three-year-old who reads and uses deductive reasoning in exhibiting skills usually not seen in children this young. Teachers of school-aged children need also to be aware not only of the accomplishments of the concrete operations period but of the sensorimotor and formal operations periods as well. An understanding of how children learn as well as their characteristics, abilities, and limits is vital to appropriate teaching (Ginsburg & Opper, 1969; Lavatelli, 1970; Piaget, 1983; Saunders & Bingham-Newman, 1984; Thomas, 1990a; Tribe, 1982; Wadsworth, 1984).

**FIGURE 5-1 Piaget's Periods of Cognitive Development**

**Stage 1: Sensorimotor Period (0 to 2 years)**

The first period is characterized by motor behavior through which schemata are formed. The child does not yet represent events mentally but relies on coordination of senses and movement, on object permanence development, on learning to differentiate means from ends, and on beginning to understand the relationship of objects in space in order to learn about the environment.

**Stage 2: Preoperational Period (2 to 7 years)**

Language and other forms of representation develop during this period, although thinking is not yet logical. Children's internal mental representations, which allow them to think of objects even if these are not physically present, is the major accomplishment of this period. Children have an egocentric view of the world, in terms of their own perspective. Early classification, seriation, and role-play begin.

**Stage 3: Concrete Operations Period (7 to 11 years)**

The child has internalized some physical tasks or operations and no longer depends only on what is visible, but can apply logic to solving problems. The child now is able to reverse operations (for instance, $5 - 3 = 2$ is the same as $3 + 2 = 5$). The child can also practice conservation—recognize that an object does not change in amount even if its physical appearance changes (stretching a ball of clay into a snake).

**Stage 4: Formal Operations Period (11 to 15 years)**

The final period, rare even in adults, is characterized by sophisticated, abstract thinking and logical reasoning abilities applied to physical as well as social and moral problems.



## B. F. Skinner (1904–1990)

Up to this point, we have considered people whose views are based on a belief that there is an inborn plan according to which children develop. Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Montessori all felt that, given an appropriate environment and understanding adults, children will develop according to nature's plan into healthy, responsible, intelligent adults. Erikson and Piaget likewise believed that development is predetermined and will follow the same stages in each person.

But this view of an innately determined plan is not the only way of viewing human development. An alternative view is that children are not shaped by internal forces but rather by external ones, specifically those emanating from the environment. **Behaviorism** is based on this viewpoint.

B. F. Skinner was one of the behaviorists whose ideas have had widespread influence on all aspects of education, including those encompassing the early childhood years. The application of his theoretical and experimental work can be seen in **behavior modification**, which operates on the underlying principle that behavior can be changed or modified by manipulating the environment, which includes both physical and social components.

Skinner emphasized that almost all behavior is learned through experience. A specific behavior, according to Skinner, can be increased or decreased as a function of what follows it. In other words, if something pleasant or enjoyable consistently happens after the child engages in a specific behavior (the teacher smiles when Jeremy helps to put away the blocks), he is likely to repeat that behavior. Conversely, if something unpleasant or painful follows a behavior (Lars burns his finger when he touches the stove), he is likely not to repeat it. Deliberately attempting to increase or decrease behavior by controlling consequences is called **operant conditioning.**

Skinner used the term **reinforcement** to describe the immediate consequence of behavior that is likely to strengthen it. Whether consciously using the behavioral approach or not, early childhood educators frequently use **positive reinforcement** because of its powerful effect on children's behavior. Teachers of young children are most likely to use **social reinforcers**—for instance, a smile, a hug, attention, or involvement—when they see a child engaging in a behavior they consider desirable.

In addition, systematic attention to behavior and its consequences can be used to encourage new behaviors or eliminate undesirable ones. **Shaping** is the method used to help a child learn a new behavior by teaching it in small steps and systematically reinforcing the attainment of each step. **Extinction** is used to eliminate a behavior that had previously been reinforced by taking away all reinforcement; for example, by totally ignoring the behavior. Extinction, however, is not synonymous with **punishment,** which is defined as an aversive consequence that follows the behavior. According to Skinner (and almost all early childhood professionals), punishment is not

**behaviorism**—The theoretical viewpoint, espoused by theorists such as B. F. Skinner, that behavior is shaped by environmental forces, specifically in response to reward and punishment.

**behavior modification**—The systematic application of principles of reinforcement to modify behavior.

**operant conditioning**—The principle of behavioral theory whereby a person deliberately attempts to increase or decrease behavior by controlling consequences.

**reinforcement**—In behavioral theory, any response that follows a behavior that encourages repetition of that behavior.

**positive reinforcement**—Application of a behavioral principle, which includes any immediate feedback (either through tangible or nontangible means) to children that their behavior is valued.

**social reinforcer**—In behavioral theory, a reward that conveys approval through such responses as a smile, hug, or attention.

**shaping**—In behavioral theory, a method used to teach a child a new behavior by breaking it down into small steps and reinforcing the attainment of each step systematically.

**extinction**—In behavioral theory, a method of eliminating a previously reinforced behavior by taking away all reinforcement; for instance, by totally ignoring the behavior.

**punishment**—An aversive consequence that follows a behavior for the purpose of decreasing or eliminating the behavior; not recommended as an effective means of changing behavior.

**KEY POINT**

B. F. Skinner, one of the important proponents of behavioral theory, emphasized that almost all behavior is learned and can be increased by positive consequences and decreased by negative consequences.

**observable behavior**—Actions that can be seen rather than those that are inferred.

an effective way of controlling behavior. To summarize, in all of these methods—reinforcement, shaping, and extinction—it is the manipulation of what immediately follows a behavior that affects it.

To return to what we originally said about the distinguishing feature of behaviorism, behavior is considered to be externally controlled, not driven by internal factors. Because behaviorism has attempted to function as a precise science, behavior is defined only by what is **observable**—for instance, actions and words—rather than by nonobservable factors such as motivation or feelings. Behavior is carefully defined, observed, and graphed by representing the rate or magnitude of a given child's response in measurable units. Examples of such measures might be the number of times a child hits another child or the number of minutes a child plays appropriately with peers.

Elements of behavioral theory are used in many ways in early childhood programs. Particularly in programs for young children with disabilities and some compensatory programs, behaviorist methods have been widely and systematically applied in attempts to teach children specific skills. When the teacher determines exactly what children should learn, those skills can be organized and presented in the form of **programmed instruction.** More pervasive in early childhood education, however, is the use of a number of behavioral techniques such as reinforcement, extinction, or step-by-step shaping. Teachers in many programs, although they do not strictly adhere to all of the theoretical and applied aspects of behaviorism, nonetheless frequently use a number of its techniques (Braun & Edwards, 1972; Bushell, 1982; Peters, Neisworth, & Yawkey, 1985; Sameroff, 1983; Skinner, 1969; Skinner, 1974; Weber, 1984).

**programmed instruction**—(also called direct instruction)—A method of teaching in which the teacher determines exactly what the children should learn, devises a sequence of learning activities to teach specific information, and teaches it directly by controlling the information according to children's responses.

**KEY POINT**

Vygotsky's sociohistoric theory stresses the importance of the social context of development; children's learning is often promoted through assistance from adults or older peers who help the child learn new skills within the zone of proximal development.

**sociohistoric theory**—Originated by Lev Vygotsky, this theory gives prominence to the social, cultural, and historic context of child development.

## Lev Semanovich Vygotsky (1896–1934)

All of the previously discussed theorists have focused primarily on the child in explaining how development occurs, although the importance of others, especially the family, is certainly not ignored. Other theorists have given much greater prominence to the importance of the cultural and historical context within which a child is socialized. The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, originator of the **sociohistoric theory,** highly stressed the importance of the social environment to development. Vygotsky's ideas have gained greater prominence in recent years, several decades after his death, and have spurred considerable interest in cross-cultural studies of child development and child-rearing practices. Vygotsky proposed that social interaction, especially dialog, between children and adults is the mechanism through which specific cultural values, customs, and beliefs are transmitted from generation to generation.

Vygotsky was particularly intrigued by the question of how young children develop complex thinking. He concluded that the same mechanism through which culture is transmitted—social interaction—is the way in which increasingly more complex thinking develops, as part of learning about culture. Children gain knowledge and skills through "shared experiences" between themselves and adults or older peers. Furthermore, the dialogues that accompany these experiences gradually become a part of children's thinking. Thus, Vygotsky conceived of

# EXPERIENCES

## CHAPTER 5

## ROSALIA, Master Teacher, Mixed-Age Class

### The Flood

Heavy snow followed by persistent rain caused a flood that devastated parts of our city. Although the children were only three to five years old, they were very much aware of the flood. When they returned to school, after it was closed for several days because of impassable roads, we talked about the flood during group time.

"What happened in our city? Does anyone have something to share?"

Several children raised their hands or called out, "It flooded."

"Can you tell me what happened? What do you know about the flood?"

Children had various stories to share. None lived in the low areas near the river where it had flooded, but many had seen the flooded downtown area shown repeatedly on television. Some had gone with their parents to the river to see the devastation. Several had helped fill sand bags with their families to help avoid more damage.

"We got to help! It was neat," shared one girl.

Some children elaborated on the flood scenario. Four-year-old Caleb told this story:

"I was all alone at home when it started to flood. The water kept going up and up, and I knew I had to rescue my dog, Eddie. So, I had to take out the boat to save Eddie. I paddled round the house, went in my bedroom window upstairs, and found Eddie. He was happy to see me because he was getting wet. He got in the boat with me and we left. It was real exciting!"

Caleb, who lived down the street from one of the teachers and nowhere near the flooded areas, had seen images on television of people paddling down flooded streets in boats. He used his usual talent for story telling to explain what happened.

Some of the children wanted to know how high the water was. From the newspaper, we found out the height of the flood at its crest, and measured string to that length. We laid out the string on the floor to show how deep the water was. We then asked children to lay down along the string, the feet of one against the head of another, to measure "how many children high" the water was. It was 12 children high! Every day we checked how high the receding waters were and adjusted the string accordingly.

We also recreated a flood in the play yard. We dug a gully in the sand to make a river. Along the banks of the river, we placed various toys, such as small cars. Then we filled the "river" with water to its normal height. A flood was created by overfilling the "river." The children were able to see how the force of the water moved the sand and the objects along the banks. They also watched as the water gradually went down, just as our city's river had done.

For weeks discussion of the flood continued. The topic gradually shifted to one about erosion. But this significant and memorable event provided great opportunity for activities that really engaged the children's interest.

The intense interest of the children about a local event that all of them had experienced provided a springboard for a series of activities. This anecdote is a good example of emergent curriculum, a feature of Reggio Emilia programs, which we begin discussing later in this chapter.

cognitive development as dependent on, not independent of, social mediation. This view is in contrast to Piaget's, which conceives of the child as gradually becoming more social and less self-focused; in Vygotsky's view, the child is socially dependent at the beginning of cognitive life, and only becomes increasingly independent in his or her thinking through many experiences in which adults or older peers help.

The intense interest of the children about a local event that all of them had experienced provided a springboard for a series of activities. This anecdote is a good example of emergent curriculum, a feature of Reggio Emilia programs, which we begin discussing later in this chapter.

**zone of proximal development (ZPD)**—In Vygotsky's theory, this zone represents tasks a child cannot yet do by himself or herself but which he or she can accomplish with the support of an older child or adult.

The child acquires new skills and information within what Vygotsky termed the **zone of proximal development (ZPD)**. This is the level at which a child finds a task too difficult to complete alone but which, with the assistance and support of an adult or older peer, the child can accomplish. Infants are frequently guided by adults in tasks they have not yet mastered. Many games adults play with infants encourage the baby to increasingly greater participation; many infant motor skills are preceded by periods in which the baby sits, stands, or walks with adult assistance. Similarly, toddlers accomplish many tasks with the guided assistance of adults. Toddlers' one- or two-word sentences, for example, are often extended by adults into a more complete format, which models as well as provides the structure for more elaborate dialogue. Preschoolers also learn many tasks through guided assistance, which, as at earlier and later ages, is adjusted to the child's skill level and gradually withdrawn as the child masters the task. The teacher who tells a child who is struggling to fit a puzzle piece into the frame, "see what happens if you turn the piece around," is working within the zone of proximal development.

Vygotsky's ideas have acquired new relevance in early childhood education. The focus on finding the appropriate zone of proximal development for each child has validated the long-held concern with individualization in early childhood programs. Vygotsky's theory also suggests that, in addition to providing a stimulating environment in which young children are active explorers and participants, early educators need to promote discovery by modeling, explaining, and providing suggestions to suit each child's zone of proximal development (Berk, 1994; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; Seifert, 1993; Wertsch, 1985).

## APPLICATION OF THEORIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

**early childhood education models**—Approaches to early childhood education, based on specific theoretical foundations; for instance, the behavioral, Piagetian, or Montessori view.

**KEY POINT**

A number of human development theories have been applied to early childhood education through specific models.

The work of human development theorists is important to early childhood education if their concepts are translated into practice and methods. In our field, this has happened over the years as a number of **early childhood education models**, founded on a particular theoretical view, were developed. Such models represent a coherent approach to working with young children, including a philosophical and theoretical base, goals, curriculum design, methods, and evaluation procedures. There was a great proliferation of early childhood models in the 1960s and 1970s when educators and researchers were encouraged to develop alternative approaches for Head Start programs. Most models were designed to examine different ways of helping children at risk for later academic failure improve their school performance. But models have implications for all children as well (Evans, 1982).



We should not, however, assume that all early childhood programs pursue a carefully prescribed theoretical view. In fact, the majority of programs and teachers of young children probably do not follow a stated philosophical foundation and preference, or they may adhere only to a vaguely recognized theory. An open mind and a practical approach to teaching borne out of sensitive observation and interaction with children are, undoubtedly, equally important.

> Often our theories of growth and development, learning and instruction, or optimal teaching application are hidden and not consciously recognized as theories in the usual sense. Good teachers, like all effective professionals, have sets of guiding principles and outcome expectations that may certainly be considered as theories, at least in a general sense. (Hooper, 1987, p. 303)

It is helpful, however, to examine how some specific models have taken the views of a particular theorist (or theorists) and transformed these into program application. We will examine only five models here, although many alternative approaches exist. These five were selected to illustrate how particular views of child development can be implemented in practice. Included will be a brief overview of Montessori programs as they exist today; the Bank Street approach, which is in part based on the psychosocial view of Erikson; the High/Scope cognitively oriented curriculum, based on Piaget's principles; the Reggio Emilia approach, grounded in part on the theories of Piaget and Vygotsky; and the Bereiter-Engelmann model, founded on behavioral theory.

**KEY QUESTION**

What was your earliest school experience? How does it compare to the type of programs you see for young children today?

## Montessori Programs

**KEY POINT**

Today there is great variation among Montessori programs. The traditional Montessori environment and materials include some unique features; the roles of the teacher and the children's activities differ from those in other types of early childhood programs.

Maria Montessori's ideas and methods gradually found a receptive audience in the United States, where Montessori programs have flourished. Although Montessori is not considered a human development theorist, her program, nonetheless, was based on some carefully considered ideas about how young children grow. Today, a wide range of Montessori programs can be found. Some adhere quite rigidly to the original techniques, whereas others follow an approach that has been adapted to better fit the current social context (Chattin-McNichols, 1992). It is interesting to note that although Montessori devised her program to meet the needs of impoverished children and to help them learn important life skills, Montessori programs today are, for the most part, attended by children from more affluent homes.

**The Environment.** If you visit a traditional Montessori classroom, you will soon observe some of the prominent features of such a program, some similar to other types of early childhood settings, and some unique to Montessori. You will quickly notice the sense of order inherent in the room. Child-sized equipment and materials are clearly organized on shelves that are easily accessible to the children. There are distinct areas, each containing materials unique to promoting the tasks to be mastered in that area. The environment is also set up to be aesthetically pleasing, with plants, flowers, and attractive furnishings and

materials. The logic, order, and beauty are all integral to the Montessori philosophy.

**The Children.** You will also note children of different ages involved in individual activities, because the essence of a Montessori program is its individualized nature. Children initiate activities and are free to engage in whichever projects they choose, defining a work space for their selected activity on a mat on the floor or a tabletop. Children are self-directed, working independently or, at times, by twos. Younger children may be learning how to participate in specific activities by observing and imitating their older classmates. The Montessori program is designed as a three-year sequence for children ages three to six.

**KEY QUESTION #2**

one is available, observe a Montessori school in our community. How does it differ from other arly childhood programs you have seen? How is similar? What elements of Maria Montessori's riginal program do you see?

**The Teachers.** There is little overt adult control. The teacher's involvement is unobtrusive and quiet. He or she may be observing from a distance or demonstrating to a child how to use a new material. The teacher does not reinforce or praise children for their work since the activities are intended to be self-rewarding, thus, intrinsically motivating. Montessori teachers learn about the methods and curriculum through an intensive course of study at the graduate level.

**The Materials.** As you look more closely at the materials, you will see that they have some special characteristics. Montessori materials are **didactic,** each designed to teach a specific lesson. In addition, they are **self-correcting** so the child gets immediate feedback from the material after correctly (or incorrectly) completing a task. Materials are graduated from the simple to the more complex; therefore, children are challenged by progressively more difficult concepts. The materials are carefully and attractively constructed, and usually made of natural materials such as varnished wood.

**didactic**—A term often applied to teaching materials, indicating a built-in intent to provide specific instruction.

**self-correcting**—Learning materials such as puzzles that give the child immediate feedback on success when the task is completed.

**The Curriculum.** Different materials fit into each of the three distinct areas of the curriculum. When children first enter a Montessori program, they are introduced to the **daily living** component, in which practical activities are emphasized. Such activities focus on self-help and environmental care skills such as buttoning, brushing hair, watering plants, washing windows, and sweeping.

**daily living**—Montessori classroom area that focuses on practical tasks involved in self- and environment-care.

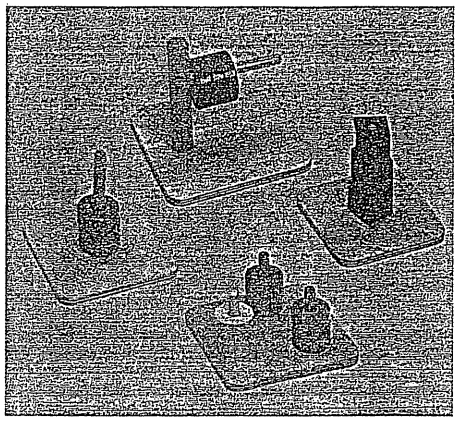
The second set of activities and materials are **sensorial,** helping children develop, organize, broaden, and refine sensory perceptions of sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste. To foster visual discrimination, for instance, children use the Pink Tower, 10 cubes increasing in regular increments of one centimeter, stacked from largest to smallest. A more complex visual discrimination task is involved with the set of color tablets, which require the child to arrange hues of one color from the darkest to the lightest; an even more advanced task might require the child to find the second darkest hue of each of the seven graded colors when all of the tablets are placed out at random.

**sensorial**—Montessori classroom area in which materials help children develop, organize, broaden, and refine sensory perceptions of sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste.

The third aspect of the program involves **conceptual** or academic materials. The practical and sensorial skills learned in the first two areas have laid the groundwork on which writing, reading, and mathematics are built. Conceptual learning activities are concrete and actively involve the child in multisensory ways. Thus, children use their fingers

**conceptual**—Montessori classroom area that focuses on academic materials related to math, reading, and writing.





Montessori programs use special equipment and arrange the classroom into centers that are somewhat different from conventional early childhood areas. How does this equipment for toddler exercises differ from that of a more traditional early childhood program?

to trace letters cut out of sandpaper, trace letters in cornmeal, or use the Movable Alphabet to manipulate letters to form words. Many of the math materials are based on a decimal system; for instance, the Golden Beads, which come singly or in units of 10, 100, and 1,000. Other activities promote cultural understanding, including maps and animal and plant pictures to identify and classify.

You may notice that some traditional early childhood activities are absent in the Montessori school. Because Montessori programs are reality based rather than promoting fantasy, you are not likely to find a dramatic play area, a creative art corner, or other activities that invite children to freely use their imagination. You may also note a restriction on how children may use materials. As David Elkind (1983) points out, once children have mastered the use of a particular material in the established manner, they should be free to act on the material and use it freely, in a more experimental way; however, the Montessori method allows materials to be used only in the prescribed procedure. You may also note less emphasis on encouraging language learning.

Montessori schools today vary considerably. Many, in fact, are a blend of the Montessori method and elements of traditional early childhood programs. Relatively little research has evaluated the effectiveness of Montessori programs. Some findings indicate that Montessori children may show greater task persistence and independence, but they appear to score lower on tests of creativity and language development (Chattin-McNichols, 1981; Elkind, 1983; Gettman, 1987; Lillard, 1973; Lindauer, 1993; Simons & Simons, 1986).

## The Bank Street Approach

Since the 1920s, New York's Bank Street College of Education has been one of the leading forces in early childhood education in this country. Its **developmental interactionist model** denotes not only that this

**developmental interactionist model**—Foundation of the Bank Street approach, concerned with the interaction among various aspects of each child's development as well as between child and environment.

KEY POINT

e developmental interactionist approach of ank Street College is an example of open ucation, with a strong emphasis on all aspects children's development.

go strength—Ability to deal effec-vely with the environment.

program is concerned with all aspects of children's development, but also that it places emphasis on interactions, both between the child and environment and between the cognitive and affective areas of the child's development. In other words, children's development in the cognitive and affective domain is not seen as a separate or parallel function but rather as truly an interactive one.

From such a perspective, this model builds on the works of a variety of theorists, including cognitive theorists such as Piaget, and those who are concerned with the development of **ego strength**, the ability to deal effectively with the environment, such as Erikson. Thus, underlying the program's philosophy is a strong commitment to fostering both intellectual and social-emotional development. Equally important to the acquisition of cognitive skills is the development of self-esteem, identity, competence, impulse control, autonomy, and relationships with other people.

> The school . . . promotes the integration of functions rather than, as is more often the case, the compartmentalization of functions. . . . [It] supports the integration of thought and feeling, thought and action, the subjective and the objective, self-feeling and empathy with others, original and conventional forms of communication, spontaneous and ritualized forms of response. It is part of the basic goal and value system of the school to stimulate individuality and vigorous, creative response. (Shapiro & Biber, 1972, pp. 61-62)

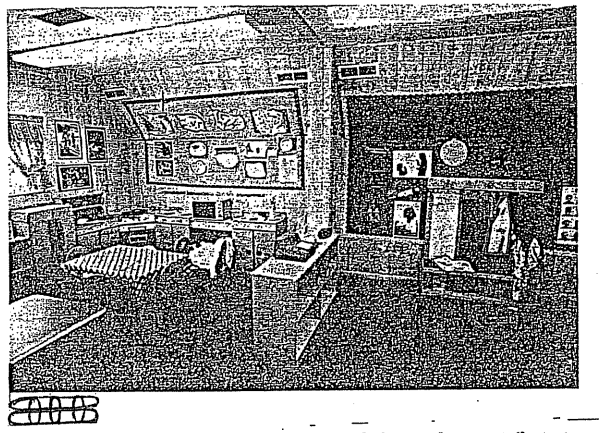
If you were to observe a classroom in which the teachers adhere to the Bank Street philosophy, you would see a program that appears, in most respects, quite similar to a variety of high-quality early childhood programs. The Bank Street approach is considered synonymous with **open education**, a term encompassing programs that operate on the premise that children, provided a well-conceived environment, are capable of selecting and learning from appropriate activities. The program does not aim to teach children a lot of new concepts, but rather to help them understand what they already know in more depth. Children's own experiences are thus the base of the Bank Street program. Because children come to school with a variety of previous experiences, however, the curriculum must remain open and flexible so each child can build on and expand according to her or his own unique conceptual level.

pen education—A program that operates on the assumption that children, provided with a well-conceived environment, are capable of selecting and learning from appropriate activities.

**The Environment.** The classroom is arranged into conventional interest areas such as music, art, reading, science, and dramatic play. The purpose of each area is clearly defined by the materials it contains. Many of those materials are handmade, both by teachers and children. Teacher materials are encouraged because they are designed to meet unique and specific needs of the children in the class. Child-made materials may include books that the children have made as part of the reading center or children's collections that are used as tools for counting in the math center.

**The Curriculum.** Because this approach is centered on the idea that the child's development must be viewed as integrated, it also specifies that the curriculum and functioning of the classroom be integrated. To promote learning, curriculum is based on a unifying theme, which serves to help children focus on specific concepts and provides a sense of integration. Children's earliest experiences in the Bank Street classroom are designed to help them understand and master their school environment by participating in activities and chores that contribute to its functioning. Later, learning is extended beyond the classroom to the community to expand the children's understanding of meaningful elements that affect their lives.





The environment in the Bank Street programs is organized into conventional interest areas. Children learn by interacting within this environment, broadening their previous experiences.

**The Teachers.** The Bank Street approach relies heavily on the abilities of competent teachers. They must have a keen understanding of children's development, of each child's individuality, and of how best to structure an environment that will encourage each child to fulfill his or her potential. The teachers' role both in teaching and guidance is to recognize nuances in the children through their sensitivity and to make changes as appropriate. They recognize the importance of helping the children develop a strong sense of self, to exercise their growing autonomy, to make an impact on and experience mastery over the environment, to make choices, to develop a joy in learning, and to feel enough confidence to take risks and handle contradictions.

In creating a classroom atmosphere that draws on teachers' understanding of the children, teachers match the types and variety of materials and experiences they provide to children's changing needs. They also understand young children's immature control over their impulses and provide rules that protect and build on positive motivation rather than on arbitrary, authoritarian control. Because each child will bring to school his or her personal experience of interactions with adults, the teachers must build on that experience to develop a meaningful relationship with each youngster (Biber, 1984; Shapiro & Biber, 1972; Zimiles, 1993).

## The Cognitively Oriented Curriculum

KEY POINT

The cognitively oriented curriculum, based on the theory of Piaget, revolves around activities that help children learn specific cognitive concepts.

A number of programs based on the theoretical precepts of Jean Piaget have evolved over the last several decades. One of those, the cognitively oriented curriculum, was developed by the High/Scope Foundation of

Ypsilanti, Michigan, under the leadership of David Weikart. This approach was initially designed in the early 1960s as a program for children from impoverished backgrounds, but has since been adopted more widely, partly through the publication of its carefully outlined curriculum manual, *Young Children in Action* (Hohmann, Banet, & Weikart, 1995). In line with Piagetian theory, the cognitively oriented model is based on the premise that children are active learners who construct their own knowledge from meaningful experiences. If you were to visit a cognitively oriented class, you would observe this philosophy in the environment, schedule, activities, and the children's and teacher's behavior.

**The Environment.** The environment is designed to be stimulating but orderly, where children can independently choose from a wide variety of interesting materials. The classroom is divided into clearly defined work areas, each with a specific set of materials appropriate to that area. A cognitively oriented classroom contains at least a housekeeping, block, art, quiet, and large-group area, although there might also be construction, music and movement, sand and water, and animal and plant work areas as well. Accessible, uncluttered storage spaces in each work area are clearly labeled with silhouettes or pictures, facilitating clean-up and promoting a sense of order.

**The Schedule.** The daily schedule is integral to the philosophy of the cognitively oriented program. Consistency helps children gain a gradual understanding of time. The day is begun with a **planning time,** when children decide what activities they would like to participate in during the ensuing work time. A teacher helps each child individually think through what he or she plans to do, and then records the child's plans. A large block of time is then set aside for **work time,** during which children engage in self-selected activities, supported and assisted by the teachers.

After work time comes **recall time,** usually carried out in small groups, where children review their work-time activities. This **plan-do-review cycle** is the heart of the cognitively oriented curriculum, helping children make deliberate, systematic choices with the help of the teacher. Additional daily periods include clean-up, considered a learning opportunity; a small-group time, which typically includes a teacher-planned activity that reinforces a cognitive concept; large-group time for stories, music, games, and other whole-group activities; outside time; and meals and nap, as appropriate to the length of the program day.

**planning time**—In the cognitively oriented curriculum, the time set aside during which children decide what activities they would like to participate in during the ensuing work time.

**work time**—In the cognitively oriented curriculum, the large block of time during which children engage in self-selected activities.

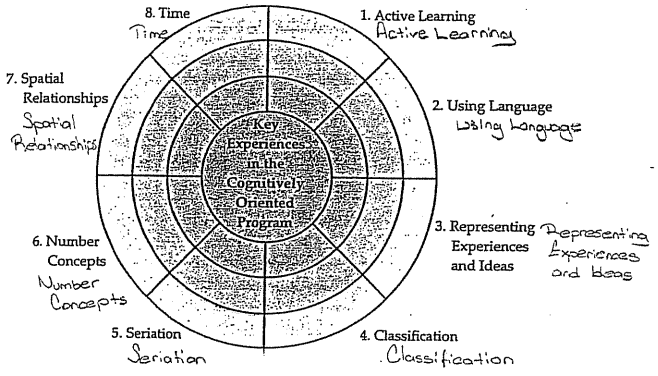
**recall time**—In the cognitively oriented curriculum, the time when children review their work-time activities.

**plan-do-review cycle**—The heart of the cognitively oriented curriculum through which children are encouraged to make deliberate, systematic choices with the help of teachers by planning ahead of time, carrying out, then recalling each day's activities.

**key experiences**—In the cognitively oriented curriculum, the eight cognitive concepts on which activities are built.

**The Curriculum.** Throughout the day, teachers focus on extending the cognitively oriented curriculum's **key experiences,** a set of eight concepts based on the characteristics and learning capabilities of preoperational children, as discussed by Piaget. (We will consider some of these concepts in more detail in Chapter 11, when we discuss cognitive development and the early childhood curriculum.) The key experiences give the teachers a framework within which to observe each child's individual performance as well as support and extend children's self-initiated activities. Following is a brief description of these eight concepts.






1. Active learning takes place when activities are initiated and carried out by children themselves. It involves learning through all the senses, manipulating and combining materials as a way of discovering their relationships, self-selecting activities and materials, and learning to use equipment and tools.
2. Using language is strongly stressed and encouraged through talking with others about meaningful experiences, describing, expressing feelings, having language written down by a teacher, and playing with language.
3. Representing experiences and ideas—according to Piaget, the hallmark of the preoperational period—allows children to represent the world in nonverbal ways. Key experiences include such activities as recognizing objects through the senses, imitating actions and sounds, role playing, and drawing or painting.
4. **Classification** begins during the preoperational period as children note similarities and differences among objects. Children are encouraged to investigate and describe the attributes of things, sort and match objects, use objects in different ways, talk about characteristics that some things do *not* have, and distinguish between "some" and "all."
5. **Seriation,** the ability to arrange objects along some dimension, is promoted by having children make comparisons, arranging objects in order, and matching.
6. **Number concepts** are the basis for mathematical understanding and are built on many concrete experiences. To promote this concept, experiences are planned to encourage children to compare, count, and engage in one-to-one correspondence.
7. **Spatial relationships** are encouraged through assembling and taking things apart, rearranging and reshaping objects, observing and describing things from different perspectives, working with shapes, experiencing and representing the child's own body,

**classification**—The ability to sort and group objects by some common attribute or property; for instance, color or size.

**seriation**—A relationship among objects in which they are placed in a logical order, such as from longest to shortest.

**number concepts**—One of the cognitive concepts young children begin to acquire, involving an understanding of quantity.

**spatial relationship**—The relative positions to each other of objects and people in space.

locating objects in the environment, and experiencing and describing relative positions and distances.

8. Time is a gradually acquired concept involving both the understanding of time units and sequencing of events in time. Experiences that help children learn such concepts include signals for stopping and starting actions, experiencing and describing different rates of speed and time intervals, observing seasonal changes, discussing future events, planning, representing past events, and describing the order of events (Hohmann et al., 1995).

The cognitively oriented curriculum provides one illustration of how Piaget's theory has been put into practice. Central is the idea that children are active learners who develop appropriate concepts through interaction with the environment. Through a carefully prepared environment and the guidance of knowledgeable teachers, children attain a deeper understanding of the rules that govern the physical and social world (Hohmann et al., 1995; Weikart & Schweinhart, 1993).

## The Reggio Emilia Approach

**KEY POINT**

The programs of Reggio Emilia in Italy are carefully designed to foster interactions, exploration, and problem solving; much of the curriculum revolves around projects in which children and teachers thoroughly explore a particular concept or topic in myriad ways, over an extended period of time.

Over the past few years, increasing attention has been paid by early childhood educators from around the world to the programs established in Reggio Emilia, in northern Italy. The publicly supported early childhood programs of this region, under the guidance and vision of Loris Malaguzzi, have developed an extraordinary curriculum, based on many theoretical foundations, Piaget's and Vygotsky's included.

**The Environment.** The physical space in Reggio Emilia is used to promote an inviting, aesthetically pleasing, comfortable environment in which both human relationships and learning are central. The use of space is designed to encourage communication and nurture relationships. Arrangements allow for places in which a child can work with a few children, a larger group of children, a teacher, or alone. Equipment, materials, and activities are arranged to encourage exploration, discovery, and problem solving as well as to offer many choices.

A distinctive feature of each Reggio Emilia school is an atelier, a special studio or workshop in which children and teachers have access to a wide variety of resource materials to depict their experiences. The atelier is used to document the children's work; transcripts of their discussions, photographs of their activities, and representations of their projects are carefully arranged to document the process of learning in relation to various projects. These displays provide deeper insights to children, as they view and review their work and the work of peers, and to teachers and parents, as they consider the process of learning of the children through these projects.

**The Curriculum.** Projects, in fact, are the central concept around which Reggio Emilia's curriculum revolves. The project approach allows children, usually in small groups, to explore a concept or topic in depth. Projects can be short- or long-term, often lasting well over a month. Because there is no set schedule in Reggio Emilia's schools, children can work at a leisurely pace because they are under no time constraints in carrying



### WHO'S WHO IN ECE?

**Who?** Jean-Jacques Rousseau

**When?** Born: June 28, 1712
Died: July 2, 1778

**Where?** Born: Geneva, Switzerland
Died: near Paris, France

**What?** Highlighted the importance of childhood. Saw the child as a "noble savage", pure, in tune with nature. This philosophy was introduced in his novel, *Emile.*
His ideas strongly influenced Pestalozzi, Froebel, Piaget, Skinner, Montessori, and others.

**What was he like?** Described as a brilliant yet self-centered, undisciplined, neurotic.
Profoundly affected by the death of his mother soon after his birth. Raised until age 10 by his father (a watchmaker and a dance teacher), then apprenticed at age 13 to an engraver. In adulthood, abandoned his own five children to orphanages.

**Where can I read more?** Read more information on pages 114.

*"Give your pupil no kind of verbal instruction; he should receive none but from experience."*

**Who?** Johann Pestalozzi

**When?** Born: January 12, 1746
Died: February 17, 1827

**Where?** Born: Zurich, Switzerland
Died: Brugg, Switzerland

**What?** Set the model for what a teacher of young children should be. Much admired for his teaching methods and his concern for poor children. Espoused the need for active learning and education for the whole child. Influenced many contemporaries, especially Froebel, and later educators, even to today.

**What was he like?** Considered to be kind, caring, highly sensitive, charismatic, arousing devotion from others.
A sickly and awkward child, others made fun of him. He did not get along with his peers or his teachers. From an early age, he believed that teaching should be more kind and humane, a belief that was affirmed when he read Rousseau's *Emile.*

**Where can I read more?** Read more information on page 114–116.

*"The first development of thought in the child is very much disturbed by a wordy system of teaching."*

*continued*

**Who?** **Friedrich Froebel**

**When?**
Born: April 21, 1782
Died: June 21, 1852

**Where?**
Born: Oberweissbach, Germany
Died: near Marienthal, Germany

**What?**
Created kindergarten, literally "garden for children," where play was promoted as the way children learn. Developed early childhood materials, including blocks; materials and activities called "gifts for play".

Twice visited Pestalozzi's schools; had great influence on the early American Kindergarten movement.

*"Play is the highest phase of child development."*

**What was he like?**
Described as a dreamy and restless child; an idealist as a man, hard working, dedicated, deeply religious.

An unhappy childhood, caused by a distant father and uncaring stepmother, led to his resolve to devote his life to making children happy. A bright spot was working in the garden with his father, reflected as a central feature of the kindergarten.

**Where can I read more?**
Read more information on pages 116.

**Who?** **Maria Montessori**

**When?**
Born: August 31, 1870
Died: May 6, 1952

**Where?**
Born: Chiaravalle, Italy
Died: Noordwijk-on-Sea, Holland

**What?**
Developed the Casa dei Bambini, Children's House, for slum children in Rome; developed comprehensive program, including theoretical formulation, materials, curriculum, and child-sized furnishings.

Influenced by Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel; has had lasting impact through worldwide Montessori schools.

*"The greatest crime that society is committing is . . . wasting money it should spend for its children."*

**What was she like?**
Strong-willed, persistent, ambitious; first woman doctor in Italy; had a mesmerizing personality.

Even as a child, she had a strong sense of the dignity of every person. A teacher commented disparagingly about the expression in her eyes; from that day on she never looked this teacher in the eyes. One of her most important lessons is that every human being, even the smallest child, must be treated with respect.

**Where can I read more?**
Read more information on pages 116–117 and 127–129.



**Who?** **Erik H. Erikson**

**When?**
Born: June 15, 1902
Died: May 12, 1994

**Where?**
Born: Frankfurt, Germany
Died: Harwich, Massachusetts

**What?**
**Psychosocial Theory**
Identifies needs of children at different age/stages, beginning with a need for trust for infants, autonomy for toddlers, initiative for preschoolers, and industry for school-aged children; highlights the importance of social interactions in development.

Application: Bank Street Model.

*"It is human to have a long childhood; it is civilized to have an even longer childhood."*

**What was he like?**
Described as thoughtful, energetic, magnetic; a scholarly thinker and prolific writer.

At 18 wandered through Europe as an artist; stumbled on a job as a teacher in a progressive school in Vienna run by Anna Freud. This proved to be the turning point, his introduction to Freud's work and his life-long involvement with psychoanalytic theory. Later his writings were likened to "works of art," paintings of word pictures with intricate detail and attention.

**Where can I read more?**
Read more information on pages 118–120.

**Who?** **Jean Piaget**

**When?**
Born: August 9, 1896
Died: September 17, 1980

**Where?**
Born: Neuchâtel, Switzerland
Died: Geneva, Switzerland

**What?**
**Cognitive Developmental Theory**
Intelligence is adaptation to the environment.

Thinking is qualitatively different at each stage; infants and toddlers learn through movement and the senses; preschoolers use symbols to organize ideas; school-agers acquire logical structures of thought.

Application: High/Scope, Reggio Emilia, Bank Street.

*"We should not allow children a completely free rein on the one hand, nor channel them too narrowly on the other hand."*

**What was he like?**
Precocious, with his first publication at 10, and Ph.D. by 22; constantly searching for answers; always ingenious and inventive in his approach.

Perhaps because his mother was in poor mental health, he developed an interest in psychoanalysis. This soon turned into his life-long fascination with normal development, especially in the thinking of children. Much of his theory was developed by careful observation of his own three children.

**Where can I read more?**
Read more information on pages 120–123.

*continued*

Who?
When?
Where?
What?

**B(urrhus) F(rederick) Skinner**

Born: March 20, 1904

Died: August 18, 1990

Born: Susquehanna, Pennsylvania

Died: Cambridge, Massachusetts

**Behaviorism**

Environment is important in shaping all aspects of behavior. Consistent positive consequences (positive reinforcement) ensure that behavior will be repeated; behavior modification is application of behaviorism.

Application: Bereiter-Engelmann program.

*"Teaching is the expediting of learning: A person who is taught learns more quickly than one who is not."*

What was he like?

Ambitious, goal-driven, persistent; seen as the "Darth Vader" of psychology by some, as a brilliant innovator by others.

"Fred" Skinner experienced a calm and nurturing childhood. Perhaps his later theory was shaped by childhood experiences, since his Grandmother Burrhus reinforced good behavior with pie, candy, and letting him win at dominoes.

Where can I read more?

Read more information on pages 123–124.

Who?
When?
Where?
What?

**Lev Vygotsky**

Born: November 5, 1896

Died: June 11, 1934

Born: Orsha, Russia

Died: Moscow, Russia

**Sociohistoric Theory**

Believed social and historic forces shape intellectual ability; we are the product of our times. Thus, his cognitive theory reflects the Marxist-Leninist philosophy of Russia during his lifetime. Language is a primary tool for conveying society's values.

*"The maturation of a child's higher mental functions occurs through the adult's assistance and participation."*

Application: Reggio Emilia.

What was he like?

An intense yet very social person with the capacity to inspire others; deeply interested in a variety of fields and topics, many of which he mastered.

His childhood friends called him "little professor" because of his academic pursuits; at age 15 he organized stimulating intellectual discussions for his peers. His ability to structure the environment so others could learn contributed to formulation of his ideas about the zone of proximal development.

Where can I read more?

Read more information on pages 124–126.

"Who's Who in ECE?" was compiled with the assistance of Melissa Burnham.



out their projects. Often the representations of learning in projects are expressed in artwork; but, as Forman (1993) points out, children move from learning to draw, to drawing to learn. Art is a vehicle through which children explore the properties of the concept or topic under study.

The subject or theme of projects can emerge from questions asked by children, ideas proposed by children or teachers, or everyday experiences. Thus, there is no preplanned curriculum beyond the general goals set by the teachers. Projects can revolve around most any topic, ranging from shadows, reflections, caves, and the city when it rains, to designing and building an amusement park for small birds.

Forman cites an example of a project, in which children studied a pervasive feature of their community environment during spring—poppy fields. Children begin by drawing the subject, to start thinking about what poppies are like. Teachers and children communicate: they ask questions, examine each others' work, and consider the various aspects of life in a poppy field. After several days of discussing, drawing, and considering questions, such activity is followed by a trip to a poppy field. They have been immersed in poppies for several days now, and are ready to observe, compare, and ponder some of the questions they have asked. The earlier activity has prepared the children to learn about poppies in greater depth now. When they return to the classrooms and again draw poppies, their creations are much more accurate and dynamic. They are, after all, based on careful redefinition of the subject, or assimilation of new information. Immersion in a topic and a time frame for each project set by the interests of the children, not by the adults, allows for much greater depth of learning.

**The Teachers.** Education, according to Malaguzzi (1993), must be centered on its three important participants—children, teachers, and families. All three must have a sense of well-being if the educational program is to be effective. Teachers in Reggio Emilia schools work in pairs, as coteachers, which stay with a group of children for three years, from infancy to age three or from three to six. The teachers' role is to be a resource for and, in effect, learning partners with the children. Teachers have the support of a team of pedagogical coordinators and a visual arts teacher. Considerable communication and coordination facilitate the cooperative atmosphere of Reggio Emilia programs. The programs include time for weekly staff meetings and provide ongoing staff development, both of which lead to strong commitment, skill, and a sense of professionalism (Bredekamp, 1993; Forman, 1993; Gandini, 1993; Malaguzzi, 1993; New, 2000).

## The Bereiter–Engelmann Model

**KEY POINT**

The Bereiter–Engelmann model, which is based on behavioral theory, uses a direct instruction approach in which the teacher presents carefully planned lessons in three academic areas.

During the height of the Head Start program development, several models based on behavioral theory evolved. One was developed by Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann in the 1960s. Like many of the models developed during that era, it was designed primarily to help children from poverty backgrounds gain some successful experiences that would diminish the likelihood of failure once they started elementary school. The Bereiter–Engelmann model is noticeably different from the

# A CLOSER LOOK

## Emergent Curriculum

One of the main features of the Reggio Emilia program of Italy is its emergent curriculum. The notion of emergent curriculum is not new, having been promoted for many decades in the United States and elsewhere. In the context of Reggio Emilia, however, the curricular projects that emerge from the children's interests and activities have provided a new emphasis to this approach to curriculum development.

The themes of the emergent curriculum differ from the more traditional thematic approach in which teachers decide what topics should serve as the focus of a given time period, for instance, a week. Emergent curriculum themes literally *emerge* out of the interests of the children in a fluid and flexible way; thus, they are determined by children and teachers rather than by teachers alone. They have no predetermined time frame; some themes may last a few days while others may last several weeks. The complexity of the topic, the children's interest and the new ideas and questions developed as the theme emerges determine how long children will spend exploring it.

Themes are used to organize curriculum in a way that will interest and engage children in meaningful activity. They build on what is familiar to children—the people and objects of their environment—and expand to assimilate new concepts and information (Diffily, 1996; Helm & Katz, 2001). Furthermore, they provide the chance to integrate curriculum content across disciplines in a natural way (Sheerer, Dettore, & Cypher, 1996). A project should include a broad range of concepts, such as math, science, art, writing, and social studies (Diffily, 1996).

It is important that the emergence of the curriculum is done in a way that actively engages the children in the process of planning, integration, and adaptation (Sheerer et al., 1996). Discussion or shared reading often provides a starting point for a new theme by sparking interest in a topic; this is followed by generation of many questions, a possible field trip, research, planning, and implementation. Often a celebration or exhibit of the process and final project put closure to the theme (Diffily, 1996).

A wide range of ideas, springing from the interest of the children, have provided the content for themes in emergent curricula. Many of these have been documented in articles, books, and films. One intriguing topic from one of the Reggio Emilia schools was titled "An Amusement Park for the Birds," as documented in a film by that name. This four-month project sprang from a conversation in which some of the children thought the birds would enjoy an amusement park in the outdoor area of the school. Topics such as building a town (Bayman, 1995), collecting and classifying rocks (Diffily, 1996), bicycles, building construction, newspaper, and even the all-too-familiar neighborhood McDonald's (Helm, 1996) provide the basis for themes that engage and fascinate children and that provide the foundation for a wide range of learning experiences. Chapter 8 discusses emergent curriculum in more detail.





other programs we have described because it is based on some very different premises, both about how children learn and about how to best meet their needs.

The program was founded on the assumption that because disadvantaged children were already behind their middle-class peers, they needed not just enrichment activities but a program that would accelerate their rate of learning. Such a program could not be designed to meet all of the needs of preschool-aged children. "A short-term preschool program cannot be expected to produce above normal gains in all areas of development at once; a 'well-rounded' program is therefore incompatible with the goals of catching up: selectivity is necessary" (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966, p. 19). (It is important to note that when Head Start was initiated, it began as a summer program for children about to enter kindergarten.) Thus, the Bereiter–Engelmann program was designed to meet very specific, teacher-determined learning goals rather than to meet the needs of the "whole child."

**The Curriculum.** The center of this highly structured preschool curriculum is daily lessons conveyed through a **direct instruction** approach. The teacher presents carefully planned lessons, drills, and exercises designed to meet very specific goals. In the Bereiter–Engelmann program, these lessons are offered in three academic areas—language, math, and reading. Precise teacher questions, which require specific verbal answers from the children, are presented in a carefully sequenced order.

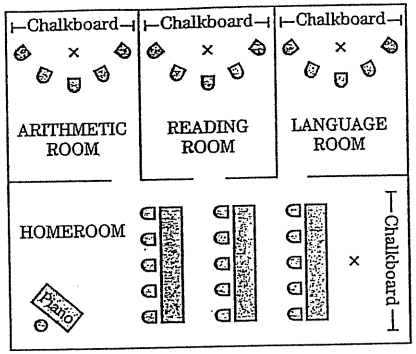
**direct instruction (also called programmed instruction)**—A method of teaching in which the teacher determines exactly what the children should learn, devises a sequence of learning activities to teach specific information, and teaches it directly by controlling the information according to children's responses.

The teacher's enthusiasm is important in implementing this approach. Each lesson is designed to help the children master specific skills related to program goals; for example, language goals related to the use of plurals, complete sentences, if-then statements, affirmative as well as negative statements, and polar opposites (big/little, up/down). Other goals relate to color recognition and naming, counting to 20, recognition of letters, ability to rhyme, and development of a sight-reading vocabulary. Constant reinforcement, both in the form of praise and food, is used to motivate and encourage the children.

**The Environment.** In addition, the environment of the Bereiter–Engelmann model is quite different from that of other early childhood programs. The facility is arranged into small classrooms, where direct teaching activities are carried out, and a large room for less structured, large-group activities. A model floor plan suggested by Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) includes three small classrooms—named the Arithmetic Room, the Reading Room, and the Language Room—each furnished with five small chairs facing a chalkboard (and, presumably, the teacher). The most important feature of these small study rooms should be their acoustic properties, ensuring that they filter out any noise that would distract from lessons. These rooms should also be plain, to minimize distraction from the task at hand. A larger "homeroom," furnished with tables, a piano, and a chalkboard, provides a place for snack and music times.

Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) also suggest that there be very few materials available to the children, mainly ones that will reinforce concepts taught in the lessons. These might include puzzles, books, tracing materials, paper, and crayons, but not creative materials, because creative

Physical layout of the Bereiter–Engelmann model




development is not a goal of the program. It was assumed that the richness and variety of peer play and games, for example, will be readily available in the child's normal environment.

**The Schedule.** The daily schedule revolves around three intensive 20-minute lessons in language, math, and reading, each involving five children and one teacher. These small-group periods are interspersed with functional times for eating and toileting and a 15- to 20-minute music period. Music is also a direct instruction activity because it is used to reinforce language. Three teachers work with the children, each teaching one of the three subjects to each of the three groups of children.

**The Teachers.** Bereiter and Engelmann (1966) suggest that elementary school teachers are more suited to teach in this model than are teachers trained to work with young children. The training of early childhood educators

> has provided them with a deeply ingrained bias against 'forcing' the child in any way; the intensive preschool is premised on 'forcing' the child. Their conception of child development and the emergence of skills is usually diametrically opposed to the viewpoint on which the intensive preschool rests. (p. 69)

**Evaluations.** Because the Bereiter–Engelmann program operates quite differently from the other programs we have discussed, a few words about how this program fares in research evaluations might be helpful in considering its merits. The Bereiter–Engelmann program was included in a number of comparative studies that sought to examine the impact of this approach. Initial evaluation showed that children had significantly improved IQ and achievement test scores, more so than the other groups studied; however, those gains declined quickly over the next few years, as they did for the children who had been involved in other programs as well.

The levels of curiosity and inventiveness of the children in the Bereiter–Engelmann model seemed lower than those of youngsters who participated in other types of compensatory programs (Miller & Bizzell, 1983; Miller & Dyer, 1975). In part, this may be because the high level of reinforcement, according to research, tends to decrease the intrinsic interest children may have in learning (Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973). In other words, once the external motivators for learning were removed, the process of learning may have ceased to hold the children's interests.



More recent evaluation of adolescents who had participated in the Bereiter–Engelmann program as preschoolers showed some unexpected outcomes. The youths who had been in a direct instruction program appeared to have higher rates of juvenile delinquency than youths involved in programs where the major teaching method involved self-selection (Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986a). The authors of this study speculated in a subsequent publication (Schweinhart, Weikart, & Larner, 1986b) that when young children have control over the activities they participate in, they may well develop a greater sense of responsibility and initiative. They point out that development of such traits is crucial in early childhood, as described by such theorists as Erik Erikson (see page 118). Proponents of the direct instructional approach, however, have questioned these conclusions and expressed concern over the research procedures used in these studies (Bereiter, 1986; Gersten, 1986). Thus, the theoretical approach that is used to help children acquire cognitive skills may have some far-reaching effects, but their measurement is not an easy task.

We have explored some different theoretical ideas about how young children develop and learn, and we have examined several models based on these theories. You have undoubtedly recognized by this time that early childhood education is not a single, unified field based on an agreed-upon philosophy. Let us now briefly examine what research tells us about the effects of early childhood education and, where applicable, what role some of these theoretical precepts play in shaping that effect.

## RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

A question that must be asked is whether early childhood education makes a difference. As we have already indicated in several contexts, much of the research about the effectiveness of early childhood education has come from the evaluation of programs designed for children from impoverished backgrounds. The result of such research is important in gauging the value of compensatory education, but it also provides us with more general information about early childhood education. In addition, it is important to understand the effect of early childhood education on all youngsters, particularly with the large number of young children enrolled in child care programs. We will look at these two topics separately.

**KEY QUESTION #5**

Visit a Head Start program in your community. Which family services and education experiences provided by this program might contribute to the types of long-range positive effects found by the research?

### The Effects of Early Intervention

**KEY POINT**

Research on early intervention programs such as Head Start has shown that they result in long-term, positive effects and cost benefits.

The 1960s can be portrayed as a period of great optimism on the part of the educators and psychologists who had a hand in the development

of Head Start. As expressed by Edward Zigler, one of the leaders in the Head Start movement:

> Intervention was supposed to impart immediate benefits so that class differences would be eliminated by the time of school entry. Furthermore, many expected that the brief preschool experience would be so potent a counteraction to the deficits in poor children's lives that it could prevent further attenuation in age-appropriate performance and a recurrence of the gap between social classes in later grades (Zigler & Berman, 1973, pp. 895-896).

Head Start, as we now know, did not live up to that idealistic expectation. Many of the early intervention programs showed some short-term results in improved IQ and achievement scores for the first two years of elementary school (Lee, Brooks-Gunn, Schnur, & Liaw, 1990; Royce, Darlington, & Murray, 1983; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1985). But the relatively brief time that children spend in Head Start just cannot make up for the wide variety of social ills that beset the children of poverty. Broader assessments of compensatory programs, however, have demonstrated that early intervention can have important and lasting effects. In a survey of outcome evaluations from a number of early childhood programs for children from low-income families, numerous clear long-term benefits were found (Campbell & Taylor, 1996). These include not only IQ gains but higher test scores and better progress throughout the school years. Children of these programs also were better adjusted, had more positive attitudes, and had a higher sense of self. Parents of these children often improved their educational and vocational status and showed reduced incidents of child abuse and neglect. "Early childhood programs clearly do help overcome the barriers of impoverishment" (Campbell & Taylor, 1996, p. 78).

A most interesting set of results comes from the cognitively oriented curriculum, which has been one of the most thoroughly researched early childhood programs for children from low-income families. Follow-up data through adolescence were collected on youngsters who had been enrolled in the program, giving information on their subsequent experiences and functioning within the larger society. When contrasted with a comparable group that had not attended preschool, the cognitively oriented graduates were significantly more likely to have completed high school, experienced job success and satisfaction, and been self-supporting rather than dependent on welfare. They were also less likely to have been arrested, required special education services, or experienced a teen pregnancy.

Further follow-up at age 27 of those who had participated in the program as preschoolers showed continued positive results (Schweinhart, Barnes, & Weikart, 1993). Results indicate that, compared to the control group, these adults had higher earnings, were more likely to own a home, demonstrated a greater commitment to marriage, were less dependent on social services, and had considerably fewer arrests.

Such long-range results indicate that high-quality early childhood programs can and do make a difference, not just to the individual children involved but to society at large. These researchers have estimated that early childhood intervention is a good tax investment that can save up to seven times the amount spent during the early years by offsetting later welfare, special education, and crime costs (Barnett, 1996; Schweinhart et al., 1993).



Longitudinal research has shown that Head Start has some positive, long-range benefits for children, their families, and society.

Another project, which has been in the news recently, also has long-term positive outcomes for children from poverty backgrounds. The Abecedarian Project of South Carolina has followed a group of children from infancy, when they entered the project, into full-time, high-quality child care, through early adulthood. A control group with similar characteristics did not receive any intervention. The children who participated in the early childhood intervention program from infancy to age five had higher cognitive test scores throughout their subsequent schooling. A significant number of the intervention group continued on to higher education. This project underscores the importance of high-quality programming from infancy for children at risk. Such intervention greatly improves the likelihood of later educational success (Bracey, 1996; Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Ramey et al., 2000).

Similar, positive long-term results were also found for adolescents who had participated in the Syracuse University Family Development Research Program (FDRP) during their infant and preschool years. Most impressive was the highly significant difference in involvement in the juvenile justice system between these teenagers and a comparable (control) group that had not participated in an early intervention program. Not only had far fewer of the FDRP youngsters been involved in juvenile delinquency, but the severity of the offenses, the number of incidents, and the cost of processing were far lower.

Another finding from this study showed that, particularly for girls, early intervention resulted in better school performance and lower absenteeism during adolescence than was found for the control group. The teachers also rated the FDRP girls, compared to the control-group girls, as higher in self-esteem and self-control (Lally, Mangione, & Honig, 1988). Follow-up studies such as these provide evidence that high-quality early childhood intervention programs can and do make a difference.

## The Effects of Early Childhood Programs on Low-Risk Children

**KEY POINT**

Research is showing that high-quality child care has an effect on all aspects of children's development.

Over the past several decades, much of the research in early childhood education has focused on children at risk because of poverty, as we just discussed. More recently, however, researchers have begun to examine

the effects of early childhood programs, especially child care, on all c
dren. Since such a large proportion of American children spend mu
of their time in child care settings, it is important to have a clear p
ture of how child care impacts their development. The findings of ma
studies have made a clear link between the quality of child care a
children's social, emotional, cognitive, and language developmer
Some longitudinal studies have also shown that the quality of an ear
childhood program affects children's later functioning in school. Suc
findings are particularly alarming because, as "A Closer Look" in Cha
ter 3 discussed, the *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study* (Helbur
et al., 1995) found that the majority of young American children are i
mediocre or inferior early childhood settings.

A number of studies have found that the quality of child care
especially when measured in terms of positive interactions between
teachers and children, impacts children's social development. Sev-
eral studies conducted during the 1980s found that children's emerg-
ing socialization is clearly affected by the quality of child care
(Clarke-Stewart, 1987; Phillips, McCartney, & Scarr, 1987). Holloway
and Reichhart-Erickson (1988) found that positive teaching style re-
sults in children who are more prosocial. In two longitudinal studies,
Andersson (1989, 1992) followed children who had been in high-quality
infant and child care to ages 8 and 13. At both later ages, children were
more socially competent.

Children's emotional and behavioral development also are af-
fected by child care quality. Children's overall behavior is more appro-
priate in classrooms where teachers use positive teaching techniques
(Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997). Another study found that pre-
schoolers' emotional expression is much more positive (more smiling
and laughing) when caregivers are more engaged and supportive in
their interactions with the children than in centers where teachers ig-
nore or minimally interact with the youngsters (Hestenes, Kontos, &
Bryan, 1993). Another study found that children who had more positive
relations with their teachers in preschool had fewer behavior problems
in elementary school; thus, the impact of early school experience
reaches well beyond the preschool years (Peisner-Feinberg, Clifford,
Culkin, Howes, & Kagan, 1999). As you will recall from Chapter 1, the
caliber of child-adult interactions is an important indicator of quality
in early childhood programs. Yet another aspect of emotional develop-
ment, anxiety, has been linked to child care quality as well. Children in
inappropriate classrooms show more stress behaviors than those in de-
velopmentally appropriate settings (Burts et al., 1992; Hyson, Hirsh-
Pasek, & Rescorla, 1990).

A number of studies have also linked quality in child care to cog-
nitive and language development. Several studies have found that
children enrolled in higher-quality centers are clearly better commu-
nicators (McCartney, 1984; Peisner-Feinberg & Burchinal, 1997). An-
other study found that children engage in cognitively more complex
play in higher-quality programs (Howes, Smith, & Galinsky, 1995).
Howes (1988a) discovered that children who had been in high-quality
child care earned higher school skill ratings from their teachers, while
Field (1991) found a significant relationship between children's en-
rollment in a high-quality infant program and their later inclusion in



a gifted program in elementary school. A follow-up study of the chil-
dren in the *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study* that we discussed
in Chapter 1 also found that in elementary school those children who
had been in higher-quality programs as preschoolers continued to have
higher scores in language and math in elementary school (Peisner-
Feinberg et al., 1999). Conversely, Howes (1990) found that children in
poor-quality child care from an early age were the least task-oriented
and most distractible in kindergarten.

A number of factors contribute to child care quality. Among these
is the strictness of a state's child care licensing standards. Vandell &
Corasaniti (1990) evaluated a sample of middle-class eight-year-olds in
a state with minimal child care standards. They found that children
who had been in full-time child care since infancy were rated lower on
a variety of measures by both teachers and parents than children who
had experienced part-time or no child care. They had poorer peer rela-
tions, work habits, emotional health, and academic performance, and
were more difficult to discipline. A more recent study followed changes
in child care standards in the state of Florida, which in 1992 passed
more stringent child care regulations related to child-adult ratio and
teacher training (Howes, Smith, & Galinsky, 1995). Careful measures
before changes were implemented and then later follow-up found that
these changes made considerable difference to the children. Their cog-
nitive development, language, behavior, and social competence all im-
proved after the state's child care standards became more stringent.

It is clear to many early childhood professionals that child care
quality has an impact, not only in relation to children's behavior and
functioning at the time they are in child care, but potentially for many
years later. This is why many professionals urge changes that would
improve the overall quality of child care. But bringing about such
changes will take considerable commitment from many sectors, in-
cluding parents, child care professionals, employers, and government.
It is important that we contribute as positively as possible to the fu-
ture success of young children. Our research right now tells us that
many children are not in high-quality child care settings, and that this
compromises not only their current development, but also their
chances for a successful future.

## SUMMARY

1. Early childhood education, although relatively new as a formal system, has antecedents that reach far back in history as ideas about children and how they should be treated were shaped.
2. The writings and work of many individuals through history have contributed to our contemporary ideas about young children and early childhood education.
3. Particularly in this century, a number of theorists have proposed models that help us understand the nature of young children and how best to meet their needs.
   A. Some theorists believe that children's development follows an inborn plan.

B. Others consider that children's development is affected primarily by external factors.

4. Many theories have been applied to early childhood education through the development of specific program models.
5. Research has proven the effectiveness of early education.

## KEY TERMS LIST

absorbent mind
abstract thinking
accommodation
adaptation
assimilation
Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt
behaviorism
behavior modification
child study movement
classification
cognitive developmental theory
conceptual
concrete operations period
daily living
developmental interactionist model
didactic
direct (programmed) instruction
disequilibrium
early childhood education models
ego strength
equilibrium
extinction
formal operations period
human development theory
Industry vs. Inferiority
Initiative vs. Guilt
key experiences
kindergarten
logical thinking
number concepts
object permanence
observable behavior
open education
operant conditioning
organization
plan-do-review cycle
planning time
positive reinforcement
preoperational period
prepared environment
programmed instruction
psychosocial theory
punishment
recall time
reinforcement
representation
schemata
self-correcting
sensitive periods
sensorial
sensorimotor period
sensory discrimination
seriation
shaping
social reinforcer
sociohistoric theory
spatial relationship
stage theorist
Trust vs. Mistrust
work time
zone of proximal development (ZPD)

## KEY QUESTIONS

1. Historic events have a great impact on our view of children and how we treat them. What social and political events have taken place during your life that have had an impact on young children and their education? Also ask this question of a relative or friend who was born in an earlier era.



2. Observe an early childhood program. What evidence do you see of the influence of one or more theorists (for instance, Piaget, Erikson) or the behaviorists? Ask one of the teachers if he or she draws on any particular human development theories and compare to your observation.
3. What was your earliest school experience? How does it compare to the type of programs you see for young children today?
4. If one is available, observe a Montessori school in your community. How does it differ from other early childhood programs you have seen? How is it similar? What elements of Maria Montessori's original program do you see?
5. Visit a Head Start program in your community. Which family services and education experiences provided by this program might contribute to the types of long-range positive effects found by the research?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Select additional books, articles, and Web sites on topics discussed in Chapter 5.

Goldhaber, D. E. (2000). *Theories of human development: Integrative perspectives.* Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.

Lascarides, V. C., & Hinitz, B. F. (2000). *History of early childhood education.* New York: Falmar Press.

Roopnarine, J. L., & Johnson, J. E. (2000). *Approaches to early childhood education* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill-Prentice Hall.

## HELPFUL WEB SITES

Theory into Practice (TIP) Database:
http://www.tip.psychology.org/theories.html

Erik Erikson:
http://www.weber.edu

Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study:
http://www.fpg.unc.edu

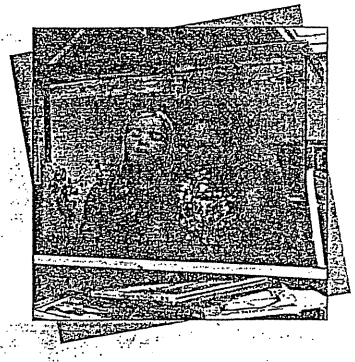
also:
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ECI/html

For additional early childhood education resources, visit our Web site at

**http://www.earlychilded.delmar.com**

CHAPTER

6



# Goals, Objectives, and Evaluation

Working with young children and planning a program for them requires a sense of direction and purpose, expressed in a set of broad goals and more specific objectives. Goals and objectives provide the "road map" for the early childhood program "journey." But not just any map will provide the specific information needed for your program. Goals and objectives should reflect the individual character and uniqueness of your class. One way of identifying that individuality is through systematic evaluation. This chapter, therefore, will cover these two discrete but closely related topics—goals and objectives, and evaluation.

## GOALS

A goal provides an overall, general overview of what you expect the children to gain from the program. Goals should be based on a sound understanding of children's development and needs, reflecting age-appropriate expectations and practices. Goals are often based on facilitating and encouraging healthy development in the social, emotional, cognitive, and motor domains and acquisition of related skills. Goals also reflect the theoretical rationale on which the program is based, such as those discussed in the previous chapter.

Keep in mind that there is no one way of wording goals and objectives. Figure 6-1 lists a few examples of goals that might be included for a group of young children, and some more specific objectives related to these goals.



## OBJECTIVES

An **objective** is a more specific interpretation of a general goal, and it provides a more practical and direct tool for day-to-day program planning. Goals can be identified at the beginning of the program year to provide direction; objectives are useful for short-term planning. Objectives will differ, depending on whether they are developed for the group as a whole or for an individual child. We will examine three types of objectives commonly used in early childhood education.

### Developmental Objectives

The purpose of activities is often to promote specific aspects of physical, cognitive, social, or emotional development, each identified as a **developmental objective**. By considering which developmental domain will be particularly enhanced by each activity, you can ensure that your program provides a good balance of activities that encompasses all areas. Experienced teachers often develop a sense of this type of balance in program planning.

**FIGURE 6-1 Sample Goals and Objectives**

**Sample Goal 1:** The children will increase their fine motor skills, gaining better control in tasks requiring use of the hands.

**Sample Objectives in Support of Goal 1:**
- The children will thread one-inch beads on shoelaces.
- The children will use scissors to cut pictures of their choice from magazines.

**Sample Goal 2:** The children will improve their language skills, acquiring larger vocabularies, longer sentence lengths, and more complex sentence structures.

**Sample Objectives in Support of Goal 2:**
- The children will use three new words in discussions and dramatic play related to bread baking after the visit to the bakery (for instance, *yeast, rising, kneading*).
- The children will retell the story with the flannel board pieces, reflecting the sequence of the story read earlier by the teacher.

**Sample Goal 3:** The children will gain greater social skills, forming friendships, engaging in more cooperative play, and developing empathy and concern for the feelings of others.

**Sample Objectives in Support of Goal 3:**
- The children will participate in the cooperative game version of "musical chairs."
- The children will discuss the emotions displayed in the "feeling pictures."

**Sample Goal 4:** The children will increase their understanding of themselves, their families, and the community within which they live.

**Sample Objectives in Support of Goal 4:**
- The children will name two functions of the heart, after examining the model of the heart and hearing Dr. Herbert discuss the heart.
- The children will explain the role of the emergency operator and will demonstrate how to dial 911 in case of an emergency.

**goal**—An overall, general overview of what children are expected to gain from the program.

**KEY POINT**

Goals should be based on an understanding of children and should reflect the program's underlying theoretical base.

**objective**—An aim; a specific interpretation of general goals, providing a practical and directive tool for day-to-day program planning.

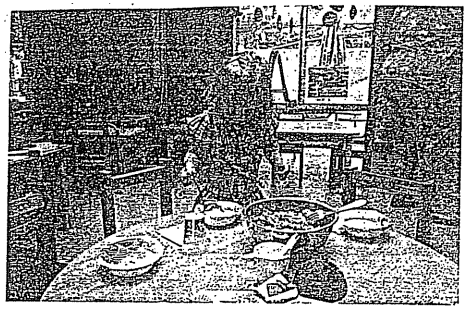
**KEY POINT**

Objectives should facilitate short-term planning and should be part of written lesson plans.

**developmental objective**—Purpose or rationale for an activity that specifies that the activity is inteded to promote an aspect of physical, social, emotional, or cognitive development.

**KEY POINT**

Developmental objectives specify which developmental domain will be enhanced by an activity.



Appropriate objectives for early childhood activities support young children's development. Three-year-olds, for instance, are interested in the everyday activities of their world and in what the important people in their lives do. What do you think this three-year-old might learn from serving herself? What objective might the teacher have had in mind in planning this?

**KEY POINT**

Content objectives relate to the subject matter to be conveyed by the activity.

## Content Objectives

Objectives are also identified for the content or subject matter of the curriculum (Essa & Rogers, 1992; Lawton, 1988; Peters, Neisworth, & Yawkey, 1985). A **content objective** relates to what an individual activity is conveying, which, in turn, is tied to a unit's topic or theme. Appropriate topics can be drawn from ideas generated by the children or from meaningful aspects of the children's environment to expand their understanding of the world.

**content objective**—Purpose or rationale for an activity that specifies that the activity is intended to promote specific subject matter.

**KEY QUESTION**

Review a lesson plan that contains specific objectives. Do you see a relationship between the objectives and the planned activities? How do the objectives give direction to the teachers who carry out the activities?

Content objectives can be met through a variety of activities, although how they are met will depend on the developmental objectives that have been identified (Essa & Rogers, 1992). For instance, a content objective that "children will identify three body parts" can be met through a variety of activities. These might include a language activity (reading a story on the topic), a motor activity (playing a game of "Hokey-Pokey"), or a perceptual activity (gluing cut-out body-part shapes). Generally, teachers plan a variety of activities, with different developmental objectives, to help reinforce a specific content objective.

## Behavioral Objectives

Although developmental and content objectives usually apply to planning for the total group, a **behavioral objective** is generally used in planning for an individual child. Behavioral objectives are very specific, based on what is observable. As an example, a behavioral objective for a four-year-old might state, "When shown a row containing four blocks—one red, one blue, one yellow, and one green—Simon will point to the red block, when asked, in three out of four trials." The objective does not tell you how to teach red, only how to measure the objective's acquisition; therefore, it will be tested after a period of time in which Simon will use red play dough, paint, blocks, and Legos, and the teacher will frequently verbalize and encourage Simon to verbalize the color.

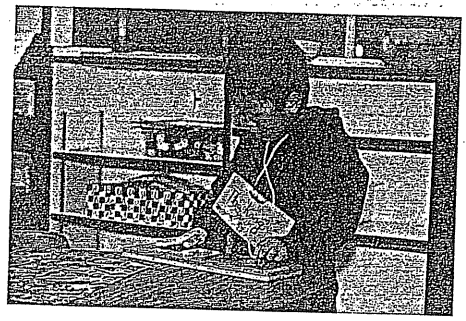
**behavioral objective**—Aim or goal, usually set for an individual child, that describes in very specific and observable terms what the child is expected to master.

**KEY POINT**

Behavioral objectives are written in very specific, observable terms and usually apply to an individual child.

Behavioral objectives, because of their precise nature, are often used in working with children who have special needs. This provides a way of pinpointing an area of deficit (Simon cannot identify colors yet); breaking down behaviors into small and manageable steps (we'll start





A behavioral objective specifies exactly what is expected of the child; for instance, that he will pick out the blue square correctly in three out of four trials.

with the color red); documenting progress (it will be clear when Simon points to the red block three times out of four); and providing accountability (Simon has learned the color red). When federal or state funding provides services for young children with disabilities or children enrolled in a Head Start program, accountability becomes particularly important, and behavioral objectives can contribute.

Notice that the behavioral objective for Simon uses a verb that describes action. When Simon *points* to the red block, there is no guesswork involved on your part; his pointing is observable. Words such as *label, name, identify, match, sort, classify,* or *order from largest to smallest* relate to a child's actions that you can observe. However, words such as *think, enjoy, consider, appreciate,* or *be aware of* describe an internalized process. If, for instance, the objective had stated that Simon will *understand* the color red, you would have no way to measure this because you cannot "see" Simon understanding the concept of redness (Deiner, 1999).

Behavioral objectives are useful, particularly in planning for an individual child in an area needing attention. Such objectives have also been criticized, however. Because they specify how a child will behave, they eliminate spontaneity, creativity, and playfulness; they preclude a child's internal motivation to master a topic or skill by spelling out and directing the content of activities; they demand a great deal of work from the teacher because each identified behavior will require developing a list of objectives; and, because they are broken into such small components, it is sometimes difficult to keep in touch with the larger goals for the child (Lawton, 1988).

## EVALUATION

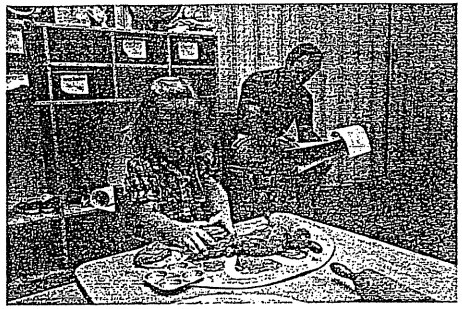
Evaluation is closely tied to goals and objectives as a beginning, an ending, and an ongoing process. To set appropriate goals and objectives, we need to know something about our group of children, and **preassessment** can help us learn about them; to find out whether the children have met the goals and objectives, we provide **summative evaluation** at the ends of units; and to know whether planned activities, methods, and topics are accomplishing what we want them to, we engage in ongoing **formative evaluation.**

**preassessment**—A form of evaluation given before teaching a specific concept or topic to assess how much children know about it and to compare later how much they have learned.

**summative evaluation**—An assessment that follows a specific lesson or unit to evaluate whether the children have met the objectives.

**formative evaluation**—Ongoing assessment to ensure that planned activities and methods accomplish what the teacher intended.

One of the most effective ways of gaining information about the children in your class is through focused observation.



Evaluation can be carried out in many ways. We will discuss both informal and formal types of assessment and the applicability of different approaches; specifically, we will examine observational techniques, teacher-developed rating scales and checklists, and standardized tests. We will also address the potential for misusing evaluation instruments, including the need for sensitivity and care in using them, and the selection of appropriate measures. One way to minimize such potential misuses is to rely on more than one method of assessment through use of more inclusive, comprehensive assessment systems, which we will consider as well.

**KEY POINT**

Observation is an unobtrusive way of gaining information about children.

## Observation

One of the most effective informal methods of evaluation is through focused observation. Early childhood teachers use observation as a primary method of gaining insight into the various facets of children's development, at different times and in different contexts (Wortham, 2001). Observation can provide us with detailed information about behavior, can help us understand it, and can provide the basis for predicting behavior. One of the most appealing features of observation is that it is unobtrusive and natural. It does not interfere with the child's ongoing activity and behavior, in contrast with more formal tests that require that the child perform specified tasks in an isolated setting.

**KEY QUESTION #2**

With a fellow student, spend about 15 minutes observing the same child. Each of you write an anecdotal observation involving this child for the exact same period of time. Now compare your two observations. Do they describe the same behaviors, activities, and interactions? Do they convey the same "picture" of this child? If the two observations differ in a significant way, why is this? Are there some subjective elements in either observation that might contribute to this difference?

**Types of Observation.** Observation can take a variety of forms. One of the most often used is the **anecdotal record**, a brief description or "word picture" of an event or behavior. (Puckett & Black, 2000). A collection of well-written and accurate anecdotes can provide a very descriptive characterization of a child. Anecdotal records come only from direct observation, are written down promptly and accurately, describe the context of the behavior, are factual rather than interpretive, and can focus either on a typical or unusual aspect of the child's behavior (Bentzen, 2001; Wortham, 2001).

**anecdotal record**—A method of observation involving a written "word picture" of an event or behavior.

**KEY POINT**

An anecdotal record provides a "word picture" of an event or behavior.

A **running record** is a more detailed account of a child's behavior over a period of time (Wortham, 2001). Whereas the anecdote focuses on a single event, the running record keeps track of everything

**running record**—A type of observation that provides an account of all of the child's behavior over a period of time.



that happens in a specified time period, whether it is a half hour or several months.

Such a record can be very useful when you are trying to pinpoint the source of a problem. It was most helpful in getting a handle on the disruptions in one class, where three-year-old Erin seemed to always be at the center of aggressive outbursts. A careful running record, kept over a period of three days, helped the teachers see that Erin was responding to rather subtle taunts from two other children.

One helpful device in keeping a running record is the **ABC analysis**, in which three columns identify the *a*ntecedent, *b*ehavior, and *c*onsequence of incidents (Bijou, Peterson, & Ault, 1968). This helps you focus not only on the child's behavior, but also on what precipitates and what follows it as well.

**KEY POINT**

A running record provides a detailed account of everything that occurred during an extended period of time.

**ABC analysis**—An observational technique in which the observer records observations in three columns, identifying *a*ntecedent, *b*ehavior, and *c*onsequence.

**Time sampling** provides a way of measuring the frequency of a behavior over a period of time (Wortham, 2001). Time sampling is a quantitative method of observation, in that you count how often the behavior occurs at uniform time intervals. You may, for instance, want to know just how often the adults in the classroom attend to Tracy, because you suspect he is often overlooked and neglected. Since you don't have time to observe Tracy all day long, you might determine that every half hour you will spend five minutes watching Tracy, noting every time a teacher attends to or interacts with him. Over a period of a week, you should have a representative sampling of the attention Tracy receives from adults. You might also decide, for purposes of comparison, to observe Sharon at the same time because Sharon appears to get frequent adult attention.

**time sampling**—A quantitative measure or count of how often a specific behavior occurs within a given amount of time.

**KEY POINT**

In the time-sampling method, a given behavior is recorded only at specified intervals of time, such as every half hour.

When you want to observe a less frequent behavior, **event sampling** can be used (Wortham, 2001). In this case, you wait until a given behavior occurs and then write a descriptive record of the event. Event sampling can be useful if you have noted that Kareem has periodic crying spells, and you have trouble pinpointing the cause. Thus, each time Kareem engages in this behavior, one of the teachers stands back and records carefully what is happening. The ABC method can be very useful in recording such an event because you are trying to get a sense of its causes and consequences (Wortham, 2001).

**event sampling**—A method of observation in which the observer records a specific behavior only when it occurs.

**KEY POINT**

Event sampling is used to observe and record only when a specified behavior occurs.

**Characteristics of Good Observations.** One of the requirements of good observation is that it be objective. Your role as observer is to be as impartial as possible, to stand back and record what you see rather than what you think the child is feeling or experiencing. Compare the two records in Figure 6-2. What distinguishes the two? The first observation tells you how the observer is interpreting the incident; the second describes what is happening. Can the first observer really know that Letitia does not like Erica? That the teacher is angry? That Letitia made a conscious decision to pick on Erica?

Another characteristic of good observation is that it is adequately descriptive. Language is a powerful tool that allows us to conjure up a picture of an event. Cohen and Stern (1978) provide some helpful suggestions to beginning observers in the use of descriptive vocabulary. The verb *run*, for instance, has many synonyms that can invoke a clearer image of what is being described. Examples include stampede, whirl, dart, gallop, speed, shoot across, bolt, fly, hippety-hop, or dash.

**KEY POINT**

Good observations need to be objective but at the same time be adequately descriptive. A collection of observations can then be combined and interpreted to better understand the child.

# EXPERIENCES

## CHAPTER 6

### SHERRY, Child Care Director

#### Teacher Portfolios

We spend a lot of time discussing the evaluation of children, how best to carry these out, what methods to use, how to use the results, and what would be the most meaningful approach. We don't spend as much time thinking about how to evaluate teachers, however.

Over the past several years, we have been developing a portfolio approach in keeping records on our children. Some children begin at our center as infants and stay until they enter first grade. There is much meaningful information that we need to note down and use so that we can provide the best possible experience for these little ones. Because each is a unique individual, their portfolios reflect that uniqueness and individuality. Recently, we have taken a similar approach to the assessment of teachers.

Each of our teachers is a unique individual, and each is at a different stage in both professional and personal development. Each has different needs, both personally and professionally. Thus, the teacher portfolios reflect that individuality. They are structured around individual goals that help both the teacher as a professional and the program.

Formally, as the director, I meet with each teacher twice a year. At these meetings we discuss performance evaluations and, as part of that, set goals for the following year. Informally we meet individually every six to eight weeks to discuss how they are progressing toward meeting their goals. My question to them is always, "What do you need from me to help you reach your goals?" What we discuss and decide at these meetings become part of each teacher's portfolio.

Goals of my staff have varied greatly. One year, one teacher's goal was to learn more about infants' emotional development. Another has been learning about inclusion of infants and toddlers with disabilities in the program. Yet another has made it his goal to learn more about effective strategies for collecting materials for the children's portfolios. We use a variety of methods, from attending workshops, to reading books and articles, to taking classes to help the staff reach their goals.

What else goes into the portfolios besides goals and plans for reaching them? That varies from teacher to teacher. My observations of the teacher's performance and peer observations are also included. Documentation of what is working well—for example, successful curriculum plans, assessments, and class projects—can become a part of the portfolio. We also include some appropriate assessment forms, such as ones that measure flexibility and willingness to change, learning style, and personality. Some of our assessments, for instance, come from Jorde-Bloom, Sheerer, and Britz's *Blueprint for Action: Achieving Center-Based Change Through Staff Development* (1991, Gryphon House).

Our aim is to provide the best possible program for the children in our center. To achieve this, we have to have the best possible teachers. Nurturing and helping the teachers reach their potential is a collaborative effort, with individualized portfolios as one vehicle.





**FIGURE 6-2 Sample Observations**

**Observation #1**

Letitia comes into the classroom and immediately decides to pick on Erica, whom she doesn't like. She approaches Erica and, in her usual aggressive way, grabs the doll that Erica is playing with. Letitia doesn't really want the doll, she just wants what Erica has. When the teacher sees what has happened, she gets upset with Letitia and makes her give the doll back to Erica. Because of this, Letitia gets really angry and has one of her nasty tantrums, which makes everyone in the class mad.

**Observation #2**

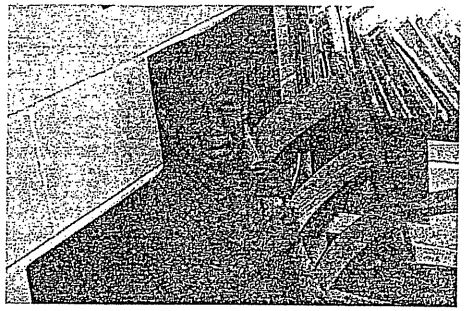
Letitia marches into her classroom. She looks around for a few seconds, then ambles to the dramatic play area, where Erica is putting a doll into the cradle. Letitia stops two feet in front of the cradle, standing with her legs apart and hands on hips. She watches Erica put a blanket on the doll, then steps right up to it, grabs the doll by an arm, and pulls it roughly out of the cradle. She runs with the doll into the block area and turns around to look back at Erica. As Letitia is running off, Erica yells, "No! I was playing with the doll." Erica looks at Mrs. Wendell, whose eyes move toward the dramatic play area. Erica's shoulders drop and she says in a softer whimper, "Letitia took the doll I was playing with," then starts to cry. As Mrs. Wendell walks toward Letitia, Letitia drops the doll and darts to the art area. Mrs. Wendell catches up with Letitia, holds her by the arm, and urges her back to the block area. She picks up the doll. "Letitia, we need to give this doll back to Erica. She was playing with it." Letitia, her lips pressed together over clenched jaws, pulls away from Mrs. Wendell and throws herself on the floor, kicking her feet and screaming.

Adding descriptive adverbs, adjectives, and phrases will also enliven an anecdote. Although synonyms can add authenticity and life to your observational anecdote, be sure to use the dictionary frequently to ensure that the word you choose actually means what you intend. Can you find some descriptive words in the second example in Figure 6-2 that make the incident come alive?

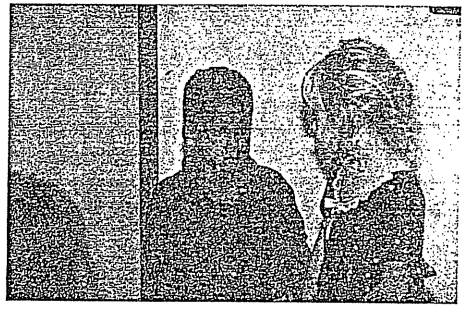
Good observations also describe nonverbal cues, some of the nuances of body language as well as voice inflection that can give deeper meaning to an anecdote. Children, like adults, share subtle movements of their face and body and shadings of voice that describe common feelings and reactions. Izard (1982), for instance, uses common facial nuances in infants and children to measure emotion. Body language is not easy to read, requiring experience and practice to interpret accurately. As you begin developing observational skills, you might double-check with a more experienced teacher to verify your reading of such nonverbal cues. Again, looking at Figure 6-2, do you see some descriptions of such nonverbal signs?

**Interpreting Observations.** As we have indicated, observational information must be gathered objectively, without inserting personal bias. But there comes the point, once you have gathered a collection of anecdotes, when you can look for patterns (Wortham, 2001). Interpretations, however, should always be kept clearly separate from observations. In reviewing observations that span a period of time, you should be able to find clues to children's unique ways of behaving and responding. When a set of observations shows repeatedly that a child reacts aggressively to conflict, or becomes pleasurably involved in messy media, or talks to adults far more than to other children, you can see a characteristic pattern for that child.

When a behavior such as a tantrum or crying spell occurs infrequently, event sampling is a good observational method to utilize. Thus, the teacher observes and carefully notes the behavior only when the tantrum or crying event happens.



When recording observations, it is important to note nonverbal cues such as voice inflection or facial expression. These can be revealing. What does this child's body language and expression tell you?

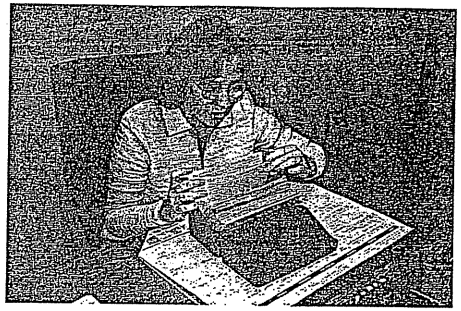


As you interpret observations, keep a clear focus on norms of development for young children. An understanding of the age range within which specific traits and behaviors generally occur (see Chapter 2) will help you interpret observations. Your familiarity with child development, combined with sensitive observation, provide a powerful tool to understanding the children in your care to help you maximize their development.

But interpretation should be undertaken cautiously. Human behavior is complex, not easily pigeonholed, and there is the danger of overzealous interpretation when a pattern is more in the mind of the observer than representative of the child.

**Some Observational Techniques.** Finding time to observe can be challenging for the busy teacher. Cartwright and Cartwright (1974) recommend developing a pattern and time frame for carrying out observations. Hymes (1981) further suggests setting a goal, a fixed number of anecdotes to record each day. It is helpful to carry a pencil and pad in your pocket while working with children to facilitate jotting down some quick notes and then to set aside a few minutes at the end of the day to write up the records.





A file box with dividers or a notebook helps organize observations and other information about a child.

Dated anecdotes can be put on file cards to be kept in a file box with a divider for each child in the class. Another handy storage device is to keep a running record in a loose-leaf notebook with separate pages for each child (Bundy, 1989). A file box or notebook can be kept in a spot that is accessible but ensures confidentiality. Keeping such records can also pinpoint children who are being overlooked when, over a period of time, you find very few or no records on some youngsters (Hymes, 1981).

Early childhood student teachers and, in some programs, teachers may be asked specifically to record observations rather than participate in the class for a period of time. If you are assigned a role as an outside observer rather than as a member of the classroom, the observation will require a somewhat different approach. First, you will have more time to engage in a thorough observation, perhaps to keep a running record. If you are observing in the classroom (rather than from behind a one-way mirror), you must be as unobtrusive as possible so that children's behavior is minimally affected by your presence. Seat yourself where you are less likely to be noticed, avoid eye contact with children, and dress simply (Wortham, 2001). If children come to you to ask what you are doing, as invariably they will, give a simple answer that does not invite further conversation, for instance, "I am writing."

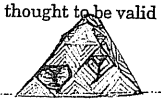
## Teacher-Designed Instruments

Other frequently used, informal methods of evaluation include **checklists** and **rating scales** designed by the teacher. Both types of instruments are based on specific learning objectives or developmental indicators (Wortham, 2001). Checklists and rating scales are prepared in conjunction with observing the children, but results are recorded with a simple check mark or numerical evaluation rather than a lengthy verbal description.

**checklist**—A method of evaluating children that consists of a list of behaviors, skills, concepts, or attributes that the observer checks off as a child is observed to have mastered the item.

**rating scale**—An assessment of specific skills or concepts that are rated on some qualitative dimension of excellence or accomplishment.

The primary difference between these two is that checklists simply note the presence or absence of a skill or concept, whereas rating scales evaluate the level of attainment (Wortham, 2001). The advantage of such instruments is that they are quick and easy to use, flexible, and very specific to the needs of your situation. However, teacher-designed instruments can be time-consuming to prepare and have to be devised with care and thought to be valid and appropriate.



**KEY POINT**

Checklists and rating scales are ways of checking whether a child or group of children engage in specific behaviors or skills.

**Checklists.** A checklist lists behaviors, skills, concepts, or attributes and is followed by a space for noting their presence or absence. They can be devised for individual children (Figure 6-3) or for the entire class (Figure 6-4). Some checklists include space for recording multiple observations that can be repeated over a period such as a year (Figure 6-3); others are taken at one point in time (Figure 6-4). If you utilize a list that includes all the children in the class to get a sense of which children have and which have not mastered specific tasks, do not post such a record in the classroom where parents will see it and make comparisons.

**FIGURE 6-3 Checklist of Selected Gross Motor Tasks (to be completed four times during the year)**

Child: _____

**Instructions:** Mark with an "X" when task has been mastered.

| Behavior | Date of Observation 1) _____ | 2) _____ | 3) _____ | 4) _____ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hops on one foot | | | | |
| Balances on one foot for 5 seconds | | | | |
| Walks 2-inch balance beam | | | | |
| Jumps across 12 inches and lands with both feet | | | | |
| Throws 10-inch ball 6 feet | | | | |
| Catches 10-inch ball with both arms | | | | |
| Pumps on swing | | | | |
| Pedals tricycle | | | | |

**KEY QUESTION**

Design a checklist of 10 items to assess social development of a group of preschoolers. How did you decide on which items to include? What resources did you use to put this checklist together? If possible, observe a group of preschoolers and apply this checklist to several of the children.

**FIGURE 6-4 Checklist of Selected Gross Motor Tasks for the Entire Class**

Date: _____

**Instructions:** Mark with an "X" when task has been mastered.

| Name | Hops | Balance 5 sec | 2-inch Beam | 12-inch Broad Jump | Throw Ball 6 feet | Catch Ball | Pedal Trike | Pump on Swing |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | |
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**Rating Scales.** Rating scales provide more qualitative information than checklists because they indicate to what extent the child engages in or has mastered a behavior. As a student, you are judged on a rating scale that usually takes the form of letter grades ranging from A (excellent) to F (unsatisfactory), and your cumulative grade point average (GPA) gives a numerical value to all of the ratings (grades) you have received.

The dimensions of ratings applied to children will depend on what you want to measure. You may, for instance, want to determine the frequency of each child's participation in various types of activities (Figure 6-5). In that case you might graph the children on a continuum that goes from "always" to "never" (Wortham, 2001):

Always — Frequently — Occasionally — Seldom — Never

or (Cartwright & Cartwright, 1974):

Always — Usually — Never

Rating scales can also be used to show where a child is in the process of mastering certain tasks. You could, for instance, take the checklist of gross motor skills used in Figure 6-2 and turn it into a rating scale by rating each behavior as follows:

1. Performs task all the time
2. Performs task sometimes
3. Performs task rarely
4. Never performs task

**FIGURE 6-5 Rating Scale of Frequency of Participation of the Children in Various Classroom Activity Areas**

**Dramatic Play**

**Instructions:** Rate each child's frequency of participation in the dramatic play area.

| Name | Frequency of Interaction: Always | Frequently | Occasionally | Seldom | Never |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
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It may be appropriate to add a "not observed" category to differentiate between a child who cannot perform a task and one who chooses not to engage in the specific behavior while the teacher is observing.

## Standardized Tests

KEY POINT

Standardized or formal tests are more stringently developed and used, and they must follow specific testing criteria.

**validity**—A characteristic of a test that indicates that the test actually measures what it purports to measure.

**reliability**—A measure of a test indicating that the test is stable and consistent, to ensure that changes in score are due to the child, not the test.

KEY POINT

Screening tests are a quick way of identifying children who might be at risk, but such tests must be followed up with more thorough assessments.

**screening test**—A quick method of identifying children who might exhibit developmental delays; only an indicator that must be followed up by more thorough and comprehensive testing.

**diagnostic testing**—Another term for screening, which might indicate that more thorough testing should be carried out.

**Denver II**—A quick test for possible developmental delays in children from infancy to age six.

**norm-referenced**—A test in which scores are determined by using a large group of same- age children as the basis for comparison, rather than using a predetermined criterion or standard of performance.

**Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL III)**—A developmental screening test for children ages two to six, assessing motor, concept, and language development.

Whereas observations and teacher-devised instruments are informal methods of gathering information about children, standardized tests are considered formal assessments. Such instruments are developed by professionals and are distributed commercially. Standardized tests are developed, tested, and refined so they have validity and reliability. **Validity** means that tests measure what they purport to measure. **Reliability** means they are stable and consistent; you know that when a child's score changes, it is because the child has changed, not the test (NAEYC, 1988). When standardized tests are administered, specific standards for testing conditions are delineated to provide uniformity. Over the past few years, the use of standardized tests with young children has increased; thus, we will examine the general categories of such tests and a sampling of specific instruments.

**Screening Tests.** Screening tests provide a quick method of identifying children who may be at risk for a specified condition; for instance, developmental delay. Screening is not an end in itself but is meant to be followed by more thorough **diagnostic testing** if the screening instrument shows a possible problem. Most screening tests take about 15 to 30 minutes to administer. They are used by a wide variety of professionals in addition to early childhood educators, including medical and social work personnel. A number of screening instruments have been developed in recent years as a result of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), which seeks to identify and provide early intervention to young children with disabilities or those at risk for later learning problems (Wortham, 2001).

One widely used screening instrument is the **Denver II** (Frankenburg & Dodd, 1990), for use with infants and children up to age six. Use of the Denver II can be learned relatively quickly. This test, often used by medical as well as early childhood professionals, examines the child's functioning in self-help, social, language, fine motor, and gross motor areas.

Items on the Denver II are scored in relation to a norm. Such **norm-referenced** tests provide a large comparison group for each age against which the score can be compared (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1982). For each tested item, the Denver II indicates whether the score of a child is at the 25th, 50th, or 90th percentile or well below or above the functioning of other children who are the same age. If the child fails to accomplish tasks for his or her age group in two or more of the four areas, then more in-depth testing is recommended.

Another widely used screening test is the **Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL III)** (Mardell-Czudnowski & Goldenberg, 1998), which screens in the motor, concepts, and language areas. This test, normed for children between the ages of two and six, has separate norms for white and nonwhite children. Like the DDST, this test is easily used with some practice and does not take long to administer.



"Can you catch the ball?" Screening tests are based on several simple tasks that the child is asked to carry out.

KEY POINT

Developmental tests are thorough assessments of children's development in all or several domains.

**developmental test**—Measures the child's functioning in most or all areas of development, although some such tests are specific to one or two areas.

**criterion-referenced**—A characteristic of tests in which children are measured against a predetermined level of mastery rather than against an average score of children of the same age.

**Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development—Revised**—A developmental assessment tool for children from birth to age seven.

KEY POINT

Intelligence tests measure intellectual functioning and are usually highly structured as to how they can be administered and interpreted.

KEY QUESTION #4

Have you been tested with a standardized instrument? Recall how you felt about the testing situation and the questions asked. What emotional impact did the test have on you? How might young children feel about being tested? What can a tester do to help children perform to their best ability?

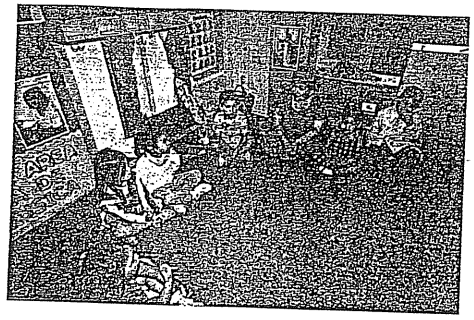
**Developmental Tests.** Frequently, a screening test will indicate the necessity for more complete assessment and is then followed by a more thorough and time-intensive **developmental test.** Such tests measure the child's functioning in most or all areas of development, although some instruments are specific to one or two areas. Various in-depth commercial assessments are available, complete with kits containing the necessary testing materials.

Developmental assessments are usually **criterion-referenced** rather than norm-referenced. Thus, children are measured against a predetermined level of mastery rather than against the scores of a group of children of the same age. The criteria in these tests are based on the test developers' educated understanding of what children, at various ages, can be expected to achieve.

One widely used developmental test is the **Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development—Revised** (Brigance, 1991). With some training, early childhood teachers can use this test. It contains subtests for fine motor, gross motor, language, cognitive, and self-help areas; it does not measure social development. Test materials are designed so that a child's progress can be followed in one booklet over the testing years, from birth to age seven. Testing of many of the items can be incorporated into the curriculum; therefore, a child does not need to be pulled from the class for the Brigance to be administered.

**Intelligence Tests.** One of the oldest types of standardized assessments is the intelligence test. Such tests have stirred considerable controversy, much of it loaded with emotion because it raises the question of whether intelligence is a fixed biological trait or whether it is malleable and can be raised through an enriched environment (Jensen, 1985; Woodrich, 1984). Another volatile controversy about such tests has been the concern over culture bias (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1982)—that tests are slanted to white, middle-class norms and experiences.

One of the major applications of intelligence tests with young children has been to identify those who fall well below or above the normal range. Classifications of mental retardation or giftedness, for instance, are generally set by IQ score ranges. One of the concerns with using IQ scores for young children is that these scores are not



Children's ability to answer items on readiness tests depends to a large extent on their prior experiences. What kinds of common early childhood experiences will help these five-year-olds answer the types of questions asked on the Metropolitan Readiness Test?

particularly predictive of later IQ. Most children's scores change between early childhood and adolescence, and some change considerably (Woodrich, 1984).

Such tests are highly structured and must be administered by a psychologist specifically trained in their use. The **Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale** (Thorndike, Hagen, & Sattler, 1986) is a single test with varying tasks for different ages ranging from two through adulthood. The test yields an IQ score; 100 is the average. The Stanford-Binet yields a single, global IQ score, without breaking down results as do some other tests.

**Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale**—A widely used test that yields an intelligence quotient (IQ).

One such test is the **McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities**, designed for children ages 2½ to 8 (McCarthy, 1983). The McCarthy yields a General Cognitive Index, which is similar to the global IQ score of the Stanford-Binet, but it also provides subscores on the Verbal Index, Perceptual/Performance Index (nonverbal problem solving), and Quantitative Index. In addition, the McCarthy reports a Memory Index and Motor Index, which are based on separate assessments. The Stanford-Binet is more accurate for children with significant retardation, whereas the McCarthy is considered more appropriate for children who are mildly retarded or may have learning disabilities or processing difficulties (Wortham, 2001).

**McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities**—An intelligence test, particularly used with children who are mildly retarded or who have learning disabilities.

**KEY POINT**

In recent years, readiness tests have been increasingly used to determine whether children are prepared to enter a specific program such as kindergarten or first grade.

**Readiness Tests.** The specific purpose of readiness tests—to determine whether a child is prepared to enter a program such as kindergarten or first grade—differentiates them from other types of assessments. Such tests should not be used to predict school success because they merely measure a child's level of achievement of specified academic tasks at the time of testing (Meisels, 1986). One study, in fact, found that the predictive validity of one widely used readiness test when compared to first-grade teacher judgment and report cards was very modest, raising questions about the usefulness of the test and about the potential harm to the many children misidentified as not ready for school (Graue & Shepard, 1989).

One such instrument used extensively by school districts across the country is the **Metropolitan Readiness Test** (Nurss & McGauvran, 1986). It has been criticized, however, because correct answers

**Metropolitan Readiness Test**—A test to determine whether a child is prepared to enter a program such as kindergarten.



rely heavily on exposure to specific concepts rather than on innate ability. Unfortunately, the test does not distinguish between a child who has had limited exposure and the child who has actual learning difficulties. The use of these tests has driven many prekindergarten programs to incorporate activities designed to prepare children for readiness testing, often at the expense of other appropriate activities, particularly exploratory, hands-on experiences (Schickedanz, Hansen, & Forsyth, 1990).

## Concerns about Use of Evaluation Instruments

**KEY POINT**

Early childhood professionals have raised some major concerns about the use and misuse of standardized tests, particularly when these lead to developmentally inappropriate practices.

All informal and formal evaluation methods can give us useful insights into the children in our care. But although using a variety of methods to better understand children has always been an important part of early childhood education, there is a growing concern about potential misuses, particularly of standardized evaluations. The 1980s brought an increased emphasis on testing, particularly as a way of proving that educational goals are being met (Wortham, 2001).

One major concern involves the misuse of readiness tests. With increasing frequency, such tests are being used to decide children's placement; for instance, if they will be allowed to move on to first grade, placed in a transitional class, or retained in kindergarten, or if they will be admitted to a particular preschool program (Wortham, 2001). Thus, children are often labeled as failures when, in fact, they are expected to conform to inappropriate expectations (NAEYC, 1988). How devastating such practices are on children's self-concepts! Read the eloquent discussion of these concerns in NAEYC's 1988 "Position Statement on Standardized Testing of Young Children 3 Through 8 Years of Age."

A corollary to this trend is the fact that many early childhood programs have adopted curricula whose main aim is to prepare children for readiness tests (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989). Thus, preschool and kindergarten programs promote developmentally inappropriate methods to meet such goals, intensifying the problem of "failures" and children who are "unready" (NAEYC, 1988).

It has long been acknowledged that standardized tests have a variety of limitations. For instance, a test cannot ask every possible question to evaluate what a child knows on a topic; but the fewer the questions, the more the chance that the test just happened to include the ones the child does *not* know. However, the more items there are on the test, the greater the chance that the child will become restless and disinterested and not give a representative picture of her or his ability.

Another criticism of standardized tests has been that they can be culture biased, yet test designers have found it impossible to devise tests that are completely culture free (Wortham, 2001). In addition, it is very difficult to establish reliable and valid instruments for young children, given the rapid changes that occur in development as well as the normal individual variations among children (NAEYC, 1988). This also calls into question the use of norm groups against which individuals are compared.

In addition to the potential problems with a test itself, there are difficulties in evaluating young children that can affect the accuracy of test results. A number of factors can affect how accurately the test reflects the

child's ability. These might include the child's attention and interest, the familiarity (or unfamiliarity) with the surroundings, the trust the child has in the adult tester (or whether the child has even seen this person before), the time of day, the fact that the child slept poorly the night before, or the fact that the mother forgot to kiss the child good-bye. In too many instances, tests are given to young children in large groups, a practice that further decreases reliability (NAEYC, 1988).

**KEY QUESTION**

Given the information from this chapter about the values and potential misuses of evaluation procedures, develop a set of criteria that might guide you, as an early childhood professional, in using assessments in the most effective way. What do you consider to be the three most important benefits of such testing? What should you avoid?

If so many problems are inherent in standardized tests, what is the answer to the dilemma of their increasing use with young children? NAEYC (1988) recommends that the relevance of tests be carefully evaluated by administrators: Will results from the test contribute to improving the program for the children? Will the children benefit from the test? If the benefits are meager in relation to the cost (expense and time), perhaps the test should not be used. Furthermore, it is recommended that

- Tests be carefully reviewed for reliability and validity
- They match the program's philosophy and goals
- Only knowledgeable and qualified persons administer and interpret results
- Testers be sensitive to individual and cultural diversity
- Tests be used for only the purpose for which they were intended
- No major decision related to enrollment, retention, or placement in a remedial program be made based on only one test, but that multiple sources of information be used for this purpose.

**KEY POINT**

Comprehensive systems of assessment, also called authentic assessment, focus on the whole child and all aspects of development; such assessments use many different methods and are closely linked to curriculum planning.

## Assessment Systems

Concerns about inappropriate evaluation, such as the ones expressed in NAEYC's Position Statement on Standardized Testing, have led professionals and researchers to suggest some alternative, more comprehensive approaches. Such approaches make a much clearer link between what is being assessed and the early childhood curriculum. The term **authentic assessment** has been coined to reflect this shift. Authentic assessment takes into account the whole child and focuses on all aspects of development. It is "the process of observing, recording, and otherwise documenting the work that children do and how they do it as a basis for educational decisions that affect individual learners" (Puckett & Black, 2000, p. 7). Such assessment is ongoing, occurring in many contexts and through many different methods. Portfolios (see "A Closer Look") can be one form of authentic assessment.

**authentic assessment**—A comprehensive approach to assessment, using multiple methods, which takes into account the whole child and focuses on all aspects of development.

One example of a more comprehensive system of assessment is proposed by Meisels (1993). The **work sampling system** combines several types of data over an extended period of time to assess children ages 3 to 8. Teachers' ongoing observations are recorded on developmental checklists, which are categorized into seven domains and include many common, developmentally appropriate activities and expectations. In addition, portfolios of select pieces of the children's work are also compiled, and teachers prepare narrative summary reports at three points during the year. Another alternative testing process is the **High/Scope Child Observational Record (COR)**, for children ages 2½ to 6 (Schweinhart, 1993). Teachers write brief notes about children's behavior in six categories; initiative, creative representations, social relations, music and movement, language and literacy, and logic and mathematics. These anecdotes are then used to rate children on 30 items, each of which has five levels. Alternatives to traditional, often developmentally inappropriate testing methods, such as the work sampling system and COR, offer promise for those who work with young children.

**work sampling system**—Samuel Meisel's alternative method of gathering reliable information about young children, using a combination of observations, checklists, portfolios, and summary reports.



One final note: It is important to keep in mind that any information gathered about children and their families—whether from test results, observations, or something a parent shared—needs to be treated with **confidentiality** and respect.

**High/Scope Child Observational Record (COR)**—An alternative method of gathering reliable information about young children; COR utilizes teachers' notes of observations by classifying them into specific categories.

**confidentiality**—Requirement that results of evaluations and assessments be shared with only the parents and appropriate school personnel.

## Selecting and Using Evaluation Methods

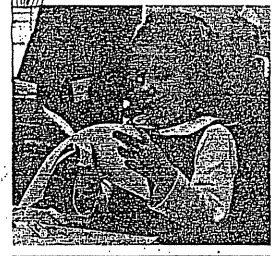
We have looked at a number of formal and informal methods of evaluation, information that can be mind-boggling considering that we have reviewed only a very small number of the many available commercial instruments. Selecting an appropriate method will depend on how the results are to be used. We will briefly examine some suggested methods in terms of three purposes of evaluation: gaining information (1) about children, (2) for program planning purposes, and (3) for parent feedback. Ideally, these three should work closely together and overlap.

**KEY POINT**

Evaluation methods can provide valuable information about children, give direction for program planning, and contribute feedback to share with parents.

**Information about Children.** Effective teaching depends on knowing as much as possible about the children in the class; a variety of data gathering methods can be used as follows:

- Ongoing observation can provide valuable insight into all children, their functioning as part of the class, their growth in all developmental areas, what they particularly enjoy, where they run into difficulties, how they get along with peers and teachers, how they communicate, and so forth.
- A screening test, used with all of the children early in the school year, can help identify those who need further diagnostic testing and those who might benefit from specific intervention programs.
- A developmental assessment can be given to children whose performance on the screening test indicated a need for further evaluation. Such an assessment should be combined with observation, parent interviews, possible professional testing (for instance, by a speech pathologist, audiologist, physical therapist, or doctor), and other sources of information to provide as full a picture of the child as possible. Based on a thorough evaluation, it is possible to make better educational and therapeutic decisions about the child's future. Periodic retesting on the developmental assessment can show whether the child is making progress and can pinpoint areas needing further attention.
- A collection of the child's work in the form of a portfolio can also contribute to a better understanding of the child's interests and abilities.



One way to assess the ability of all children in a class on a task such as scissor use is through systematic observation or use of a checklist.

# A CLOSER LOOK

## Portfolio Assessment

Criticism of the more formal methods of evaluating young children has led to the development of alternative methods of assessing their progress. One of these alternatives is portfolio assessment, a collection of meaningful examples of student work that "exemplifies interests, attitudes, ranges of skills, and development over a period of time" (Gelfer & Perkins, 1996, p. 5). What, however, is a portfolio? What does it look like? How is it developed and used?

Gelfer and Perkins (1996) discuss some of the specifics that go into the portfolio assessment process. A portfolio, they say, typically is housed in an expandable file folder. In the folder is a careful selection of the child's work that exemplifies performance and improvement. This could include artwork, writing samples, audio or videotapes, photographs of experiments or projects, teacher or parent observations, anecdotal observations, checklists, self-evaluations, interest inventories, progress notes, log books, reports of parent-teacher communications, and other pertinent examples. Items for the portfolio are carefully selected by the child, teacher, and parents to illustrate the child's changing abilities and development. It is helpful if the teacher meets with each child for a few minutes every few weeks to review the portfolio and select new additions. Gullo (1996) also specifies different types of portfolios: ones that contain works in progress, ones that focus on the current year, and ones that are permanent.

Programs that include infants can learn much from portfolios that are begun when the child is very young. Infant portfolios can include anecdotal observations, assessment of the child's thinking skills (for instance, how he uses his eyes, hands, mouth, and objects); audio tapes of language samples; copies of the daily schedule and events of each day, noting the child's patterns of sleeping, eating, and playing; and notes about progress in reaching various skills as well as dates of achievement. Similar materials can be collected in toddler portfolios, including records of social play and samples of art work (Puckett & Black, 2000).

Portfolios can be organized in any way that is meaningful to the child and teacher. It can be arranged by subject area, developmental area, skills, themes, or chronologically. One suggested organizational scheme might be subsections for problem-solving, literacy and language, creativity, personal and social growth, and teacher and family support and involvement.

How do evaluations such as portfolios measure up with more traditional, formal assessments? Meisels and his colleagues have examined the reliability and validity of alternative assessment methods that sample children's work rather than rely on a standardized test. They found that work sampling methods provide a reliable and valid measure of children's achievement when comparing the two approaches (Meisels, Liaw, Dorfman, & Nelson, 1995).

A concern about portfolio assessments has, however, been voiced by those who find implementation of portfolios to be very time consuming (Roe & Vukelich, 1994). They conclude that for portfolios to live up to their promise, support from the wider environment—for instance, school districts—must be given; otherwise, teachers can be caught in a bind of having to use two systems of record keeping—portfolios and more traditional methods.





**Information for Program Planning.** One of the main purposes of assessment is to help direct program development. Once you have an idea of strengths and areas that need attention, both for individual children and for the group as a whole, you can plan a prescriptive curriculum (Hendricks, 1998). Some useful data-gathering methods include the following:

- Information from observations can provide excellent programming direction. You may notice, for example, that the parallel play that predominated earlier in the year is beginning to give way to more and more interactive play (remember our discussion of play in Chapter 2). You might plan activities that require a greater measure of cooperation and set up the class environment to facilitate more social interaction.
- Checklists and rating scales allow you to evaluate the functioning of the group of children on tasks that you identify as important. You may, for instance, discover that the majority of your three-year-olds are not able to hold scissors effectively, let alone cut with them. This information tells you that more activities using scissors should be planned to help children acquire this fine-motor skill. Similarly, these evaluation devices (as well as observations) will help you determine whether children have successfully met the objectives that you set for specific curriculum units.
- Some programs administer either a formal or informal developmental assessment at specific points of the year to evaluate whether children are meeting the overall goals of the program.
- Portfolios of each of the children can provide insight into the children's interests and progress toward meeting program and individual goals.

**Information for Parent Feedback.** All forms of evaluation provide information to share with parents. It is important to examine the child's strengths, not just areas that may be problematic, and it is vital that all information be as accurate, realistic, and unbiased as possible. Data carefully collected over a period of time and thoughtfully evaluated provide the basis for good parent-feedback conferences.

There are a number of points to keep in mind when sharing evaluation results with parents. In all instances, tests or other evaluation information should never be given in isolation, out of the context of the child's overall nature. Thus, to tell parents that their child is performing below (or, for that matter, above) the norm in fine-motor skills is only part of the picture. It is equally important to tell them that their child has excellent social skills, shows leadership qualities, has a delightful sense of humor, seems to particularly enjoy sensory activities, and so forth. Such information does not rely solely on the results of a developmental assessment, which yielded the fine motor score, but is reinforced by observations, anecdotes, and the teachers' reflection about the child.

Another point to remember when sharing evaluation results with parents is that you should be able to explain the measures that were applied. Some standardized tests are rather complicated to use, score, and interpret. Be sure that you understand what the test results mean

and that you can explain them. It does not help a parent who asks, "What do you mean she scored below the norm?" to be told, "Well, I'm not exactly sure what 'norm' means." If your school uses any kind of standardized test, read its manual carefully, know how the test was constructed, understand how results should be interpreted and used, and be familiar with the terminology.

At the same time, it is also important to keep in mind and convey to parents that tests have their limitations. Consider the preceding discussion about the shortcomings of and concerns about tests and let parents know that these represent only part of the input used in evaluation. Also remind parents, as well as yourself, that children are amazingly flexible and often will experience a quick change or growth spurt in their development that could suddenly modify the test findings. Never present any evaluation results as *the* definitive information about the child's abilities and functioning. Similarly, let parents know that a wide variety of profiles fall within a "normal" range.

Finally, when sharing evaluation results with parents, also be prepared to defend the measures you used. A parent may well ask you, "Why did you give this test to my child?" Be able to answer such a question, because it is certainly logical and valid. You need to feel that the test provides valuable information and you should be able to specify how information will be used. For instance, such measures should help plan relevant learning experiences for the child (Wortham, 2001).

## Evaluating the Environment

**Early Childhood Environments Rating Scale (ECERS)**—A widely-used assessment of the early childhood environment, used both for research and for program evaluation purposes.

A number of instruments are available for assessing the early childhood environment. Such tools are often used for research purposes, but are equally used for self-assessment and program evaluation by teachers and administrators. The most widely used such instrument is the **Early Childhood Environments Rating Scale (ECERS)** (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998) and its related forms for infant and toddler (ITERS) (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 1990), school-age (SACERS) (Harms, Jacobs, & Romano, 1996), and family day care settings (FDCRS) (Harms & Clifford, 1989). These scales rate all aspects of the physical and social environment and take into account indicators of inclusion and cultural sensitivity. Each scale examines aspects of the environment specific to the age group of children. The ECERS, for instance, includes 43 items under the categories of space and furnishings, personal care routines, language-reasoning, activities, interactions, program structure, and parents and staff. Completing a rating using one of these scales takes about two to three hours.

## SUMMARY

1. Goals provide an overall, general overview of what is expected of the children.



2. Objectives are a more specific interpretation of goals. There are different types of objectives.
3. Evaluation is an important element in early childhood education and helps assess whether goals and objectives are being met.
   A. One of the most widely used methods of evaluation is observation.
   B. Teacher-designed instruments such as checklists and rating scales are another type of evaluation.
   C. Many commercially produced standardized tests are used for different purposes.
   D. Although evaluation instruments are widely used, there is also considerable concern about their use.
   E. Assessment systems which rely on multiple measures of gathering information about children give a more balanced and authentic picture of their functioning.
   F. Information from evaluations and assessments can be used in different ways.
   G. Environments can be assessed through such widely-used instruments as the Early childhood Environments Rating Scale (ECERS).

## KEY TERMS LIST

ABC analysis
anecdotal record
authentic assessment
behavioral objective
Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development—Revised
checklist
confidentiality
content objective
criterion-referenced
Denver II
Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning (DIAL III)
developmental objective
developmental test
diagnostic testing
Early Childhood Environments Rating Scale (ECERS)
event sampling
formative evaluation
goal
High/Scope Child Observational Record (COR)
McCarthy Scales of Children's Abilities
Metropolitan Readiness Test
norm-referenced
objective
preassessment
rating scale
reliability
running record
screening test
Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale
summative evaluation
time sampling
validity
work sampling system

## KEY QUESTIONS

1. Review a lesson plan that contains specific objectives. Do you see a relationship between the objectives and the planned activities? How do the objectives give direction to the teachers who carry out the activities?
2. With a fellow student, spend about 15 minutes observing the same child. Each of you write an anecdotal observation involving this child for the exact same period of time. Now compare your two observations. Do they describe the same behaviors, activities, and interactions? Do they convey the same "picture" of this child? If the two observations differ in a significant way, why is this? Are there some subjective elements in either observation that might contribute to this difference?
3. Design a checklist of 10 items to assess social development of a group of preschoolers. How did you decide on which items to include? What resources did you use to put this checklist together? If possible, observe a group of preschoolers and apply this checklist to several of the children.
4. Have you been tested with a standardized instrument? Recall how you felt about the testing situation and the questions asked. What emotional impact did the test have on you? How might young children feel about being tested? What can a tester do to help children perform to their best ability?
5. Given the information from this chapter about the values and potential misuses of evaluation procedures, develop a set of criteria that might guide you, as an early childhood professional, in using assessments in the most effective way. What do you consider to be the three most important benefits of such testing? What should you avoid?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Select additional books, articles, and Web sites on topics discussed in Chapter 6.

Bentzen, W. R. (2001). *Seeing young children: A guide to observing and recording behavior* (4th ed.). Clifton Park, NY: Delmar Learning.

Wesson, K. A. (2001). The "Volvo effect"—Questioning standardized tests. *Young Children, 56*(2), 16–18.

Wortham, S. (2001). *Assessment in early childhood education* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill-Prentice Hall.



## HELPFUL WEB SITES

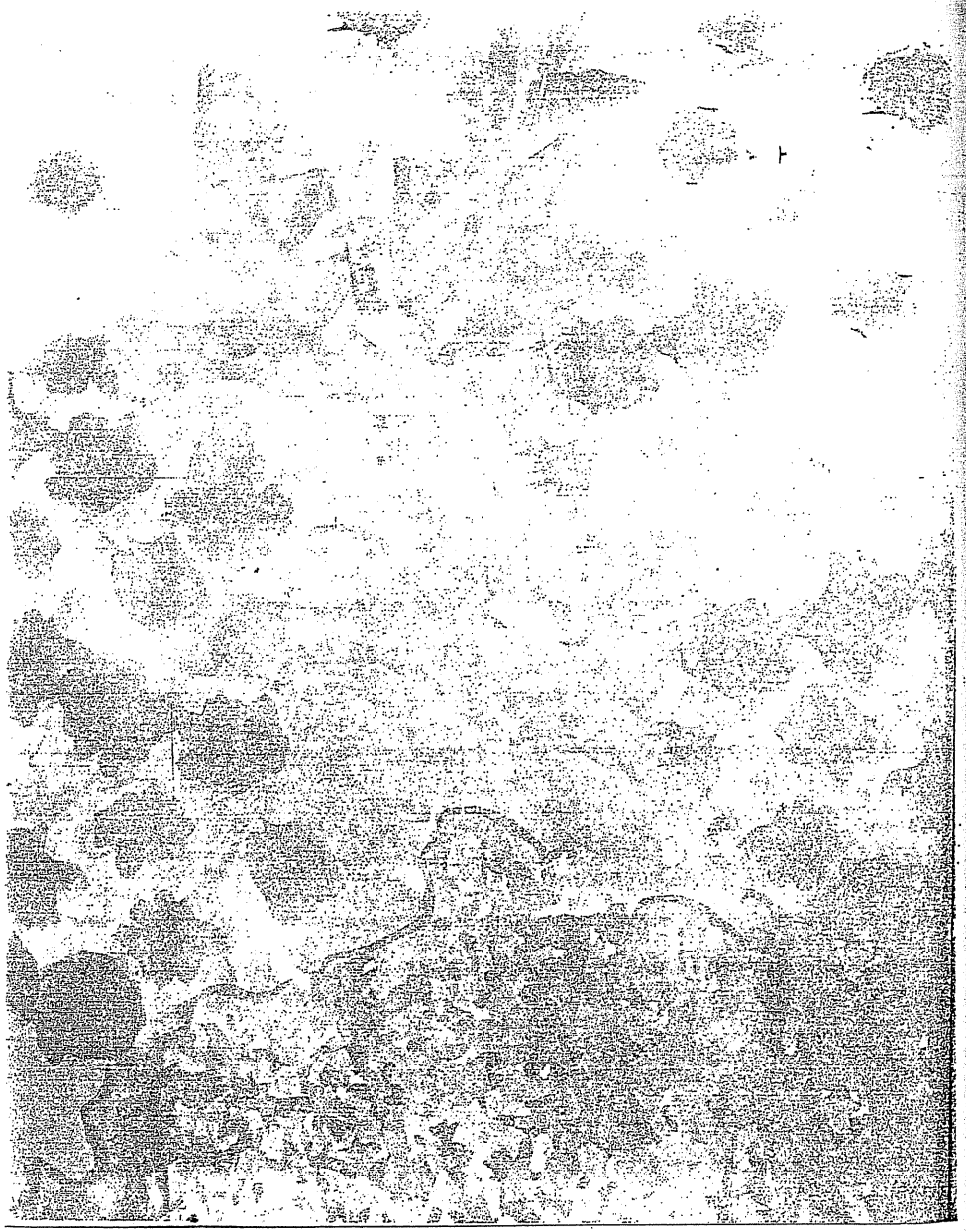
High/Scope Educational Research Foundation:
http://www.highscope.org

Alfie Kohn's "Rescuing Our Schools From 'Tougher Standards' ":
http://www.alfiekohn.org/standards/standards.htm

NAEYC's Position Statement on Assessment:
http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/pstestin.htm

For additional early childhood education resources, visit our Web site at

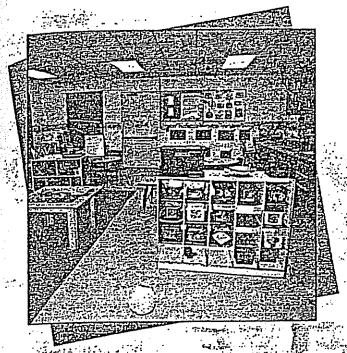
**http://www.earlychilded.delmar.com**



# PART IV

# The Where of Early Childhood Education

The environment of the early childhood program is an important factor. Just *where* is it that children and their teachers play and work? What elements do we have to keep in mind as we consider the appropriate environment for programs for young children?



CHAPTER

# 7

# The Physical Environment

Today, many young children spend the bulk of their waking hours in an early childhood program, often in one room for 9 or 10 hours every weekday. They spend some time in the outside play area and occasionally go on excursions into the community, but, by and large, for many young children most of the time is spent in a relatively confined space.

From research we know that the physical environment affects the behavior of children (Thomson & Ashton-Lilo, 1983). In fact, some theorists propose that **place identity** should be considered part of self-identity, because it contributes to a definition of who the person is. Place identity is integral to self-identity because it is within the environmental context that children's needs are met, that they develop mastery and competence, and that they gain control over the physical world (Proshansky & Fabian, 1987). It is, therefore, extremely important to consider physical environment, its arrangement, and its contents.

## EFFECTS OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Take a moment to think about a place where you enjoy spending time. What is it about this place that makes it enjoyable? What are its appealing features? Is it because this place is relaxing and soothing, stimulating and exciting, thought-provoking and challenging, orderly and methodical, comfortable and homey, or colorful and bright? Now think about a place that you do not particularly like, and consider why it is aversive to you. It may be that this place is boring, messy, stark, disorganized, dark, or uninviting. Think about spending all day in each of these places. What feelings and attitudes does this idea invoke in you? How do you think you would act and react in each place? Can you draw some conclusions about how and why the environment affects you?

**place identity**—Considered part of self-identity because it relates to the environmental context within which a child's needs are met, competence is developed, and control over the physical world is gained.

**behavior setting**—According to Kounin and Sherman, different environments elicit behaviors that are fitted to the setting; thus, children act "schoolish" at school.

**KEY POINT**

Because children's engagement in activities depends on the environment, teachers need to provide the most appropriate setting possible for learning.

**KEY POINT**

The environment can help promote or discourage positive peer interaction, independence, and self-esteem in children.

**KEY QUESTION**

Talk to two or three children who are four or five years old. Ask them what they like about their classroom and playground. Are the features they mention ones that you consider particularly interesting and noteworthy? What do their answers tell you about these children's interests, attitudes, and needs in relation to the environment?

According to researchers (Kounin & Sherman, 1979), when children are in a particular **behavior setting** they behave in a manner appropriate to that locale, following what might be viewed as unspoken rules.

> It is apparent that preschoolers behave "schoolish" when in a preschool. They are diligent creatures who spend 95% of their time actively occupied with the facilities provided and they deal with the facilities appropriately. . . . [T]hey do all of these things in a sort of unwritten private contract between themselves and the setting they enter: teachers and peers infrequently exert any pressure to either enter or leave these settings. (p. 146)

Such research underscores the importance of providing an environment that supports development and learning. If children's engagement in activities is to a large measure prompted by the environment, then it is incumbent upon teachers to provide the most appropriate setting possible.

The quality of the environment has an impact on the behavior of the children as well as the adults who spend their time in that space (Rettig, 1998). "Arrangement, organization, size, density, noise level, even the color of the classroom directly and indirectly invite a range of behaviors from children and teachers" (Thomson & Ashton-Lilo, 1983, p. 94).

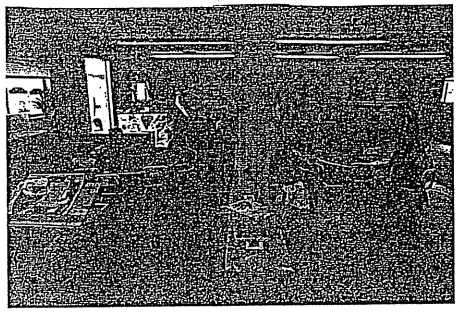
## Effect of the Environment on Children

The early childhood environment should support the development of children. It has a direct effect on how children behave toward each other. Positive peer interaction is promoted when children are not crowded, when an ample number and variety of items are available, and when socially oriented materials are provided. Classroom arrangement and careful selection of materials also foster cognitive development by providing opportunities for children to classify, find relationships, measure, compare, match, sort, and label. The environment also enhances both fine and gross motor development through a range of appropriately challenging equipment and materials (Dodge, 1992).

Children's growing sense of independence is supported when they can confidently and competently use equipment and when space and materials are arranged so they can see what is available and make autonomous choices. At the same time, children develop a sense of responsibility when the environment makes it clear how and where materials are to be returned when they finish using them. Children are more productively involved in activities when the purpose of classroom spaces is clearly defined and when materials are developmentally appropriate (Shepherd & Eaton, 1997). Children are also more likely to follow classroom rules when the environment reinforces these; for instance, if it is important for reasons of safety that children not run inside, classroom furnishings should be arranged in a way that makes walking, rather than running, natural.

The environment also enhances children's self-esteem when it is designed with their needs and development in mind, when it provides space for personal belongings, and when it promotes competence by allowing children to function independently. In addition, the environment should convey a sense of security and comfort through a friendly, warm, and inviting atmosphere; and through "soft" elements





A pleasant, well-organized environment that provides children with a variety of age-appropriate activity options supports children's development in all domains and enhances learning.

such as beanbag chairs, carpeting, or sling swings (Jones & Prescott, 1978; Weinstein, 1987).

## Effect of the Environment on Teachers

When the environment is set up to maximize children's development, prevent problem behaviors, and promote appropriate behaviors, teachers' well-being will be indirectly supported. More directly, teachers' jobs are made more pleasant if they work in aesthetically pleasing surroundings, if they have a designated space where they can relax and plan, and if their needs are generally taken into consideration (Thomson & Ashton-Lilo, 1983). Both personal comfort and professional needs should be supported (Harms & Clifford, 1980). Environmental factors such as pleasant temperature, light, color, sound absorption, ventilation, and spatial arrangement can facilitate or hinder staff in carrying out their jobs. Thus, a carefully arranged environment can help prevent teacher burnout by supporting teachers' goals for the children and by making the work site a pleasant place to be.

Eisenberg (1997) identifies four categories of space for adults within the early childhood classroom. Appropriate space should be provided for the personal belongings of teachers and volunteers. A small locked area, a coat hook, or space on a shelf can meet this need. Teachers also need space where they can plan and prepare classroom activities; this includes storage for needed materials. A third category for adult space is an area where paperwork is kept and resource materials such as books and journals can be kept. Finally, there is a need for a designated space for written communication with other adults; for instance, sign-in sheets, messages and information for parents, and communiques among staff members. Eisenberg concludes that a program will be much more harmonious if adult needs are considered.

**KEY POINT**

An appropriate environment must also take the needs of teachers into account.

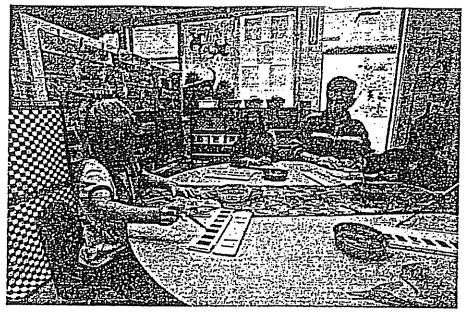
**KEY QUESTION**

Spend some time in an early childhood classroom and attune yourself to the environment. What do you like? What do you dislike? How would it feel to work all day in this setting? What changes could make this a more pleasant or accommodating environment for adults?

## ARRANGING THE INDOOR ENVIRONMENT

As we consider the indoor environment, we must take into account both its fixed features—for instance, size and shape of the room, placement

When arranging the classroom, it is best to take advantage of natural features; for instance, putting the art area near a window. What other environmental features will have an impact on how the early childhood classroom is arranged?



of windows and doors, built-in features such as shelves and storage spaces—and movable or semifixed features, such as arrangement of furnishings and materials, color, and texture (Prescott, 1997).

## Fixed Features

KEY POINT

Fixed features of a room—such as its size and shape, placement of doors and windows, built-in storage, and water access—must be considered when arranging the indoor space.

Room size will, to a large extent, dictate how many children and how much material can be housed in the space. The maximum number of children allowed in an area is prescribed by licensing regulations. In most states, 35 square feet per child is required, although 50 square feet is often suggested as more desirable. Some experts recommend as much as 100 square feet per child (Spodek, 1985). Although the research on the effects of crowding is not clear-cut. Phyfe-Perkins (1980) concludes that "crowding of children which provides less than 25 square feet per child for an extended period of time should be avoided. It may increase aggressive behavior and inhibit social interaction and involvement" (p. 103).

The shape of the room has an impact on its arrangement and supervision. A rectangular room seems more adaptable than a square one, and an L-shaped room poses more problems for supervision (Mayesky, 1998).

To some extent, room arrangement will be affected by the amount of natural light available through windows. For instance, color used during art activities is enhanced by clear, bright light; thus, it is desirable to locate the art area near windows. Areas in which children need to attend to close detail, such as the book or language center, should also be located in a well-lighted place. All areas of a room should be well lit, and places not reached by natural light should be provided with adequate electric lighting.

Building materials have an effect on acoustics. Some rooms are constructed with sound-absorbing ceiling, floor, or wall materials, whereas others seem to reverberate with noise. If the room's noise level hinders rather than enhances the children's participation in activities and the communication process, added features such as drapes, carpets, and corkboards can help eliminate much of the noise.



Because many young children's activities are messy, it is important to have water accessible, preferably in the room. Sensory activities, the art center, and cooking projects should be placed near the water source. If there is no running water in or adjacent to the room, an alternate arrangement, (for instance, a bucket with soapy water and paper towels) should be close at hand.

If the room contains built-in storage units, the room should be arranged to best utilize these units. Shelves that are placed at child level should hold materials the children use every day; for instance, blocks, manipulatives, or art implements. Besides built-in storage, easily reachable portable units should be added as needed. If built-in storage space is above the children's reach, such shelves can be used for teacher materials or items not used every day (Prescott, 1997).

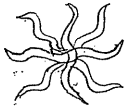
## Movable Features

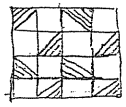
KEY POINT

An early childhood classroom is made more flexible and can meet the needs of young children by thoughtful arrangement of its movable features such as furniture and equipment.

More than a room's fixed features, it is the movable elements that allow you to arrange a well-planned, developmentally appropriate environment for children. Placement and grouping of equipment and furnishings communicate many messages. They convey the purpose of spaces, set limits on behavior, indicate how many children can comfortably use an area, establish boundaries, invite possible combinations of play through juxtaposition of areas, and encourage quiet or active involvement. Research has provided some guidelines for maximizing the effective use of space. Phyfe-Perkins (1980), in a review of studies that examine the effect of physical arrangements on children's behavior, proposes some helpful principles.

- Children in full-day child care need privacy; thus, places where children can be alone should be provided in the environment.
- Soft areas such as beanbag chairs, pillows, or rugs allow children to snuggle and find comfort if "adult laps are in short supply" (p. 103).
- Small, enclosed areas promote quiet activities as well as interaction among small groups of children.
- Physical boundaries around areas can reduce distraction, which, in turn, increases attention to activities.
- Large spaces allow for active, large-group activities that are more boisterous and noisy.
- Clearly organized play space and clear paths can result in fewer disruptions and more goal-directed behavior.





Elizabeth Prescott (1987), one of the leading researchers on effective environments for young children, suggests that recurring guidance or curriculum problems can quite often be resolved by rearranging the classroom. She advises teachers to examine classroom pathways from a child's eye level to ensure that they are clearly defined, that all areas have a path leading to them, and that they are not obstructed. Curtis and Carter (1996) also suggest that viewing the room from a child's point of view helps the teacher see if there are things of interest that peak curiosity within reach of the child, if there

# EXPERIENCES

## CHAPTER 7

### HESTER, Head Teacher, Preschool Class

#### The New Room

Our staff made the decision that we would switch the classrooms used by two groups at the end of the year. My class of three- and four-year-olds would move into the space previously used by the kindergartners, and they would take our room. We had occupied the larger, upstairs area while the kindergartners had been in the more intimate downstairs room. If you had seen the two rooms before and after the move, you would have seen great differences!

The challenge was to arrange our new downstairs area to fit the needs and interests of my class. I know the characteristics of my kids and what works and what doesn't. The younger ones need more supervision, are more easily distracted, and can be messy. The older ones want plenty of room to carry out activities and projects. All of them love the housekeeping area.

I began by looking for the best large corner for placing housekeeping, separating it like a small room within the classroom. I placed the area for manipulatives next to housekeeping since the children often like to take props from this area to use in their dramatic play. Legos can serve as money, small animals can stimulate the creation of a pet store, and Bristle Blocks double as food items.

The art and sensory areas I placed as close to the bathroom as possible. The shorter the distance between a messy activity and the source of water, the fewer little fingerprints need to be cleaned up later. Luckily, the floor area near the bathroom was linoleum covered. For the blocks, however, I looked for a level carpeted area that would muffle sounds. Some of the younger children in particular love to build towers and then knock them down, so carpeting is ideal.

Some activities needed to be placed where there would be minimum distraction, and these I put in the corner nook under the loft, where there is little traffic. This is where I put the computers and the books, quiet activities that need concentration.

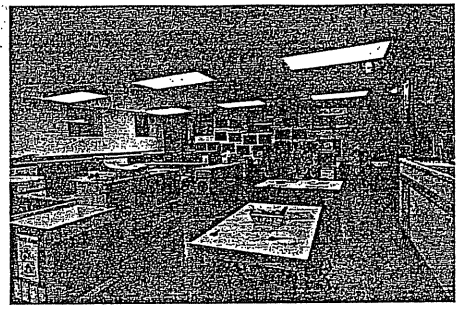
Overall, I was concerned about safety and ease of supervision. We arranged the room so that the teachers could see all areas easily. No high dividers obstruct the view. We have one blind spot in this room, however—a corridor that leads to the exit to the outside. This corridor can't be observed by the teachers. We solved this by talking to the children about the need to stay "on this side of the metal strip" at the edge of the carpet. The children monitor themselves and each other. If someone strays over the line, invariably another child will say, "You're not being safe. You're over the line."

A couple of weeks after we moved into our new room, Clayton said to me, "I like it here. I like that the ceiling isn't so far up and that the walls are close by." For younger children, the room seems to feel secure. I must say, I like the new room, too!

When arranging a classroom environment, the characteristics of the children need to be taken into consideration. The same space should look quite different if it is intended for younger preschoolers than it would for an older group of children.







Periodic assessment of the classroom and, if appropriate, rearrangement of learning centers can capitalize on children's changing interests.

is enough room for several children to play together, if there are interesting props to support play, and if there are items that make the child feel at home.

The walls of a classroom offer an excellent opportunity to convey the philosophy and activities of a classroom. Bulletin boards and other wall space should display the children's creations and should reflect the children's planning and thinking rather than the adults' (Jones & Villarino, 1994).

## Learning Centers

Indoor space is often organized into **learning centers** (also called interest or activity areas), which combine materials and equipment around common activities. Learning centers can include art, manipulatives, dramatic play, sensory experiences, blocks, music, science, math, computers, books, language arts, woodworking, cooking, and a variety of other areas that fit the unique interests, needs, and characteristics of a group of children and teachers (Essa & Rogers, 1992). Available space and materials, ages of the children, and licensing regulations also contribute to decisions about numbers and types of learning centers included in a classroom.

**learning centers** (also called interest or activity areas)—Where materials and equipment are combined around common activities; for instance, art, science, or language arts.

**KEY POINT**

One effective way of arranging the indoor environment is through organized learning centers that combine materials and equipment around common activities.

Learning centers allow children to make choices from a range of available, developmentally appropriate activities. A curriculum based on learning centers can be considered responsive to the children because it is designed to meet and respond to their specific needs and experiences (Myers & Maurer, 1987). Yet, although learning centers and their activities are planned, structured, set up, and facilitated by teachers, the children determine how to engage in and carry out the activity (Sloane, 2000).

When you arrange learning centers, it is important to take into account the size of the activity area. Researchers have found that smaller, more-defined, and secluded areas encourage children to enter more quickly into play, sustain play for longer periods of time, and engage in more complex play (Tegano, Moral, DeLong, Brickly, & Ramassini, 1996). Thus, using all areas of the room, especially odd-shaped ones such as lofts, the area under lofts, and other sheltered

**FIGURE 7-1 Guidelines for Organizing Classroom Space**

1. The room arrangement should reflect the program's philosophy. If the program's aim is to foster independent decision making, self-help skills, positive self-concept, social interaction, and more child-initiated than teacher-initiated activities, this should be promoted through room arrangement.
2. Keep in mind the children's ages and developmental levels. As children get older, provide more choices, a more complex environment, and greater opportunity for social play. For young preschoolers, it is best to offer a simple, uncluttered, clearly defined classroom with space for large motor activity. School-aged children need more varied materials and flexible space in which they can plan and carry out complex projects.
3. Any environment in which children, as well as adults, spend blocks of time should be attractive and aesthetically pleasing. Thought and care should be given to such factors as the arrangement of furnishing, use of colors and textures, and display of artwork. Plants and flowers added to the classroom can enhance its attractiveness.
4. If children are encouraged to make independent choices, then materials should be stored at a level where children can easily see, reach, and return them.
5. If children are to develop self-help skills, toileting facilities and cubbies for coats and boots should be accessible to them. Access to learning materials also contributes to the development of self-help skills.
6. If the program supports a positive self-concept in children, then there should be individual places for children's belongings, for their projects or art to be saved, and for their work to be displayed.
7. If development of social skills and friendships is encouraged, then the environment should be set up to allow children to participate in activities with small groups of other children without undue interference or disruption.
8. If children are to have many opportunities to select and direct their own activities, then the environment should be set up to offer a variety of activity choices.
9. There should be places for children to be alone if they so wish. Quiet, private spaces can be planned as part of the environment; for instance, a corner with large pillows, a cozy spot in the library area, or a designated rocking chair with cushions.
10. There should be "soft" places in the environment where children can snuggle and find comfort.
11. An environment set up into learning centers should have clearly marked boundaries that indicate the space designated for each given area. Storage shelves and other furnishings can be used to define the edges.
12. Paths to each area should be clear and unobstructed. Children are less likely to use areas that are hard to reach.
13. A pathway to one area should never go through another activity center. This only interferes with ongoing play and can cause anger and frustration.
14. Doorways and other exits should be unobstructed.
15. Quiet activities should be grouped near each other, and noisy ones should be placed at some distance from these. The block area should not be next to the book area, for example.
16. Group those activities that have common elements near each other to extend children's play possibilities. Blocks and dramatic play are often placed next to each other to encourage the exchange of props and ideas.
17. Provide areas for individual, small group, and large group activities by setting up different-sized centers.
18. Some areas require more space than others. Block play, for instance, is enhanced by ample room to build and expand block structures.
19. The sizes of various learning centers will, to some extent, convey how many children can play in each area and how active that play should be. Small, cozy areas set natural limits on the number of children and the activity level, whereas large areas send the opposite message.
20. Decrease noise level by using carpeting or area rugs in noisy centers such as the block area.
21. Place messy activities near a water source.



**FIGURE 7-1 Guidelines for Organizing Classroom Space—cont'd**

22. Place activities that are enhanced by natural light near windows. Ensure that all areas are well lit, however.
23. Place tables and chairs in or near centers where tabletop activities are carried out. For instance, tables should be placed in the art and manipulative areas but are not needed in the large block center. Tables scattered through the room can take on an added use during snack time.
24. Consider multipurpose uses for space, especially where room size is restricted. When your room allows for a limited number of areas to be set at any one time, some of these might be used for more than one activity. For instance, the area designated for large group activities might also be the block area, music center, or place set aside for large motor activity.
25. Some learning centers may not be part of the classroom on a daily basis. Such centers as woodworking, music, or cooking may be brought into the classroom on a less frequent schedule or may be rotated with other areas for specified periods of time.
26. Be flexible in the use of space and open to rearranging it. As children mature and their interests change, so should the center. Also, if repeated problems arise, try solving these by rearranging the environment.
27. Safety should be an overriding, primary concern in setting up an environment for young children.

nooks, encourages more intense and involved play. Evaluate your classroom to look for all possible areas that can be creatively used as interest areas.

One useful tool in arranging a room into learning centers is to draw a scale model of the classroom, with fixed features such as doors, windows, and built-in furnishings marked. You can then pencil in furniture until you find a workable arrangement. A method that is initially more time consuming but allows more extensive spatial experimentation is to draw and cut out scale models of the furniture and manipulate these on your classroom drawing. Commercial classroom planning guides are also available, which include room layouts and a wide variety of scaled equipment cutouts. Figure 7-1 offers some suggested guidelines to keep in mind when arranging a classroom for preschool or primary school children.

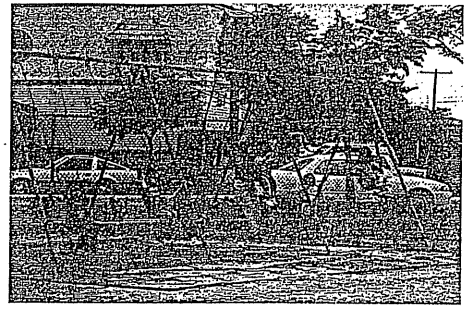
## Safety

It is also important to be aware of safety considerations when arranging and equipping an early childhood classroom (Click, 2000). Some guidelines will be spelled out in building codes, fire regulations, and child care licensing. But beyond these, additional measures can protect children from foreseeable accidents. Each classroom should have at least two exits to be used in case of emergency. Clearly marked emergency exit routes should be posted and familiar to teachers and children alike, and a well-functioning fire extinguisher and smoke detectors should be installed in each room. Carpeting, drapes, and other furnishings should be treated with fire retardants.

Walls and other surfaces should be painted with lead-free paint. Any potentially hazardous substance, such as those used for cleaning

**KEY POINT**

Safety should be of primary concern as teachers arrange and equip the classroom.



Many playgrounds contain conventional metal structures such as the galvanized pipe geodome climber along with metal swings, slides, and climbers. As you read this chapter, you will see that such playgrounds are being replaced by newer "playscapes."

or medical purposes, should be stored out of the classroom or in a locked cupboard. Electrical outlets should be covered. Sharp edges should be eliminated from all furniture and built-in storage units. Any lightweight equipment should be backed against a wall or another sturdy surface so it cannot be knocked or pulled over during vigorous play. In addition, when the classroom is carefully arranged with clearly defined learning areas and paths, the number of accidents will be minimized.

## Environments for Infants and Toddlers

An environment for infants and toddlers needs to be designed with many of the same guidelines suggested for preschool and primary environments; it must be developmentally appropriate, safe, secure, comfortable, aesthetically pleasing, and appropriately stimulating. The environment must encourage movement and exploration while meticulously ensuring safety and hygiene. Further, it must be adapted to the needs of very young children by including discrete areas for playing, eating, diapering, and sleeping. Developmental changes are rapid during the first two years of life. The environment must take such changes into account by providing differing levels of stimulation and challenge for different ages (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Gonzalez-Mena & Eyer, 2000; Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 1990; Lally & Stewart, 1990).

## ARRANGING THE OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT

**KEY POINT**

The traditional metal swings and slides of many playgrounds are being replaced by more contemporary playscapes.

Just as the indoor space is arranged with care and thought, considering the children's needs and developmental levels, so should the outdoor environment be carefully designed. The outdoor area should be more than a place where children can let off steam and exercise large muscles. It should also provide opportunities that enhance socialization, cognitive and language development, sensory exploration, creative expression, and an appreciation of nature.

Unfortunately, too often outdoor areas are literally set in concrete, leaving little room for versatility and rearrangement. Most early childhood playgrounds come equipped with either traditional structures such as metal swings, slides, and climbers or with more contemporary

## A CLOSER LOOK

### Hygiene Practice in Child Care

Parents often note that when they enroll their children in a group child care setting where they are in contact with other children, their rate of illness invariably rises. Children are exposed to more viruses and, as a result, experience more infectious diseases. Respiratory infections, which are the most common illness among young children, are particularly prevalent. Is this rise in illness inevitable, however?

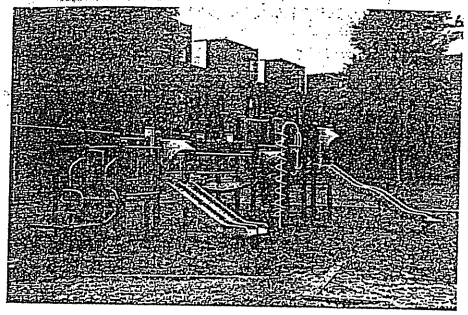
Studies have shown that the incidence of infectious illnesses among child care youngsters can be significantly decreased when the staff pay meticulous attention to hygiene and cleanliness. Several studies, for instance, found a decrease in diarrhea when staff consistently and carefully washed hands when diapering infants and toddlers (e.g., Bartlett et al., 1985).

A more recent study carefully monitored the number of illnesses experienced by infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in one center both before and after a staff education program to promote infection control was instituted (Krilov et al., 1996). The education program included lectures, written policies, colorful posters about hygiene and disease transmission placed around the classrooms, and involvement of the parents in infection control measures.

The results of these preventive steps paid off. A comparison of number and type of illnesses for the year before and the year after the infection control program showed significant decreases in a number of illnesses. The overall number of illnesses, particularly respiratory infections, was considerably lower after the program was instituted. There was also a somewhat less dramatic decrease in diarrhea, ear infections, and sinus infections. In addition, children had fewer visits to the doctor, took fewer antibiotics, and were absent less from school.

Several measures help to decrease the incidence of illness among children in group care. One of the most important is careful handwashing by staff whenever they change diapers or help children with toileting routines. Cleaning and disinfecting areas where children's diapers are changed, where children eat, and where children play are also very important. Furthermore, toys need to be routinely disinfected, especially for infants and toddlers who frequently mouth toys.

Contemporary playgrounds are more versatile in design and construction. They are made of various materials such as wood and plastic and encourage a variety of activities.



**playscapes**—Contemporary, often innovative playground structures that combine a variety of materials.

**playscapes,** which combine a variety of materials and allow for a range of activities. Such equipment must meet standards of safety and developmental appropriateness. Beyond the immovable components of the outdoor space, however, various elements can enhance and expand children's play, as we will discuss.

## Fixed Outdoor Play Structures

In the early decades of the 20th century, when the playground movement took root in this country, outdoor play areas were generally equipped with swings, slides, seesaws, and sandboxes, not so different from many playgrounds today (Eriksen, 1985). But the design of play structures has also come a long way from such traditional, single-purpose pieces of equipment. Through the efforts of child development specialists, professional playground architects, and commercial equipment developers, far more creative and versatile play structures are now available.

**creative playgrounds**—Outdoor play areas that use innovative materials such as tires, telephone poles, nets, and cable spools.

**adventure playground**—A European innovation, a type of outdoor play area in which children use a wide range of available "junk" materials to create their own environment.

Many of today's **creative playgrounds** contain equipment constructed of such materials as tires, cargo nets, railroad ties, telephone poles, large cable spools, barrels, and drainage pipes. A European variation is the **adventure playground** in which children use a wide range of available "junk" materials to create their own environments (Frost, 1992). In fact, research has shown that children engage in a wider variety of social interactions, greater language usage, and more originality on innovative rather than on traditional playgrounds (Hayward, Rothenburg, & Beasley, 1974). Where traditional structures were primarily constructed of metal, which could become dangerously hot or very cold during weather extremes, new equipment materials include a variety of treated wood surfaces and "space-age plastics" (Frost & Wortham, 1988).

**KEY POINT**

Guidelines help the early childhood teacher evaluate the safety and developmental appropriateness of outdoor equipment.

Just because equipment is contemporary, however, does not necessarily make it developmentally appropriate or safe (Frost & Klein, 1979). Some guidelines can help ensure that outdoor equipment provides suitable play space for young children.

- Because large structures are relatively fixed in the function they serve, they should be complex in design. For example, while including opportunity for a wide range of motor skills, they can also provide some open spaces underneath, which children can use for dramatic play (Frost & Wortham, 1988). More complex play structures encourage more complex play that lasts a longer time than play on simple structures (Kritchevsky, Prescott, & Walling, 1996).
- Play equipment should provide graduated challenges, offering activities that allow for safe risk taking for children of different ages and developmental levels (Moore, Goltsman, & Iacofano, 1987). An outdoor play area used by a range of children could, for instance, include one gently sloped and one taller, more steeply angled slide; balance beams of different widths; or steps as well as ladders leading to raised platforms.
- Play structures should promote social interaction rather than competition among children. Wide slides, for example, encourage two or three children to slide down together; tire swings invite several children to cooperatively pump; and added props encourage dramatic play. At the same time, there should also be a provision for privacy if children want to be alone.
- A final, important factor is the safety of outdoor play equipment. Equipment should be securely anchored to the ground and in good repair with no sharp edges, broken or splintered elements, or loose nuts and bolts. There should be no openings that could trap a child's head, fingers, hands, or feet. Swing seats should be made of a lightweight material. Safety is also fostered when equipment is of appropriate size; climbing heights should not exceed the reaching height of the children (Frost, 1992; Frost & Wortham, 1988). The surfacing material under swings and climbing structures must also be considered to ensure that children are somewhat cushioned if they fall. In some parts of the country, spiders and other insects like to nest in dark parts of play equipment; for instance, inside tires. Thus, frequent safety checks should be carried out and appropriate measures taken in such cases. If there is frequent rain, tires can also trap water, which then stagnates and attracts mosquitos; drilling drainage holes into the bottoms of tires can avoid this problem "Tire Hazards," 1986).

An outdoor play area for infants and toddlers in the sensorimotor stage of development (recall the discussion of Piaget's stages of development in Chapter 5) must encourage basic motor skills and sensory experiences. It must allow for a wide range of movement; stimulate the senses; offer novelty, variety, and challenge; and be safe and comfortable (Frost, 1992).

## Flexible Outdoor Play Components

Although not many adjustments can be made with the large equipment, there are other ways in which the outdoor environment can be arranged to enhance and support children's development. By adding equipment and materials, capitalizing on the natural features of the play space, and creating interest areas, the outdoor play space can be made more exciting and flexible.

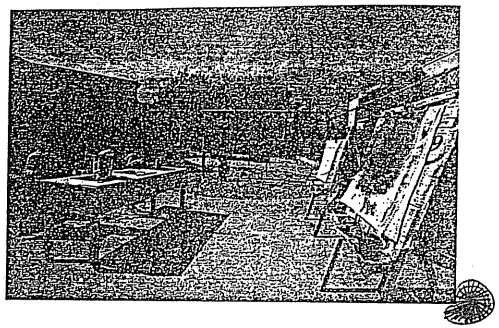


promote social interaction
promote social interaction
promote social interaction

**KEY POINT**

The outdoor environment can be made more flexible by adding movable equipment, by including indoor curriculum activities such as painting or woodworking, and by taking advantage of natural features such as slopes and shady trees.

Many activities commonly considered indoor activities can be carried out on the playground. Sensory tables and art activities, for example, can be accommodated outdoors as well as inside. What other activities, usually restricted to the indoor environment, could also be set up outside?



KEY QUESTION

Observe a group of children in an outdoor environment. What kinds of activities are the children involved in? Which developmental needs are being met? If you see little involvement in activities that promote one, or several, areas of development (for instance, social, language, cognitive), what changes or additions could be made to bring these about?

A variety of movable large equipment components can be added to the outdoor area. When large crates, sawhorses, ladders, ramps, balance beams, tires, pulleys, hollow blocks, or cardboard boxes are provided, children will find a variety of creative ways to incorporate these into their play. Such movable components give children the opportunity to structure and arrange their own environment.

An outdoor play area should also take advantage of all available natural features. The play yard's physical contours, plants, and surfaces provide potential for enhancing the playground. A small hill can let children experience gathering momentum as they run or roll down, or it can be used as the site for a tunnel. A large, grassy area is ideal for large-group movement, ball toss, or parachute activities.

Trees provide shade; shrubs and flowers add to the aesthetic and sensory pleasures of the yard. A flower, vegetable, or herb garden that the children help tend can provide a meaningful science experience. Multiple surfaces such as fine sand for digging, cement on which to ride tricycles, pea gravel or wood shavings under large equipment, grass to sit on, dirt to make mud with, textured paving stones to touch with hands or bare feet—all add to making the outdoor area a good learning environment.

The playground should also accommodate all indoor curriculum areas; for instance, art, music, science, or story time. "The good contemporary playground contains nooks and crannies, amphitheater areas, tables, benches, and so on for full exploration of these subjects" (Frost & Wortham, 1988, p. 26). Woodworking, sand, water, and other sensory activities are also portable and very suitable additions to the outdoor environment. An outdoor area can also be enhanced by creating defined learning centers that are more permanent, similar to those used indoors.

## ADAPTING THE ENVIRONMENT

KEY POINT

The environment can be adapted in a variety of ways so children with special needs can enjoy its use.

Increasingly, early childhood programs are including children with special needs into their facilities. It is important when children with different levels of ability are included to provide a suitable environment in which all of the children can experience appropriate challenges and successes. Frost (1992) presents a compelling reason why it is important to adapt the early childhood environment for children with special needs. "Play is the vehicle by which children develop and demonstrate competency in dealing with their environment. If a handicapping condition results in play deprivation, the child's competence in interacting with people and objects will also be lacking" (p. 297). Following are suggested adaptations for children with physical and visual disabilities.

Children with severe physical limitations need specialized equipment, such as special chairs or bolsters, to help them participate as much as possible in activities. Children who rely on wheelchairs or walkers for mobility, as well as those with other physical limitations, need wide enough paths and entries to learning centers to maneuver in an unobstructed way throughout the room. Activity opportunities and shelves from which children select materials should be accessible so these children can be as independent as possible. Similarly, outdoor activities and equipment must be accessible through such modifications as wide, gently sloped ramps with handrails; raised sand areas; or sling swings that provide secure body support.

Children with visual impairments require a consistent, uncluttered, and clearly arranged environment that they can recognize through touch. Landmarks such as specific equipment or furniture, and a sensory-rich environment with varying textures, can help blind children orient themselves inside or outside (Frost, 1992).

The environment should always be responsive to children, suited to their unique needs and characteristics. Recognizing that each child is uniquely individual, the play environment should be versatile enough to provide a rich variety of sensory stimuli, opportunities to make and carry out independent choices, and a range of experiences to promote all areas of development in children of varying levels of competence. A sensitive staff can help make the early childhood experience of children with special needs as beneficial as possible through some appropriate environmental modifications.

## DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT

Early childhood **equipment** refers to furniture and other large items that represent the more expensive, long-term investments in an early childhood facility; **materials** refers to the smaller, often expendable items that are replaced and replenished more frequently. Because it is expensive, equipment needs to be acquired carefully. Figure 7-2 lists basic equipment that should be included in classrooms for young children.

**equipment**—Large items such as furniture that represent a more expensive, long-term investment in an early childhood facility.

**materials**—The smaller, often expendable items used in early childhood programs that are replaced and replenished frequently.

### Criteria for Selecting Equipment

Some important questions to ask when selecting equipment include the following:

- **Does this piece of equipment support the program's philosophy?** Equipment should promote children's self-esteem and independence, encourage positive social interaction, and support children's development.
- **Is the equipment appropriately sized for the children?** Some pieces of equipment are available in various sizes. For a

KEY POINT

Equipment must be carefully evaluated to ensure its appropriateness for young children.

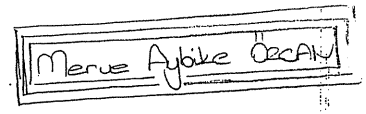


**FIGURE 7-2 Basic Equipment and Materials for a Preschool Classroom**

A classroom for 16–20 young children or a smaller group of infants or toddlers should include, but not be restricted to, the following pieces of equipment:

| Equipment | | Materials |
|---|---|---|
| **Basic Furniture** | | |
| 3–4 | Tables that seat 6–8 each (round, rectangular, or both) for meals and activities, as needed | Beanbag chairs, pillows<br>Bulletin boards |
| 24–28 | Chairs | |
| 1 | Rocking chair | |
| 16–20 | Cubbies, one for each child, to store personal belongings | |
| **Dramatic Play Center** | | |
| 1 | Small table | Dress-up clothes, both men's and women's |
| 2–4 | Chairs | |
| 4 | Appliances | Empty food containers |
| 1 | Large mirror | Set of dishes, pots/pans |
| 1 | Ironing board | Telephones |
| 4–6 | Dolls, different ethnic groups, both sexes | Doll clothes, blankets |
| 1 | Doll bed or crib | Dramatic play kits with props for selected themes |
| **Art Center** | | |
| 2 | Easels, two-sided | Variety of paper, paints, crayons, scissors, glue, collage materials, clay |
| 1 | Storage shelf for materials | |
| **Block Center** | | |
| 1 | Set unit blocks, 250–300 pieces, 12 shapes | Various props, including people, animals, vehicles, furniture |
| 1 | Set hollow blocks | |
| 1 | Set cardboard blocks | |
| 3–6 | Large wooden vehicles | |
| **Manipulative Center** | | |
| 1 | Storage shelf with individual storage bins | Wide variety of puzzles, pegboards, construction toys, parquetry, beads, lotto and other games |
| **Sensory Center** | | |
| 1 | Sand and water table or deep plastic bins | Variety of props such as funnels, hoses, measuring cups, waterwheels, scoops, containers, and shovels |
| **Language Center** | | |
| 1 | Bookshelf | Wide variety of books |
| 1 | Large flannel board | File of flannel board stories |
| 1 | Tape recorder | Writing materials |
| 1 | Puppet theater | Variety of puppets |
| **Science and Math Center** | | |
| | Animal homes, such as aquarium or cages | Wide variety of natural materials found in nearby environment |
| | | Variety of scientific instruments, such as microscopes, magnifiers, magnets, thermometers |
| | | Variety of math materials such as attribute blocks, Cuisinaire rods, items to sort or classify, seriate calendars, timers |
| | | Variety of old mechanical objects to take apart, such as clocks, watches, cameras, or locks |



**FIGURE 7-2 Basic Equipment and Materials for a Preschool Classroom—continued**

| Equipment | | Materials |
|---|---|---|
| **Music Center** | | |
| 1 | Cassette player | Variety of records |
| 1 | Set rhythm instruments | Props for movement activities, such as scarves or streamers |
| 1 | Autoharp | |
| 3–4 | Tonal instruments such as xylophones or bells | |
| 1 | Storage unit for instruments | |
| **Woodworking Center** | | |
| 1 | Woodworking bench with vises | Soft wood scraps |
| 1 | Set tools | Thick Styrofoam sheets |
| 1 | Tool-storage unit | Variety of nails, screws |
| **Outdoor Equipment** | | |
| | Gross motor equipment that allows children to slide, climb, swing, crawl, hang, balance. | Sensory materials such as fine-grained sand and access to water (in appropriate weather) |
| 8–10 | Wheeled vehicles such as tricycles, wagons, scooters. A play house or other space for quiet or dramatic play | Movable equipment such as tires, crates, planks, and cardboard boxes<br>Balls, ropes, parachute |
| **Infant/Toddler Environment** | | |
| | Cribs or cots | Soft toys |
| | Changing table | Mobiles |
| | Storage near changing table | Colorful displays |
| | Storage for belongings, toys | Teething toys |
| | Toddler-sized chairs and tables | Sturdy books |
| | Mats, carpets | Dramatic play props |
| | Cassette player | Small blocks |
| | Strollers, buggies | Nesting toys |
| | | Pull toys |
| | | Mirrors |

*Note: This suggested equipment and materials list is by no means exhaustive. Many other items could and should be added, selected to suit the program, children, and staff. Discussion of activities in Chapters 9 through 13 can be consulted for additional suggested materials.*

class of two-year-olds, chairs should be smaller and tables lower than for an older group of preschoolers.

❖ **Is the equipment safe?** When purchasing equipment, it is important to ensure that safety standards are met and that the equipment will withstand long-term usage. It must continue to be safe for the expected lifetime of the equipment. Manufacturers of outdoor play structures often provide a safety warranty for such equipment.

❖ **Is the equipment durable?** Early childhood equipment should be well built to withstand hard use by large numbers of children over a period of years. Varnished or plastic surfaces will protect tabletops and shelves. Outside equipment should be finished to resist weathering, rusting, and chipping. It is usually more expensive in the long run to purchase less expensive equipment that is not intended for group use and will have to be replaced sooner.

**KEY QUESTION #2**

Browse through one of the many catalogs in which early childhood materials and equipment are advertised. Evaluate several of the items in the catalog according to the criteria outlined in this chapter for selecting equipment and materials. What conclusions can you draw about selecting developmentally appropriate items for young children?

Classroom equipment has to be sized appropriately for the children. The chairs and tables in this class of toddlers are smaller than the furnishings in the classrooms of their older peers.

- **Is there room for this equipment?** The size of the classroom or outside play area will dictate how much equipment (and of what size) can be accommodated. A large outside structure that takes up most of the space in a relatively small play yard may be impractical if it leaves little room for other activities. Storage room should be available if a piece of equipment—for example, a water table or woodworking bench—will not be used all the time.
- **Can the equipment be constructed rather than purchased?** Sometimes teachers, parents, or community volunteers with carpentry skills can make a piece of equipment at a considerably lower cost than would be required to purchase a commercial equivalent. Ensure that a volunteer carpenter understands your standards for safety and performance. Many exciting play yards have been constructed by parent and staff groups; however, if you are considering construction of outdoor equipment, get expert advice to assure its safety. One preschool center, with the help of volunteers, had constructed a very interesting, contemporary playground that the children very much enjoyed. About five years after the construction of a tire swing, which was suspended from three telephone poles by heavy chains, one of the poles snapped from unsuspected dry rot. One child's nose was broken by the falling wood and chain. This preschool decided that homemade equipment, although it offered unique choices, could not be used because of the safety risk to the children and because the liability was too high. Within a year, all of the volunteer-made equipment was replaced by commercial units with warranties.
- **Is the equipment aesthetically pleasing?** Consider whether a new piece of equipment will fit harmoniously with existing furnishings. When you purchase a new sofa for your living room, for example, you look for something to match the existing decor; in the same way, consider new equipment in the context of the entire classroom. Many early childhood items are available in attractive natural wood, whereas others come in brightly colored plastics.



- **Is the equipment easy to clean and maintain?** Classroom items should be relatively easy to sanitize and keep clean. Replacement parts such as bolts or gears should be readily available from the manufacturer.

## Computers and Other Technology

Over the past two decades, early childhood programs have increasingly invested in the purchase of computers and software for the children's uses. Toward the end of the 1980s, about one-fourth of early childhood programs had computers; today, the vast majority of facilities have them, although programs that serve poor and minority children have less access to such technology (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). A growing number of people today have **computer literacy**; in other words, they are knowledgeable about and capable of using a computer. It is often argued that young children are entering a world in which familiarity with computers will be a requisite for effective functioning; therefore, exposure to computers and development of some basic computer skills should be part of early childhood programs.

**computer literacy**—Familiarity with and knowledge about computers.

**KEY POINT**

Computers have become a prevalent feature in many early childhood classrooms; in addition, a considerable amount of software has been developed for the use of young children. Software must be carefully evaluated for appropriateness.

Electronic technology is an integral part of 21st century life, which most children are exposed to at home as well as at school. Computers can be of benefit to children if they are appropriately used. "As with any learning resource, *how* computers are used with young children is more important than *if* computers are used. Integrating computers into classrooms may make a significant difference in children's developmental gains or it may have no effect at all or actually reduce children's creativity" (Haugland, 2000, 12–13).

When should young children be exposed to computers? Haugland (1999) suggests that computers not be used with children younger than three because computers do not "match their learning style" (26). Infants and toddlers are sensory learners, mastering such tasks as crawling, walking, talking, and toileting; they are not yet ready to focus on computer-related tasks. By age three, however, children have mastered the basic motor, language, and social skills that are requisites for using computers. Haugland (1999) recommends that preschoolers be allowed to explore computers freely, using appropriate software. Children in kindergarten and the early primary grades can use computers in a more structured way, again with developmentally appropriate software. In addition to free-choice computer activities, teachers can also provide some more directed activities that support learning objectives.

**KEY QUESTION #5**

If you have access to a computer and early childhood software, try out one early childhood activity on the computer. After you have mastered the activity, evaluate the software according to the criteria presented in this chapter. What do you think young children will learn from the activity? What feature(s) do you think might be appealing, unappealing, or frustrating to preschoolers?

Computer **software** refers to the "instructions" that direct the computer to perform an activity. Software is usually stored on a disk that is inserted into the computer or can be downloaded onto the computer's hard drive so no disk is needed. The selection of computer software for an early childhood program must follow the same principles as the selection of any developmentally appropriate materials. The *"NAEYC Position Statement: Technology and Young Children—Ages Three through Eight"* (NAEYC, 1996b) can guide teachers in what may seem to be a complex and difficult task in evaluation of available resources. The statement affirms the important role of the teacher as the

**software**—The "instructions" that direct a computer to perform an activity, usually stored on a disk or directly in the computer; many such programs are available for young children.

Many early childhood programs today include computers for children's use. Many of the early concerns about computers for young children (for instance, that computers would discourage peer interaction) have been dispelled. What are some advantages and potential problems in using computers in early childhood programs?

one whose professional judgment ultimately deems developmental appropriateness of technological learning materials.

There is a huge selection of software available for young children, but only about one-fourth of what is on the market is developmentally appropriate; inappropriate "drill and practice" programs, in which there is one right answer, represent the majority of software packages on the market today (Shade, 1996). Haugland and Shade (1990) propose 10 criteria for judging developmental appropriateness.

1. **Age appropriateness**—The concepts taught and methods presented show realistic expectations of young children.
2. **Child control**—The children, as active participants (not the computer), decide the flow and direction of the activity.
3. **Clear instructions**—Verbal or graphic directions are simple and precise. Written instructions are not appropriate.
4. **Expanding complexity**—Software begins with a child's current skills, then builds on these in a realistic learning sequence that continues to challenge.
5. **Independence**—Children are able to use the computer and software with a minimum amount of adult supervision.
6. **Process orientation**—The intrinsic joys of exploring and discovering are what engage children on the computer. Printouts of completed work can be fun, but they are not the primary objective. Extrinsic rewards such as smiling faces or other reinforcers are not necessary.
7. **Real-world model**—Objects used in software are reliable models of aspects of the world, in appropriate proportion to each other, and in meaningful settings.
8. **Technical features**—Children's attention is better held by high-quality software, with colorful, uncluttered, animated, and realistic graphics, and realistic sound effects. Software also loads and runs quickly, minimizing waiting times.
9. **Trial and error**—Children have unlimited opportunity for creative problem solving, exploring alternatives, and correcting their own errors.
10. **Transformations**—Children are able to change objects and situations and see the effects of their actions.

## DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE MATERIALS

KEY POINT

A wide variety of developmentally appropriate learning materials are available commercially; in addition, many programs also include teacher- or parent-made materials.

In addition to the more expensive furnishings and equipment, an early childhood classroom requires a rich variety of play and learning materials. These include commercially purchased items such as puzzles, crayons, or Legos; teacher- or parent-made games and manipulatives; commercial or teacher-assembled kits that put together combinations of items for specific dramatic play themes or flannel board stories; and donated scrap materials for art or construction activities. Review the recommended basics for an early childhood program listed in Figure 7-2.



Manipulatives are among the most versatile, open-ended materials because they lend themselves to an infinite variety of uses.

One special category of learning resources, **Montessori equipment**, stands out because of its specific attributes and prescribed use. These materials are available through special catalogs for use in Montessori programs. Montessori items are of high quality and design, and their cost is also relatively high. The Montessori philosophy does not recommend that these materials be used by non-Montessori schools, although many eclectic programs stock some of these materials. You may want to review the discussion of Maria Montessori's program and its contemporary counterparts in Chapter 5.

Montessori equipment—Early childhood learning materials derived from, and part of, the Montessori approach.

## Criteria for Selecting Materials

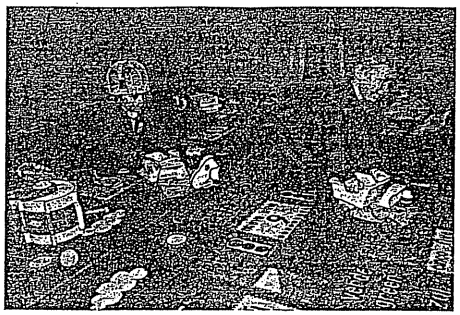
More than ever before, a great selection of early childhood materials is commercially available. Toy and variety stores, as well as catalogs, display variously priced toys and games that often promise to fully educate or entertain young children. In selecting learning and play materials, some specific criteria must be met to assure their suitability for young children.

KEY POINT

Materials need to be carefully selected to ensure that they are developmentally appropriate.

- **Developmentally appropriate**—Materials should match the stage of development of the children. Toddlers just mastering language and locomotion will benefit from play items that encourage vocabulary building, promote a sense of balance, exercise fingers, and feed their burgeoning sense of independence. Older preschoolers and primary children, however, need materials that utilize their more refined skills in all areas of development. All early childhood materials, however, should actively involve children, be interesting, and be safe.
- **Active**—Young children need materials that they can act on. They quickly get bored with items that require no action on their part or that don't stretch the imagination. All early childhood materials should promote active involvement and exploration.
- **Open-ended**—Among the most popular and most frequently used materials are open-ended toys, ones that can be used flexibly

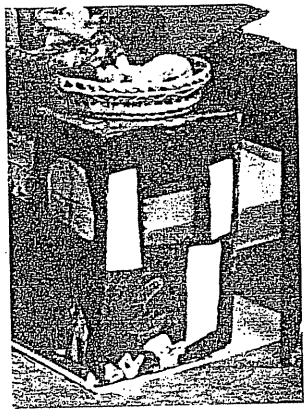
Toddlers who have not yet mastered the social skills involved in sharing should have access to more than one of their favorite play materials.



and do not dictate how they are to be used. Not all materials in the early childhood program will be open-ended (puzzles, for instance, have only one outcome), but the majority should be.

- **Give feedback**—As children interact with materials, they should receive feedback on the success of their actions. A completed puzzle tells the child that the pieces have been fitted together correctly; when the "bridge" stays up, the child knows that the blocks were stacked successfully; when there is a place setting for each of the four children at the table in the housekeeping area, they know that they have matched children and dishes appropriately.
- **Multipurpose**—Materials or combinations of materials should suggest many possibilities for play. Children's problem-solving skills and imaginations will be enhanced by multipurpose materials. Children of different skill levels should be able to use materials successfully.
- **Safe and durable**—Items purchased for children's use should be sturdy and well constructed. Materials should be of high quality; for instance, hardwood or nonbreakable plastics. Young children should not be given toys that require electricity. All materials should be checked regularly for loose parts, sharp edges, splinters, or chipping paint.
- **Attractive**—Materials' appearance should be appealing and inviting.
- **Nonsexist, nonracial**—Materials should convey a sense of equality and tolerance rather than reinforce sexist, racial, or cultural stereotypes.
- **Variety**—A wide variety of materials that cater to different interests and that meet all developmental needs is necessary. There should be ample materials to develop fine and gross motor skills, to exercise cognitive processes, to promote language use, to encourage socialization, to provide outlets for emotional needs, and to invite creativity.





Many wonderful early childhood materials have been made by teachers or parents.

- **Duplicate**—Although variety gives children divergent ways through which they can develop skills, there should also be more than one of some items. Toddlers, who have not yet mastered the art of sharing, especially need the assurance of multiples of popular items.

Software packages are only one way that computers can be used by young children today. A variety of Web sites are also readily available (Haugland, 2000). Web sites can provide a rich variety of learning opportunities to enhance a variety of cognitive and social skills. There are so many Web sites available, however, that a teacher must carefully screen and select appropriate ones for use by the children. Information Web sites, which are often enhanced with sound and video, can be used to help children find answers to questions and build knowledge. Haugland, for instance, discusses a "virtual" trip to the zoo, where children can see and hear the animals.

## Teacher-Made Materials and Resources

**KEY POINT**

Teachers may develop classroom resource materials; for instance, dramatic play kits, a flannelboard story file, or a song and fingerplay file.

Some of the best early childhood materials are not purchased commercially but are ones that an energetic teacher or parent constructs. Homemade toys often are tailored to fit the specific interests or needs of the children. Many resource books offer excellent suggestions and instructions for games and materials that enhance cognitive concepts, fine or gross motor skills, and language development (Baratta-Lorton, 1979; Debelack, Herr, & Jacobson, 1981; Linderman, 1979).

Teachers also can develop and organize classroom resource materials to facilitate planning and programming. One helpful resource is

dramatic play kits, which contain a collection of props for common dramatic play themes. Contained in individual labeled boxes, dramatic play kits can include some of the following items:

- **Health theme**—bandages, empty syringes, hospital gowns, stethoscope, empty medicine vials, and similar items donated by local doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers
- **Bakery theme**—rolling pins, cookie cutters, baking pans, muffin liners, aprons
- **Self-care theme**—small mirrors, combs, toothbrushes, hair rollers, empty shampoo bottles, other cosmetic containers
- **Grocery store theme**—empty food containers, cash register, register tapes, bags, play money

Another helpful resource is a flannelboard story file. The flannelboard pieces, a copy of the story, and suggestions for variations can be collected into separate manila envelopes, then labeled and stored in an accessible place. Similar to pulling a book off the bookshelf, flannelboard stories will then be readily available to both teachers and children who wish to use them.

A similar collection of favorites can be put into a song and finger-play file. One way to do this is to type the most frequently used songs and fingerplays on 5″ × 8″ cards, laminate them, punch holes in the upper left corners, alphabetize the cards, and connect them with a key ring. This file can be used by new or substitute teachers and can help refresh the memory of teachers who may have forgotten all the words. Newly acquired songs or fingerplays can be added at any time.

**KEY POINT**

Community resources can provide a variety of interesting materials for early childhood programs.

Numerous community resources can be tapped for useful materials. Often, their scraps can be an early childhood teacher's treasures. Home decorating businesses may be able to contribute color chips and wallpaper or drapery samples. Printing companies may be able to provide trimmings from paper of different colors, sizes, textures, and weights. Carpet sales rooms may make available carpet squares or the heavy inner rolls from carpeting. Businesses that receive copious computer printouts may be able to provide computer printout paper for art and writing projects. Lumber companies are usually willing to share scraps of soft wood or wood shavings. Travel agents may have old travel posters and brochures to contribute. It is a good idea to canvas your community for possible resources.

## PARENTS' ROLE IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT

**KEY POINT**

Parents can be an important resource to the early childhood program in relation to the environment.

Parents can be active participants in matters related to the early childhood environment. They can contribute in a variety of ways to selecting, modifying, or maintaining various aspects of the environment. Some programs have advisory or policy-making parent councils that may be involved in decisions about major purchases or construction.



Parents also often have a strong commitment to their children's program and are willing to spend a few weekend hours helping to paint, clean, varnish, or construct. Many parents contribute to their child's center by making learning materials or contributing throwaways that children can use for creative activities. As in all areas of the early childhood center's functioning, parents can be a tremendous resource in matters related to the environment.

## SUMMARY

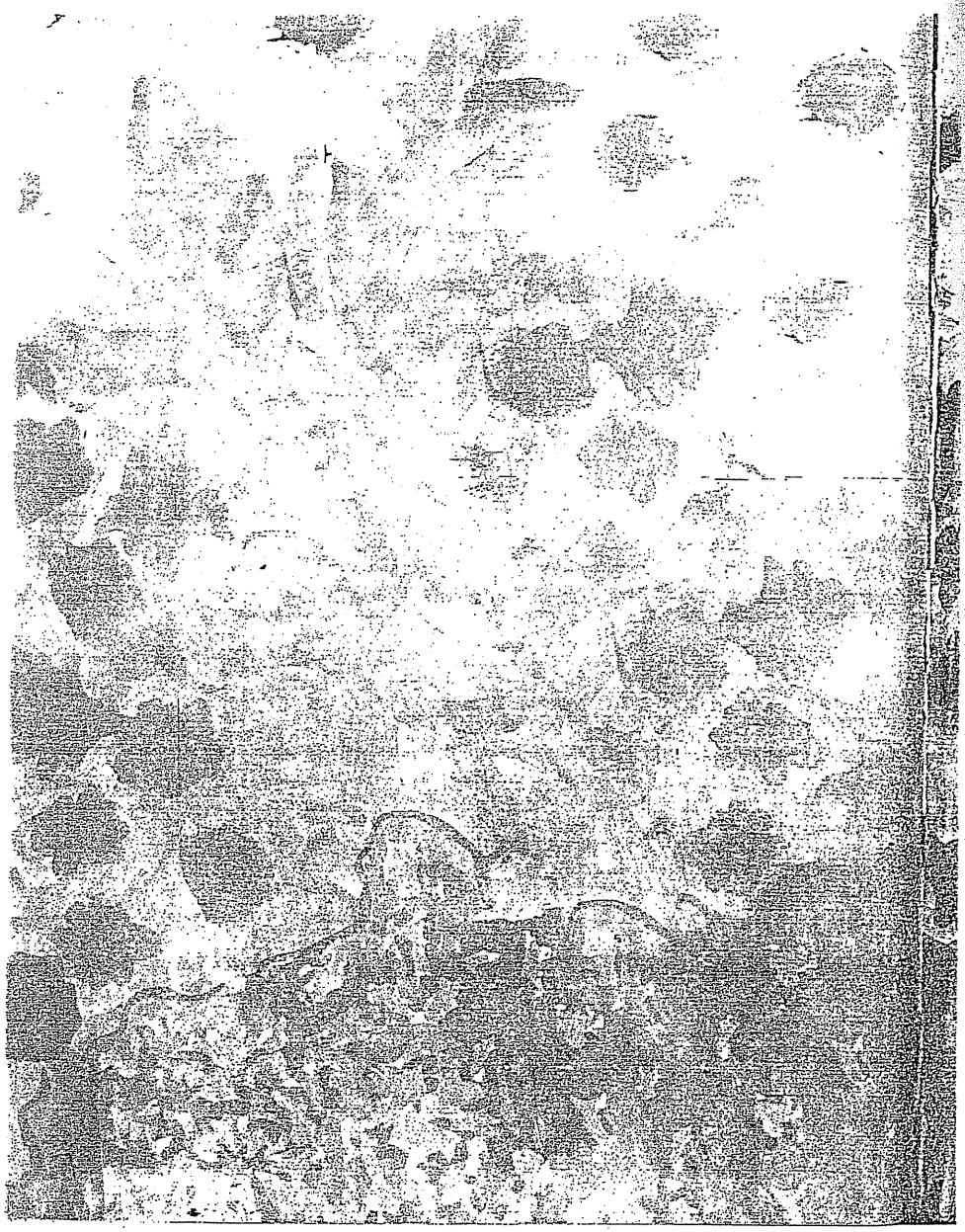
1. The physical environment affects both children and adults.
2. Consider the importance of the indoor environment, focusing on how to use it most effectively to support the development of young children.
3. Consider the outdoor environment and how to maximize its potential.
4. Occasionally the environment must be adapted to meet the requirements of children with special needs.
5. Select developmentally appropriate equipment, with particular emphasis on the role of computers in early childhood programs.
6. Consider criteria for selecting appropriate materials for use in early childhood programs.

## KEY TERMS LIST

adventure playground
behavior setting
computer literacy
creative playgrounds
equipment
learning centers
materials
Montessori equipment
place identity
playscapes
software

## KEY QUESTIONS

1. Talk to two or three children who are four or five years old. Ask them what they like about their classroom and playground. Are the features they mention ones that you consider particularly interesting and noteworthy? What do their answers tell you about these children's interests, attitudes, and needs in relation to the environment?





NAEYC's Position Statement on Technology and Young Children—Ages 3 to 8:
http://www.naeyc.org/resources

Once you access this Web site, click on "position statements" (listed on the left side) and find the position statement on "technology and young children."

Keeping Outdoor Learning Safe:
http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/Children/naeyc5.html

For additional early childhood education resources, visit our Web Site at

**http://www.earlychilded.delmar.com**

CHAPTER

8

# Scheduling and Curriculum Planning

The schedule is the overall structure into which you must fit the curriculum and activities. The schedule provides a sequence for the events of the day as well as the length of time various components will last. It also allows for many types of interactions: between child and child, between adult and child, and among small and large groups. In addition, the schedule provides time to do activities in a variety of environments (Hohmann, Banet, & Weikart, 1995). But more than that, the schedule reflects your program's philosophy, takes into account the needs and interests of the children, and provides the security of a predictable routine for children and teachers (Essa & Rogers, 1992).

Curriculum is fitted within the structure of the schedule. Planning curriculum is at the heart of your program, an opportunity for thoughtfully building on what the children already know, introducing relevant new topics, and creating a positive attitude toward learning. In this chapter we will examine, in detail, guidelines for good scheduling and for effective curriculum planning. As part of the discussion on curriculum planning, we will consider two distinct approaches: the more traditional, theme-based curriculum and the emergent, project-based curriculum.

## COMPONENTS OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SCHEDULE

Most early childhood programs contain some fairly standard elements. How these components are arranged and how much time is allocated to them reflects the school's, as well as the teachers', philosophy and goals. Consider, for instance, a program in which the children spend the bulk of their time in self-selected activities and a program where the teacher directs and controls most of the day's activities. In the first, the philosophy and goals reflect a respect for the child's growing independence, increasing decision-making

skills, and ability to draw what is valuable from the day's experiences. In the second example, the teacher feels a need to supervise the children's experiences closely to ensure that they gain specific skills and information. Both approaches are used, although most early childhood professionals prefer the former, where faith is placed in children's ability to learn and flourish in a well-planned environment. Let us now examine standard components of the early childhood program, keeping in mind that these can be arranged in a great variety of ways.

## Activity Time

activity time—Largest block(s) of time in the early childhood program day during which children can self-select from a variety of activities.

**KEY POINT**

One of the largest time blocks in the early childhood schedule is activity time, during which children select from a variety of developmentally appropriate activities.

The largest block(s) of time each day should be reserved for activities from which the children can select. **Activity time,** in many programs, is also called self-selected learning activities, free play, play time, learning center time, or other similar names that connote that the children make choices about the activities in which they engage. This is the part of the schedule in which you insert many of the activities we will discuss in the next few chapters. A wide variety of well-planned activities should reinforce and support the objectives and theme of the curriculum. Each day's activities should also provide multiple opportunities for the development of fine and gross motor, cognitive, creative, social, and language skills.

In a part-day program, there will usually be only one lengthy activity time block; an all-day child care program will typically have at least one such block in the morning and one in the afternoon. Such time blocks should include at least 45 minutes, (and can be as long as 2 hours or more) to allow children ample time to survey the options, select an activity, get involved in it, and bring it to a satisfactory conclusion. Many children will, of course, participate in more than one activity, but others will spend all of their time with one activity.

Increasingly larger time blocks will be required as children mature and as their attention span increases. Thus, in an after-school program, you may plan up to 2 hours for activity time, assuming, of course, stimulating, age-appropriate activities are available.

A recent study confirms the importance of an adequate-length time block for self-selected play. Christie, Johnsen, and Peckover (1988) compared four- and five-year-olds' social and cognitive levels of involvement in play during a 15-minute and a 30-minute free play period. They found that when the play period was longer, children engaged in more mature play. More specifically, in the longer play period, children engaged in considerably more group play than parallel or solitary play; in the shorter period, there was more onlooker and unoccupied behavior. Similarly, there was significantly more constructive play, in which objects are used to make something, during the longer play period.

Activity time blocks also allow the teachers to interact with children individually or in small groups. Social guidance, informal conversations, well-timed questions, and careful listening give teachers the chance to learn more about the children in the class, develop relationships, introduce or reinforce concepts, evaluate the children's understanding of concepts, or assess developmental status.

When planning the activity time block, consider safety and adequate supervision. Some activities require close attention by an adult,

# PART V

# The How of Early Childhood Education—Curriculum

We will now turn our attention to the *how* of early childhood education, just what it is that involves teachers and children. In Part V, we will examine those aspects of the early childhood program that deal with curriculum.

In small group activities, the teacher focuses on a specific concept that is presented to five or six children at a similar developmental level.

in leading group activities; for instance, "reading" a familiar book, leading songs, and moving the group into transitions. Such opportunities to take over group leadership should, of course, never be imposed and should be conducted as the child chooses. More recent early childhood programs, particularly those based on an emergent curriculum approach, use group times in a different way. In keeping with the more egalitarian relationship between adults and children, group times provide opportunities for the genuine exchange of ideas and exploration of topics, and often involve sub-groups of children, depending on their interests and involvement in the topic under discussion (Fraser & Gestwicki, 1999).

When guiding large group (as well as small group) activities, it is important to remember how children learn and what constitutes developmentally appropriate group activities. Children, as active learners, will gain more from activities that allow for their input, include active involvement, and encourage flexible problem solving. Asking children to provide answers for which there is a "right" or "wrong," or "correct" or "incorrect," response does not support their developmental needs and their growing self-esteem.

## Small Group Activities

**KEY POINT**

During small group activities, a teacher usually presents a concept to a few children, ensuring that the activity matches their abilities and interests.

Some programs include a small group activity time during which five or six children work with one teacher for a short period, generally 10 to 15 minutes. This can be handled by staggering small groups throughout the program day or by having each teacher take a small group during a designated small group time block. Usually such times focus on teaching specific concepts and are geared to the abilities and interests of the children in the group (Hohmann et al., 1995). Children are often grouped by developmental level for small group activities, although Hohmann and colleagues recommend that small groups represent a cross-section of the classroom population to promote cross-learning. In a small group setting, the teacher has an opportunity to pay close attention to each individual child. As you might expect, careful planning is crucial for successful small group activity times.



whereas others can be carried out relatively independently by the children. Such activities as cooking and woodworking require constant teacher attention, for example. Water and sand play, other sensory activities, messy media, and blocks also need close supervision.

For each activity time block, it is important to consider the balance between activities that should be closely supervised and those that are more self-directed, particularly in relation to the number of adults available in the class. It can be easy to lose sight of safety needs in an effort to provide a wide variety of interesting and stimulating activities.

## Large Group Activities

Most programs include one or more times when all of the children and teachers gather together. **Large group time**—variously called circle, story time, group, or other similar names—can be used for many purposes. Some teachers tend to use it in the same way day after day, and others use such times to meet various objectives. Some programs have several group times, each serving a different purpose; for example, morning business (roll call, calendar), story, or music/movement.

**large group time** (also called circle, story, or group time)—Time block(s) during the day when all of the children and teachers join together in a common activity.

**KEY POINT**

Large group times, when teachers and children gather together, can serve a variety of purposes and include many types of activities.

Group times offer the possibility of meeting a wide variety of objectives. For instance, they provide an excellent opportunity to introduce a new curriculum topic or to probe the children's comprehension of concepts and information (Essa & Rogers, 1992). They can also be used for discussions, stories and books, songs, finger plays, movement, socialization, poetry, games, dramatizations, sharing, relaxation exercises, planning and review, calendar or weather, and a host of other activities best carried out with the whole group (McAfee, 1985).

From interviews with and observations of early childhood teachers, McAfee (1985) found that the most popular and frequently observed circle activity was the reading of books or stories. In verbal interviews, teachers indicated that music activities were carried out almost as often as book and story activities, but in actual classroom observations McAfee found music used only about one-third as often as reading activities. "Show and Tell" was observed quite regularly, whereas other types of activities were seen relatively infrequently or not at all.

As part of a recent research study (Essa, 2000), six preschool teachers were videotaped. Their guidance techniques were later analyzed. When children were engaged in self-selected activities there were almost no behavioral concerns. What became quickly obvious, however, was that the bulk of behavior problems occurred during teacher-led group activities. Teachers were constantly reminding children to sit still, listen quietly, or "keep your hands to yourself." Closer examination of the videotapes showed that there was almost no opportunity for the children to be active participants because the teachers did all the talking, controlled the direction of the activities, and held generally over-long group times. In other words, the group activities, in contrast to the other parts of the curriculum, were not developmentally appropriate.

In traditional programs, group times are almost always teacher-initiated and led, although teachers often seek children's input. In fact, older preschoolers and primary children enjoy and are very competent

Time for outdoor play may be affected by the weather, although the weather should never be used as an excuse for not going outside. Children thoroughly enjoy the snow, for instance, if they are properly clothed. Children do not catch cold from playing outside in the winter.

If inclement weather does prevent the children from enjoying outside time, alternative activities should be made available inside so children can expend energy and engage in large motor activity. Many schools have a selection of large motor equipment, such as tumbling mats or an indoor climbing apparatus, to use on rainy days. If this equipment is in a relatively restricted space, then small groups of children should be allowed to use it throughout the day rather than having the entire group involved at one time.

## Cleanup

KEY POINT

Other important components that must be considered in scheduling include cleanup, meals, nap, and transitions.

It is wise to schedule 10 to 15 minutes, particularly after activity times, for children and teachers to participate in putting the classroom back into order. When cleanup time is included in the daily schedule, it conveys that this is an important component of the program.

## Meals

KEY QUESTION

Visit an early childhood program and look at its daily schedule. What elements are included? Does the schedule seem developmentally appropriate by taking into account the needs of the children? Does it provide the kind of balance discussed in this chapter? Would you change anything in this schedule? Why or why not?

Sharing food provides a unique opportunity for socialization and learning; thus, almost every program includes at least one snack, if not several meals. A three-hour program usually includes a snack time around the halfway point of the day. The timing of meals, however, should be dictated by the children's needs, not by a rigid schedule, especially for infants. If it appears that some children get to school having had breakfast several hours before or not having eaten breakfast at all, then an early morning meal should be provided. An alternative, particularly if children's arrival at school is staggered over several hours, is to have a snack available for a period of time and allow children to eat as they feel the need to refuel.

Timing of lunch will depend on the ages of the children, the length of time they are at the center, and when morning snack was served. Younger preschoolers may need lunch at 11:30 A.M. and be ready for a nap by noon. How much time is allocated for each of these meals will depend on the children in the group and the type of meal; generally, however, 15 to 20 minutes for snacks and 20 to 30 minutes for lunch is adequate. Most children can comfortably finish a meal in this period of time.

## Nap or Rest

In full-day programs, children should have time for sleep or rest during the middle of the day, usually sometime after, though not immediately following, lunch. Allocating one to two hours for this time is usually enough (see Chapter 14 for a more detailed discussion). Also be aware of your local regulations for rest time, because some states include specific requirements.



So much learning goes on in the outdoor environment! Large blocks of time for vigorous outdoor play must be an important part of the early childhood schedule.

A somewhat different type of small group activity is an integral part of emergent curriculum programs (Cadwell & Fyfe, 1997). This type of dialogue, although facilitated by the teacher, is not as teacher-directed as the small group activity previously described. Nonetheless, teachers are full participants in such conversations with small groups of children, asking open-ended questions, stimulating thinking, and provoking discussion. The purpose of such dialogue is "to explore the children's ideas" (p. 85). What is especially important is that teachers listen carefully to gain insight into the children's process of thinking. An excellent discussion of how to conduct meaningful conversations with small groups of children can be found in Joanne Hendrick's *First Steps Toward Teaching the Reggio Way* (1997).

## Outdoor Activity

KEY POINT

Large time blocks should be set aside for outdoor activities.

A large time block for outdoor play should be part of the daily schedule. Some adults think of outdoor play merely as a time for children to expend excess energy and for teachers to take a rest. But outdoor time contains far too many valuable opportunities for learning and development to be dismissed in this way. When you think of outdoor play as an integral part of the early childhood experience, it becomes natural to allocate at least 45 minutes to this time block. Keep in mind that outdoor time requires planning in the same way that indoor activity does, and that it involves the same kinds of teacher-child interactions.

Just like during activity times, the teacher's role when outside includes setting up a stimulating environment, providing for each child's individual needs, guiding children's behavior, providing a variety of experiences, taking opportunities to teach concepts, and encouraging exploration and problem solving. In addition, some unique safety concerns require special attention in an outdoor play area. An important skill that you, as the teacher, should develop is the ability to scan, to keep an eye on the entire outdoor play area. It is particularly important to pay attention to the fronts and backs of swings, slides, climbing equipment, tricycles, and other wheeled toys, and the area in and around the sandbox.

Time for outdoor play may be affected by the weather, although the weather should never be used as an excuse for not going outside. Children thoroughly enjoy the snow, for instance, if they are properly clothed. Children do not catch cold from playing outside in the winter.

If inclement weather does prevent the children from enjoying outside time, alternative activities should be made available inside so children can expend energy and engage in large motor activity. Many schools have a selection of large motor equipment, such as tumbling mats or an indoor climbing apparatus, to use on rainy days. If this equipment is in a relatively restricted space, then small groups of children should be allowed to use it throughout the day rather than having the entire group involved at one time.

## Cleanup

KEY POINT

Other important components that must be considered in scheduling include cleanup, meals, nap, and transitions.

It is wise to schedule 10 to 15 minutes, particularly after activity times, for children and teachers to participate in putting the classroom back into order. When cleanup time is included in the daily schedule, it conveys that this is an important component of the program.

## Meals

KEY QUESTION

Visit an early childhood program and look at its daily schedule. What elements are included? Does the schedule seem developmentally appropriate by taking into account the needs of the children? Does it provide the kind of balance discussed in this chapter? Would you change anything in this schedule? Why or why not?

Sharing food provides a unique opportunity for socialization and learning; thus, almost every program includes at least one snack, if not several meals. A three-hour program usually includes a snack time around the halfway point of the day. The timing of meals, however, should be dictated by the children's needs, not by a rigid schedule, especially for infants. If it appears that some children get to school having had breakfast several hours before or not having eaten breakfast at all, then an early morning meal should be provided. An alternative, particularly if children's arrival at school is staggered over several hours, is to have a snack available for a period of time and allow children to eat as they feel the need to refuel.

Timing of lunch will depend on the ages of the children, the length of time they are at the center, and when morning snack was served. Younger preschoolers may need lunch at 11:30 A.M. and be ready for a nap by noon. How much time is allocated for each of these meals will depend on the children in the group and the type of meal; generally, however, 15 to 20 minutes for snacks and 20 to 30 minutes for lunch is adequate. Most children can comfortably finish a meal in this period of time.

## Nap or Rest

In full-day programs, children should have time for sleep or rest during the middle of the day, usually sometime after, though not immediately following, lunch. Allocating one to two hours for this time is usually enough (see Chapter 14 for a more detailed discussion). Also be aware of your local regulations for rest time, because some states include specific requirements.



## Transitions

Those times between activities are as important as the activities themselves. Failing to plan how children will get from one area to another—from group to the bathroom to snack, or from cleanup time to putting on coats to going outside—can result in chaos. We will discuss transitional techniques in more detail in Chapter 14 in the context of group guidance.

## Scheduling for Infants and Toddlers

In an infant and toddler program, the schedule is initially set by the needs of the children and, gradually, shifts toward a more uniform schedule as the children get older. An infant program has to revolve around the eating, waking/sleeping, and elimination patterns of each child. The daily program for each child is uniquely tailored around her or his physiological patterns. As they get older, children begin to eat at times more consistent with adult meals; sleep primarily at night with two time spans, then one time span, for sleep; and regulate their elimination schedule. Thus, by the end of the toddler years, children are ready to enter into a more uniform schedule that applies to the entire group. One of the best ways to meet the needs of infants and toddlers and to help them make the gradual transition from an individual to a group schedule is to provide a consistent caregiver who remains with them throughout this period (Essa, Favre, Thweatt, & Waugh, 1999). See EXPERIENCES for an example of such an arrangement.

# GUIDELINES FOR PROGRAM SCHEDULING

KEY POINT

In planning a schedule, it is important to balance times when children are active and when they are quiet.

These components of the early childhood day—activity time, large group activities, small group activities, outdoor activity, cleanup, meals, nap or rest, and transitions—can be arranged in the daily schedule in a wide variety of ways. Let's examine some guidelines that will help in setting an effective schedule.

## Alternating Active and Quiet Times

Children need time both to expend energy and to rest. A useful rule in scheduling is to look at the total time in terms of cycles of activity and rest, boisterousness and quiet, energy and relaxation. Categorize the descriptions of time blocks listed in your daily schedule in terms of active (for example, activity time, outdoor play, large group activities that involve movement) and less active times (for example, story, small group activities, nap, snack).

In applying this guideline, think about providing the opportunity to be physically active after quiet times and to slow down after active involvement. Also consider the total consecutive time that children are expected to sit quietly. Thus, reconsider a schedule in which children sit at a large group activity from 10:00 to 10:20, then move into a small group activity from 10:20 to 10:35, followed by snack until 11:00. Such a schedule ought to include an active break within that hour, in which children shift from one relatively inactive period to another. Similarly,

# EXPERIENCES

## CHAPTER 8

### GERRI, Head Teacher, Infant/Toddler Class

#### Attachment and Continuity

In our center, the three infant/toddler head teachers stay with a group of children for three years. Teachers and children move to new rooms as the children's development indicates new skills and needs. So, over a three-year period, a strong bond is formed between teachers and each of the children in their group. Above everything else, the children gain a good foundation of self-esteem; this, in turn, leads to a strong sense of independence. All other skills develop naturally because the children have gained a strong sense of trust and a strong attachment to their teacher.

At one time, each of the teachers had a group of infants, or one-year-olds, or two-year-olds, for one year. Then the children moved on to a new room and a new teacher; but things are very different now. I've reflected on how this new, three-year rotation has affected all of us, children and teachers. I think that my whole approach is different. When the children were with me for one year, I tended to focus on those that had the greatest needs; not that the others were ignored, but they did not get my wholehearted commitment. Now I find that the three-year period I spend with children gives me a chance to get to know each one intimately and in depth. Somehow, I don't feel the pressure of having to "accomplish" certain goals; these seem to get accomplished anyway, but much more flexibly.

I know the children very well. I know their moods, the nuances of their communication, their body language, their strengths, their needs. And they know me. They know my body language; for instance, what a certain look from across the room means. I use a lot of expressive facial expressions. We can "read" each other. The children are comfortable with me because we have such a long-standing relationship based on trust. I've known them virtually all their lives. The continuity of being with me, an adult to whom they have a strong attachment, for three years provides an anchor for them.

Perhaps the most important aspect of our relationship is that I don't get into power struggles with the children. I try not to limit them and I give them as much independence as possible. In many ways I recognize that there is no need for me to impose an all-or-nothing situation on children. They can make choices about play, about eating, about sleeping, about toileting. I have found that when a child resists I need to step back and reassess the situation. More often than not, I am imposing a decision that the child could have made on his or her own. So, I always try to examine the child's needs and to give the child a choice whenever possible. When children are allowed to make their own decisions, they are less likely to resist when there is no choice possible.

I have read some of the recent research about how important children's need for consistency and continuity is. Because our director and the other infant/toddler staff are aware of this need, we changed our program to make a better environment for children. It's been a wonderful change! We found that having the same teacher stay with the children for three years helps the children develop the self-esteem and independence that lays the foundation for development in the rest of their lives.





when children have been engaged in active exploration, a quieter time should follow. One caution: Do not expect children to move immediately from very active involvement, such as outdoor play, to being very quiet, such as nap time. For such times, plan a more gentle transition that helps children settle down gradually.

## Balancing Child-Initiated and Teacher-Initiated Activities

Most early childhood programs provide large time blocks in which children can make decisions about the activities in which they will participate and how they will carry them out. Most programs also include times when teachers direct activities. Typically, activity time and outdoor time accommodate child initiation, whereas small and large group times generally involve teacher initiation. Some functional activities, such as snack, nap, and cleanup, require children to follow the direction of adults and thus do not entail children's initiative.

A balance between child and teacher control must be carefully considered. When young children are allowed to decide how they will spend their time, they develop qualities such as autonomy, judgment, independent decision making, social give-and-take, initiative, exploration, and creativity. In addition, children are also expected to develop a reasonable amount of compliance, understand the rules of group behavior, and accept the authority and wisdom of adults. Generally, when adults convey respect for and trust in the ability of children to make appropriate decisions, children will reciprocate with enthusiastic participation in adult-initiated activities. Of course, teacher-initiated activities must be developmentally appropriate and engage the interest of the children. Most of the day's activities should, however, be child selected and allow children to move from activity to activity at their own pace (Miller, 1984).

**KEY QUESTION #2**

Consider the issue of child-initiated vs. teacher-initiated activity. Do you agree with the author that there should be ample time for children to make decisions and exercise independence or do you think more teacher control is important? Note that not everyone agrees on this question. Discuss this question with others in your class and consider both sides of the issue.

**KEY POINT**

There should be a balance between child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities to allow children enough time to make decisions and exercise their growing autonomy.

## Activity Level of the Children

By nature, young children are active and must have many opportunities for expending energy. Some children, however, are more active than others. Occasionally, you will find that you have a group in which a large portion of the children is particularly active. If this occurs, a schedule that has worked for you in the past may not serve as well because the needs of the children are different. In such a case, adjusting the schedule as well as the classroom arrangement and the types of activities planned will help the class run more smoothly. You might, for instance, carry out some activities, which are traditionally indoor ones, outside and plan either a longer or an added outdoor time block.

**KEY POINT**

The activity level of the children is an important consideration in making scheduling decisions.

## Developmental Level of the Children

As children get older, their attention span noticeably increases; thus, your daily schedule should reflect the group's ages and developmental levels (Miller, 1984). For older children, plan longer time blocks for small group, large group, and activity times. However, younger children require added time for meals, nap, and cleanup. With a group of very

**KEY POINT**

The ages of the children will have an impact on the schedule because older children have longer attention spans and younger children may require more time for some routines.

It is important to consider the children's overall activity level. Sometimes a particularly active group of children needs additional time outdoors. Alternatively, you may want to plan more activities that let children expend excess energy indoors.

young children, you may also want to schedule regular times for toileting; for instance, before going outdoors and before nap.

The length of large group time can be particularly problematic. The time allocated to such activities will depend on the ages and attention spans of the children. Children can, of course, sit for a longer period of time if the activity captivates their interest; but, generally, a well-paced, shorter group time is more rewarding for all. As the program year progresses, reassess the length of group time and adjust it according to the children's interest.

## Group Size

KEY POINT

Creative scheduling can provide an effective way of working with large groups of children.

Group size may also influence the schedule. Particularly with a large group of children, creative scheduling can be used to allow for more individualized attention to children. One example is a church-supported child care center in which the one large room, in which more than 50 children of varying ages spend the day together, dictates scheduling considerations. Although the children and teachers share the same indoor and outdoor space, the director has created five subgroups of children and teachers who alternate use of the outdoor area, the indoor large-motor area, and the large variety of other learning centers. Thus, while one group is involved in a music activity, another will be outside, while the other groups are engaged in self-selected activities. The children know that they will also have a chance to participate in the other activities because space, teachers, and time blocks are rotated for different groups of children.

## Arrival of Children

KEY POINT

The schedule also needs to take into account whether children all arrive at school at the same time or whether, as in most child care facilities, their arrival is staggered over a period of time.

How children arrive and leave the center—whether over staggered periods of time or at about the same time—has to be taken into account in scheduling. In most child care centers, the early morning period, until most or all of the children are at school, and the late afternoon period, when children start leaving for home, require some special considerations. The arrival or departure of children makes carrying out teacher-initiated activities difficult because the teacher and other children are



interrupted frequently and because the arriving or departing children will not get the full benefit of the teacher-led activity. Thus, self-selected activities, in which children can control engagement and disengagement, should be available during such times. In programs where all the children arrive at the same time, however, the first activity might be a teacher-initiated group time to introduce the plan for the day.

## Seasonal Considerations

KEY POINT

In a location where the weather gets very cold or very hot in winter or summer, the schedule may need to be adjusted to include less outdoor time.

In geographic locations where the weather varies considerably from season to season, you may want to adjust the schedule according to the time of year. For instance, during winter in a New England child care program, it would be difficult to keep to a schedule that contains three outdoor time blocks when each involves helping children get into their snowsuits, boots, mittens, and hats and then getting them out of such clothing at the end of the outdoor time. At the same time, a lengthy outdoor time is inappropriate when the temperature is below freezing or, for that matter, when it reaches 100 degrees. Yet once spring arrives and the temperature is balmy, the schedule should allow for longer outdoor time. The weather can certainly affect your schedule, so a flexible approach and attitude are important when working with young children.

# TYPES OF SCHEDULES

KEY QUESTION

You probably know children like Rita who spend most of their day in a child care center. How are the needs of these children met? How do they differ from a child like David? In what ways can the schedule take the children's needs into consideration?

KEY POINT

Schedules for various programs, (for instance, infant care, preschool, child care, before- and after-school care) will vary because they meet different needs for the children; the needs of teachers also must be considered in the schedule.

Obviously, the schedules of an infant program, a 2½-hour preschool, a child care center, and a before- and after-school program will differ and must be designed to meet the unique needs of the children and teachers. Take the example of two children to illustrate how the program must meet children's needs. David attends a three-hour morning preschool program because his parents want him to have an enriching social and learning experience. He gets up around 7:00, eats breakfast with his parents before his father leaves for work, and plays for an hour or so before his mother takes him to school at the nearby recreation center. At lunch his mother picks him up and he has lunch with her and his younger sister Tina, after which he reads or plays with his mother while Tina takes a nap. After dinner, Dad reads the children a story, and they go to bed by 8:00. Rita, who lives with her single mother and two older sisters, has been in child care since she was six weeks old. She gets up at 6:30 and they are out of the house by 7:15, with or without time for breakfast. She spends the day at the child care center, from about 7:45 to 5:30 in the evening. After picking up her sisters, the family stops at the grocery store or sometimes McDonald's, gets home by about 6:30, followed by dinner, some TV, and bed time. Clearly the two children have very different needs that their respective early childhood programs have to meet.

Although the main scheduling consideration for full-day programs is the needs of the children, the schedule must also take into account the requirements of the staff. Early childhood teachers spend long and difficult hours working with their young charges, a job that can be tiring, energizing, and frustrating, as well as rewarding. Complementary to the schedule provided for the children has to be a schedule that provides rest, rejuvenation, and planning time for the adults.

When the needs of the adults are considered, the children's needs will be better met, and teacher burnout is less likely to occur.

## Examples of Schedules

**KEY POINT**

Schedules for infants and toddlers need to be completely flexible, set by the individual schedules of the children.

After examining standard components of the early childhood program, guidelines for scheduling, and differences between preschool and child care, you probably have concluded correctly that a daily schedule can be arranged in numerous ways. Figures 8-1, 8-2, 8-3, and 8-4 show four examples of schedules that consider many variables. Of course, any schedule you devise must meet the unique characteristics of your group and children, your philosophy, and your program.

## FLEXIBILITY OF THE SCHEDULE

The schedule provides the framework within which your program functions. You might think of the schedule as the skeleton and the curriculum and activities as the flesh that fills out and defines the character of the inner structure. A sound skeleton is vital to a healthy body, just as a well-put-together schedule is integral to a well-run program.

The daily schedule also provides security, because it gives the day a predictable order. A good schedule provides the predictability that

**FIGURE 8-1 Full-Day Program for a Group of Four- and Five-Year-Olds**

| | |
|---|---|
| 7:30–9:00 | **Staggered Arrival:** Teachers greet children and talk to parents; self-selected activities such as books, manipulatives, play dough, and blocks. |
| 7:30–8:30 | Breakfast available. |
| 9:00–9:20 | **Group Time:** Introduction of day's activities; story or discussion related to day's topic. |
| 9:20–10:30 | **Activity Time:** Self-selected activities from learning centers, or teacher-planned projects. |
| 10:30–10:40 | **Cleanup Time.** |
| 10:40–11:00 | **Snack.** |
| 11:00–11:15 | **Small Group Activity:** Teacher-initiated, small group activity to reinforce specific concepts. |
| 11:15–12:00 | **Outdoor Time:** Self-selected activities. |
| 12:00–12:20 | **Group Time:** Recap of morning; story; music. |
| 12:20–12:30 | **Wash for Lunch.** |
| 12:30–1:00 | **Lunch.** |
| 1:00–3:00 | **Nap:** Transition to nap and sleep for those requiring a nap. |
| 1:00–1:30 | **Rest:** Quiet individual activity for nonsleepers. |
| 1:30–3:00 | **Activity Time:** Self-selected activities, both inside and outside; as sleeping children wake, they gradually join others. |
| 3:00–3:20 | **Snack.** |
| 3:20–4:00 | **Activity Time:** Continued self-selected activities both inside and outside. |
| 4:00–4:10 | **Cleanup.** |
| 4:10–4:30 | **Group Time:** Closing of day; story; movement activity. |
| 4:30–5:30 | **Staggered Departure:** Self-selected activities until all children leave. |



**FIGURE 8-2 Full-Day Program for a Group of Two- to Three-Year-Olds**

| | |
|---|---|
| 7:30–9:00 | **Staggered Arrival:** Teachers greet children and talk to parents; self-selected activities such as books, manipulatives, play dough, and blocks. |
| 7:30–8:30 | Breakfast available. |
| 9:00–9:15 | **Group Time:** Introduce day's activities; story. |
| 9:15–10:00 | **Activity Time:** Self-selected activities from learning centers, or teacher-planned projects. |
| 10:00–10:15 | **Cleanup Time.** |
| 10:15–10:20 | **Snack.** |
| 10:20–10:30 | **Toileting.** |
| 10:30–11:15 | **Outdoor Time:** Self-selected activities. |
| 11:15–11:30 | **Group Time:** Story, music, finger plays. |
| 11:30–11:45 | **Wash for Lunch.** |
| 11:45–12:15 | **Lunch.** |
| 12:15–2:15 | **Nap:** Transition to nap and sleep. |
| 2:15–2:45 | **Toileting followed by Snack.** |
| 2:45–3:30 | **Outdoor Time.** |
| 3:30–4:15 | **Activity Time:** Self-selected activities. |
| 4:15–4:30 | **Cleanup.** |
| 4:30–4:45 | **Group Time:** Story, puppets, movement. |
| 4:45–5:30 | **Staggered Departure:** Self-selected activities until all children leave. |

**FIGURE 8-3 Half-Day Program for Three- and Four-Year-Olds**

| | |
|---|---|
| 8:50–9:00 | **Arrival.** |
| 9:00–9:20 | **Group Time:** Introduce day's activities; story, music. |
| 9:20–9:40 | **Snack.** |
| 9:40–10:30 | **Activity Time:** Self-selected activities. |
| 10:30–10:40 | **Cleanup.** |
| 10:40–11:00 | **Small Group Activity.** |
| 11:00–11:40 | **Outdoor Time.** |
| 11:40–11:55 | **Group Time:** Closing and recap of day. |
| 11:55–12:00 | **Departure:** Gather belongings; teachers talk to parents briefly. |

**FIGURE 8-4 Before- and After-School Program**

| | |
|---|---|
| 6:00–8:30 | **Arrival:** Breakfast available, self-selected activities; outdoor play, weather permitting. |
| 8:30 | **Board Bus for School.** |
| 3:00–4:15 | **Arrival:** Snack available until 4:15; outdoor play, with organized games available. |
| 4:15–4:30 | **Group meeting, discussion.** |
| 4:30–6:00 | **Self-selected indoor activities:** Projects, clubs, activity centers, homework, and so on. |

The schedule may need to be rearranged according to the weather. If winters are severe, it would be difficult to help the entire group get in and out of full snow gear several times a day. Think about your own part of the country. What climatic conditions might affect the schedule during different seasons?

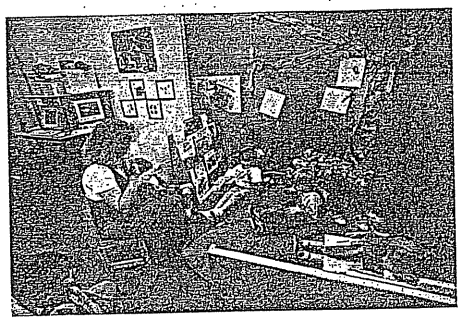
children need, and they soon learn the sequence of activities. Thus, you can say to a child, "I know you are anxious for your mother to come. After we finish cleaning up, we will go outside. Later, when we come back inside, we will read a story, and then your mother will be here." The child can relate to this temporal time frame because he or she is familiar with the schedule.

The schedule should also allow for flexibility, rather than being rigidly followed. There are many occasions when the set time frame should be altered. For instance, if you find that the children are particularly engrossed in activity time, extend that time and shorten a later time block; the clock should not arbitrarily cut off involved play. If it has been raining relentlessly for two weeks and today is a beautiful, sunny day, plan to spend a large portion of the day outside so everyone can enjoy the nice weather. Similarly, if, despite your best efforts, the children are restless and uninterested in your group activity, shorten the time rather than allowing a negative situation to develop. In other words, use cues from the children—and your judgment—to adapt the schedule if it will improve the flow of the day and better meet the needs of the children. You might also ask the children what changes in the schedule they would suggest. Their insights will surprise you!

Some large early childhood centers, because they have multiple classes that share some common facilities, establish a centerwide schedule. Such a schedule makes flexibility of certain aspects of the day more difficult, but still allows for some latitude. It may not be possible to alter the time allocated for outside play when classes rotate the use of the playground, or of meals if they share a common dining room; however, self-contained parts of the schedule, such as activity or group time, should be adapted as required.

In infant programs, there are multiple daily schedules. Each child has an individual schedule, set by his or her own needs and rhythms of being awake and sleeping, eating, and elimination. Furthermore, as children get older, their schedules change and they spend more time alert, playing, exploring their environment, and interacting with peers and nurturing adults. Teachers need to be very flexible, adjusting their own time use to the needs of the children. Toddlers, however, begin to establish a more predictable routine that resembles that of the other





Although the daily schedule should be predictable, it also needs to remain flexible. If, for instance, the children seem unusually inattentive and restless at group time, shorten it.

children in the group. Nonetheless, flexibility is still very important because there will be many individual variations in schedule. Especially important parts of the daily schedule for infants and toddlers are arrival and departure times, those transitions between home and school that should promote security and calm for the children as well as facilitate communication among adults (Wortham, 1994).

## WHAT IS CURRICULUM?

Now that we have discussed the daily schedule, let's turn to an examination of the **curriculum**, the content and substance of that schedule. The term curriculum has a somewhat different connotation in early childhood than in elementary, secondary, or higher education. In these settings, curriculum often refers to a course of study on a specific topic, such as a curriculum in history, social studies, physics, reading, or any other subject. Thus, students typically are in the midst of several curricula, which are not necessarily connected to each other. In early childhood, curriculum tends to be viewed more holistically, and all aspects of the program are integrated and related. In fact, in early childhood, even the word *curriculum* is not used uniformly; for instance, some writers replace it with the word *program* (Almy, 1975).

**curriculum**—Overall master plan of the early childhood program, reflecting its philosophy, into which specific activities are fit.

**KEY POINT**

Early childhood professionals view curriculum as dealing with the "whole child," not focused on only one facet, such as intellectual development.

Most early childhood professionals today view curriculum as integrally tied to a concern for dealing comprehensively with "the whole child," the child's physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development (Williams, 1987). The foundation for sound program development is based on research and theoretical knowledge that helps us understand how children learn, what makes for a good learning environment, and what curriculum material is suitable for young children.

A recent development in early childhood programming that concerns many professionals is the proliferation of curricula and teaching materials aimed at accelerating young children's development (Elkind, 1987b; Gallagher & Coche, 1987; Minuchin, 1987). Advertisements for preschool programs as well as books, kits, and other teaching materials promise parents brighter children, toddlers who read and do math, or future Harvard graduates.

# A CLOSER LOOK

## Developmentally Appropriate Practice

You have seen the term *developmentally appropriate practice* (DAP) used on a number of occasions in this text, and you might have asked yourself, What exactly is DAP? NAEYC publishes the DAP statement (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), in which there is considerable discussion and clarification of the ideals and concepts included in this statement. "*Developmentally appropriate practices* result from the process of professionals making decisions about the well-being and education of children" (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 8).

These decisions are based on an interplay of three sources of information that serve as a foundation for professionals working with young children—general child development; specifics about the strengths, needs, and interests of individual children; and the sociocultural contexts of the children's family lives. None of these can be left out in decisions about programs for young children. In other words, you, as a teacher, continually need to keep in mind information about age norms, each individual child's fit to these, and the family's culture and values as you make decisions about the program.

DAP addresses decisions relevant to curriculum at great length. To be appropriate, curriculum must be challenging, relevant, and interesting to children. The authors consider that too many young children today are subject to developmentally inappropriate curriculum either because it demands too little or too much (of the wrong things) of them. If curriculum is based on learning a set of narrow basic skills that address for instance items on a standardized test, countless opportunities for more complex learning are lost and children are left bored and unmotivated. In other instances, curriculum is based on the next year's expectations, and children are expected to learn inappropriate content through inappropriate methods; for instance, large group instruction where children must sit still and listen to the teacher.

Curriculum, to be developmentally appropriate, must incorporate all areas of development, include a broad range of content that is relevant and meaningful to the children; build on what children already know by adding depth and complexity; cross traditional subject matter to help children make connections and facilitate concept development; promote development of knowledge, skills, and a positive disposition toward learning; allow children to use scientific principles of inquiry and experimentation appropriate to their age; incorporate their home culture and language as well as the culture of the community; and set goals for children that are attainable and realistic. The DAP statement also expands on the all-important role of the teacher to respect and know each child well and to facilitate learning, peer collaboration, and a sense of responsibility.

What DAP provides is some reasonably reliable principles for guiding decisions about what's appropriate for any given group in a specific context. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 39).

As an aspiring teacher of young children, it would be well worth the investment of your time in carefully reading and thinking about Bredekamp and Copple's *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8*.





Many accelerated preschool curricula are based primarily on a downward escalation of curriculum, presenting elementary school tasks and methods to younger children (Bredekamp, as quoted in Shell, 1989). Elkind (1987b) warns that programs that teach reading, math, ballet, or gymnastics to very young children should be considered "miseducation" because they put children at risk for short- and long-term stress and other problems. There is no research-based support for such practices; on the contrary, research tells us that they tend to be damaging.

So, as you begin to think about an appropriate curriculum for young children, where do you turn? It might be helpful to remember that young children are eager, absorbent learners, curious and interested in learning as much about their world as possible. Children are equipped with a drive to explore and discover, an urge to see and feel and hear firsthand, and a thirst for new experiences in both physical and social realms. This suggests that we do not have to force-feed children what we think they should learn. Rather, we can plan a curriculum based on the faith that children's innate interest in their world will lead them to appropriate learning, given a suitable learning environment and knowledgeable adult guidance.

## Children's Development and Curriculum

What you include in the curriculum must be directly related to the children in your program. Curriculum that does not fit the comprehension level, abilities, needs, and interests of the children is meaningless. To plan an appropriate program requires knowledge about the age group of your class, about family characteristics and backgrounds, and about the individual variations among the children in the class.

First of all, a sound understanding of child development is essential to curriculum planning. A general comprehension of what four-years-olds are like is basic to planning for a class of fours. Not only does such knowledge tell you what to expect of this age group in terms of physical, cognitive, and social ability, but it also helps you understand what interests four-year-olds often share.

Furthermore, the more you know about the backgrounds of the children, the more specifically you can plan curriculum to meet the characteristics of the group. Any ethnic, cultural, religious, or regional factors unique to the group can be incorporated to enhance the curriculum and to help children feel good about their uniqueness.

In addition, your ability to observe children and glean information from your observations will help you in developing an appropriate curriculum for the individuals in the class. Topics and activities must be matched carefully to the general abilities of the children as a group, but variations within the group and individual needs of children must be recognized. If children with special needs are included in your class, it is particularly important to ensure that your classroom provides an appropriate program for them.

One of the most valuable guides in developing curriculum is NAEYC's *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children From Birth Through Age 8* (Bredekamp, & Copple, 1997). This resource provides a philosophical rationale as

**KEY QUESTION**

What are your memories of your earliest school experiences? What kinds of activities were involved? Can you glean from your recollections what type of curriculum your preschool, child care, kindergarten, or first-grade teacher might have been following?

**KEY POINT**

Particularly important is the match between the children's development levels, abilities, needs, and interests and the curriculum. This involves understanding child development principles and knowing the characteristics of each individual child in the group.

Appropriate curriculum is based on the children's abilities and experiences. A theme related to fruits and vegetables can be reinforced through a lotto game in which children match and group food items.

well as specific and pragmatic information on appropriate and inappropriate practices when working with young children. (See "A Closer Look" in this chapter.)

## Types of Curriculum

The early childhood curriculum is the result of both long-range and short-term planning. Many programs start with a master plan that covers a sizable period (a year, for instance), and is then filled in with details for shorter segments of time. Such programs generally base curriculum on a series of themes. In other programs, the curriculum is derived from the interests of the children; planning is generally more spontaneous and flexible in such programs. Such a strategy is called emergent curriculum, and includes the kind of program used in Reggio Emilia (see Chapter 5) and in other project-based approaches (e.g., Helm & Katz, 2001). In this section we will discuss both of these widely-used approaches.

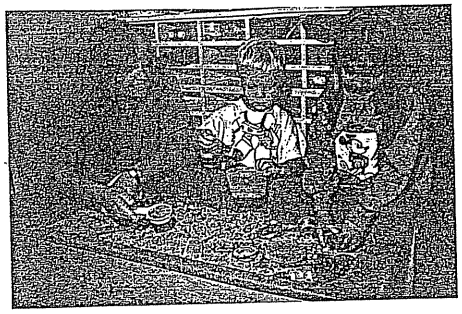
### Themes

**KEY POINT**

One method of curriculum planning revolves around themes, which are usually determined ahead of time by the teacher. Appropriate topics for themes should be derived from the children's life experiences, including the children themselves, their families, and the community.

Many early childhood programs are based on a thematic approach. Usually, the teacher decides ahead of time on a series of themes that are relevant to children, which, based on his or her best estimate, would engage their interest. Such themes can range from familiar topics such as family, pets, and the grocery store, to more remote ones such as dinosaurs and the night sky. Content of an appropriate early childhood curriculum should be derived from the children's life experiences, based on what is concrete, and tied to their emerging skills. Consider that young children have been part of their physical and social world for only a very short time. They have so much to learn about the people, places, objects, and experiences in their environment. When you give careful consideration to making the elements of the environment meaningful and understandable to children, you need not seek esoteric and unusual topics. Children's lives offer a rich set of topics on which to build a theme-based curriculum, including learning about themselves, their families, and the larger community in which they live (Essa & Rogers, 1992).





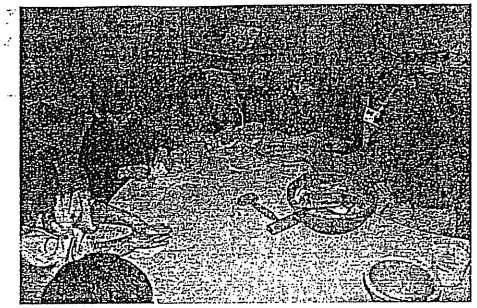
Having a sound understanding of child development gives you the background to plan developmentally appropriate activities.

**Children As the Focus of Curriculum.** The most crucial skills with which young children can be armed to face the future are feelings of self-worth and competence. Children are well equipped for success if they are secure about their identities, feel good about themselves, and meet day-to-day tasks and challenges with a conviction that they can tackle almost anything. The curriculum can foster such attributes by contributing to children's self-understanding and providing repeated reinforcement and affirmation of their capabilities, individual uniqueness, and importance.

Self-understanding comes from learning more about oneself—one's identity, uniqueness, body, feelings, physical and emotional needs, likes and dislikes, skills and abilities, and self-care. Children enjoy learning about themselves, so a focus on children as part of the curriculum can and should take up a significant portion of time. It is important, however, to ensure that planned activities are age appropriate so they contribute to both self-understanding and positive self-esteem. Two-year-olds, for instance, are still absorbed in learning to label body parts; thus, activities that contribute to sharpening this language skill are appropriate. Older preschoolers and school-aged children, however, are more interested in finer details. For example, they enjoy examining hair follicles under a microscope or observing how the joints of a skeleton move in comparison to their own bodies.

**The Family As the Focus of Curriculum.** The family is vitally relevant to children and provides another rich basis for curriculum topics. We can help children build an understanding and appreciation of the roles of the family, similarities among families, the uniqueness of each family, different family forms, the tasks of families, and relationships among family members. Similarly, an examination of the children's family homes, means of transportation, food preferences, celebrations, parental occupations, and patterns of communication also provide appropriate curriculum topics. You might invite family members to come into the classroom and share special knowledge and talents. Or, children as well as teachers might bring photographs of their families to share.

Themes that focus on the family contribute to children's feelings of self-esteem and pride. They can share information about something



Follow-up activities help reinforce and clarify concepts learned on the field trip. After a visit to the bakery, the children are now kneading bread dough that will be baked in the school kitchen. How does such an activity reinforce what was learned at the bakery?

central to their lives, while at the same time expand their understanding of the family life of the other children. While such learning strengthens children's emerging socialization, it also contributes to cognitive development. Teachers help children make comparisons, note similarities and differences, organize information, and classify various aspects of family structure.

**The Community As the Focus of Curriculum.** Children's awareness of their world can particularly be expanded through themes related to the community. Young children have had experience with numerous aspects of their community, especially shopping, medical, and recreational elements. The community and those who live and work in it can certainly extend the walls of your program and offer a wealth of learning opportunities and curriculum material.

From the community and the people who work in it, children can learn about local forms of transportation; food growing, processing, and distribution; health services, including the role of doctors, nurses, dentists, dental hygienists, health clinics, and hospitals; safety provisions such as fire and police departments; communications facilities, including radio and television stations, newspapers, telephone services, and libraries; and local recreational facilities, such as parks, zoos, and museums. Children can visit an endless variety of appropriate places through field trips. (In Chapter 14, we will discuss field trips in more detail.) In addition, community professionals can be invited to visit your class and share information and tools of their professions with the children.

You can help children begin to build an understanding of the community as a social system by focusing on the interrelatedness of the people who live and work in your area. For instance, people are both providers and consumers of goods and services; the dentist buys bread that the baker produces, and the baker visits the dentist when he has a cavity.

In addition, the larger physical environment of the area in which you live provides a setting worth exploring with the children in your class. Your approach will differ, depending on whether your community is nestled in the mountains, by the ocean, or in the midst of rolling plains. Most young children living in Kansas, for instance, will not have experienced the ocean. It is difficult to convey what the ocean is like to someone who has never seen it, and this is particularly true for children who rely on concrete, firsthand experience. Therefore, it makes little sense to plan a unit on "the ocean" when it is more than a thousand miles away. Instead, focus on what is nearby and real in the environment, on what children have some familiarity with and can actually experience.



Cooperative formulating of lesson plans ensures that all teachers are familiar with the objectives and the activities planned to meet these objectives.

## DEVELOPING WRITTEN PLANS FOR THEME-BASED CURRICULUM

As we discussed earlier, curriculum can be viewed as a comprehensive master plan. Once this larger curriculum is in place, units that cover shorter periods of time, daily lesson plans, and individual activities can be developed to fit into the curriculum. We will examine each of these four elements and briefly discuss staff involvement in planning.

### Planning the Overall Curriculum

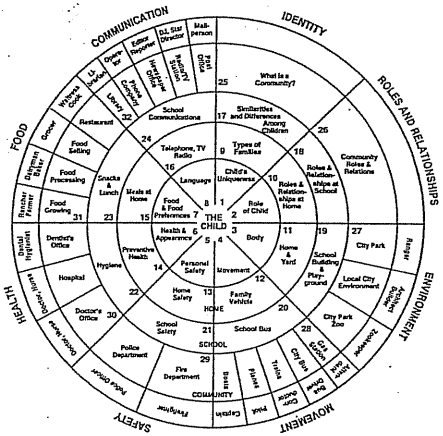
**KEY POINT**

A written overall curriculum or master plan for a relatively long period of time, such as a year, will facilitate further planning.

The preceding discussions—that curriculum is based on enhancing the total development of children, that it is founded on a good understanding of children, and that it derives its content from children's life experiences—provide direction for curriculum planning. Many programs develop a master plan that spans a typical cycle of time—in most instances, this is a year—and defines some broad topics you wish to cover. Putting together a curriculum master plan requires thoughtful consideration. It should provide a flexible guide, which gives general direction for the year but also allows for input from the children and personalization to reflect the character of the class and its individual children and teachers as the year progresses.

One example of how to organize a master plan is the Self-Concept Curriculum (Essa & Rogers, 1992), which covers four general areas, beginning with the child, then moving on to home and family, school and friends, and community and community helpers. In this curriculum, each of these four areas is further broken down into eight topics—identity, roles and relationships, environment, movement, safety, health, food, and communication. Together, these four general areas and their

**FIGURE 8-5 The Self-Concept Curriculum Model**




From Essa, E. L., & Rogers, P. R. (1992). *An early childhood curriculum: From developmental model to application.* Clifton Park, NY: Delmar Learning.

eight subsections result in 32 curriculum units (see Figure 8-5). The Self-Concept Curriculum provides a logical progression of topics, which moves from what is closest to the children, to increasingly wider circles of their expanding environment.

## Units

**KEY POINT**

Units that revolve around specific themes bring the larger curriculum down to a manageable size for planning and should follow a progression based on how children learn.

Units bring the broad curriculum outline down to a manageable size and provide unifying themes around which activities are planned. A unit can last any length of time, from a day or two to a month or more. It may seem practical to make all units fit into a one-week framework, but keep in mind that it should be the complexity, interest-value, and relevance of the topic to the children that dictate how much time is spent on a unit. Furthermore, the length of units should be flexible so you can spend more time if the topic intrigues the children or cut it short if the children seem ready to move on. A brief outline of steps in the development of a unit can be found in Figure 8-6.

Planning a unit should begin by carefully considering objectives. What is it that you want the children to learn about the topic? What



**FIGURE 8-6 Steps in Planning a Unit**

1. Identification of appropriate objectives
2. Introduction of the new theme through review of familiar aspects of the topic
3. Introduction of new information:
   - First concretely, such as through a field trip
   - Activities that recall the new experience, such as drawing pictures, dictating stories
   - Creative representations of the new experience, such as through art, dramatic play, blocks
4. Summary and evaluation

concept, skills, and information can this unit convey? Most important, are these relevant, age-appropriate, and of interest to the children, and will the children enjoy them? Children have to be the starting point for planning. For instance, if you are planning a unit on bread, you might want the children to learn that

- bread is baked at the bakery.
- the baker is the person who bakes bread.
- many loaves of bread are baked at the bakery (mass production).
- bread is made up of many ingredients.
- bread is taken by trucks to grocery stores, where it is sold to people such as those in the children's families.

A unit should begin with an introduction through which the theme is initially presented. The length of time spent on the introductory component will depend on the length of the unit and on how new the topic is to the children. Often, the introduction takes place during a large group discussion time.

Introductory components will generally focus on a review of the children's familiarity with the subject or closely related areas and will allow for evaluation of what the children already know about the topic. Thus, if you plan a unit on the topic "bread," you can discuss, for instance, types of bread with which the children are familiar, the food group in which bread belongs (assuming you have already spent time discussing nutrition and the basic food groups), the process of baking (for those children who have helped their parents make bread), and the different ways in which bread is used in meals.

Once the topic is introduced, new ideas or information can be presented logically and sequentially. New material should always be presented first in a concrete manner. This often takes the form of a field trip, but concrete experiences can be brought into the classroom through objects or guests. In the case of the bakery unit, you may want to plan a field trip to the local bakery at the beginning of the unit so the children can see how bread is made; however, some in-class experiences with bread baking can be a wonderful preparation for a trip to the bakery. In either case, it cannot be emphasized enough that any new concept should begin with the concrete, with firsthand experience.

Once children have had a chance to observe and learn through firsthand experience, they can begin to assimilate this information through subsequent activities. After the field trip, children should have opportunities to factually represent what they observed by talking about and dictating accounts of the visit to the bakery, drawing pictures of what they saw on the field trip, kneading bread dough, and otherwise recalling and replicating their visit. This factual recounting allows children to fix the experience in their minds.

Children can begin to use new information in creative ways once it has been integrated into their existing memory and experiential store. They can play with the information through such activities as art, dramatic play, puppets, or blocks. This element of the unit offers a wide variety of possibilities that children can approach in their unique ways.

Finally, a unit is ended through a summarizing component. Children and the teacher review the major features of the unit and what was learned. The teacher can also engage in a final evaluation of how well the children have met the objectives.

## Lesson Plans

**lesson plans**—The working documents from which the daily program is run, specifying directions for activities.

KEY POINT

Daily lesson plans, by specifying activities and objectives, provide the working documents from which the program is run.

Daily **lesson plans** provide the working documents from which a program is run. A lesson plan is fitted into the structure set by the schedule, as discussed earlier. At a minimum, the lesson plan describes each activity planned for that day, objectives for activities, and the time frame within which they are carried out. In addition, it can give information about which teacher will be in charge of the activity, in what part of the classroom each activity is to be carried out, and what materials are needed. Lesson plans can take many forms, but they should be complete enough so that any teacher can pick one up and know for any given day what activities are planned and why they are planned.

## Activities

The smallest element of curriculum planning is the activity, the actual play in which the children will be involved. It is important to be aware of the objectives of a given activity as well as to think through how the activity will be carried out so that the children will gain the knowledge and skills you would like them to acquire.

# EMERGENT CURRICULUM

**emergent curriculum**—An alternative to theme-based curriculum where topics are developed based on the interests of the children.

**project approach**—Curriculum which expands children's learning through in-depth exploration of topics that are of interest to the children and teachers.

Over the past two decades, considerable attention has been focused on the programs of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy (see Chapter 5). Many American schools have, in turn, adapted the lessons learned from the Reggio approach to their own programs. This alternative approach to more traditional theme-based curriculum is often called **emergent curriculum** because it emerges out of the interests of the children. In addition, American educators have refocused attention on the **project approach**, which dates back several decades (Helm & Katz, 2001), and shares many of the features that make Reggio Emilia's programs unique. The project approach, like Reggio Emilia programs, expand children's and teachers' learning through in-depth exploration of topics of interest to children and teachers.

There are a number of integral components of emergent curriculum, particularly relevant to the programs of Reggio Emilia. Among these are the image of the child, the environment, the projects that make up the emergent "curriculum," and documentation (Gandini, 1997). We will examine these elements of emergent curriculum in this section.



## Image of the Child

KEY POINT

An alternative to traditional, teacher-controlled curriculum planning is emergent curriculum, which is based on in-depth exploration of topics of interest to children and teachers. The centerpiece of such a curriculum is long-range projects, which engage children's interest and enjoyment of learning and flexibly follow the interests that emerge out of the children's and teachers' investigations.

One of the most basic principles of the programs of Reggio Emilia is the importance of viewing children as competent and strong rather than as needy and weak. "All children have preparedness, potential, curiosity, and interest in engaging in social interaction, establishing relationships, constructing their learning, and negotiating with everything the environment brings to them" (Gandini, 1997, pp. 16–17). This image of children ensures that teachers' expectations and interactions are highly appropriate. Recognizing their abilities, adults respect and encourage children's ideas and thoughts and use these as the basis for curriculum. Teachers learn from children by carefully observing and listening to them. This sense of co-learning places children and teachers on an equal plane. Children are strong and competent, with a desire to experience their world and communicate with others, right from birth (Rinaldi, 2001).

## The Environment

Children deserve, and require, a thoughtfully planned, beautiful environment, what Lella Gandini (1993) calls an "amiable school" (p. 6). The environment sends the message that each classroom is a place where children and adults are "engaged together in the pleasure of learning" (Gandini, 1997, p. 18); thus, the environment is considered the "third teacher" (Saltz, 1997). The environment is very carefully arranged to be welcoming and aesthetically pleasing. Light, texture, color, and form all are carefully used to extend and expand learning (Ceppi & Zinni, 1998) Furthermore, the environment is arranged to respect children's innate curiosity, drive to explore, and need to interact.

One of the most unique aspects of Reggio Emilia environments is the inclusion of an art studio (*atelier*) as part of each school. This space includes a wealth of resource materials and media through which the children can express their learning. Art is considered an integral part of symbolic learning, a way for children to construct their ideas (Hendrick, 1997). In the atelier, children are encouraged to draw or sculpt what they have been thinking about as a way explaining and clarifying their thinking process. Anyone who has seen the Reggio Emilia exhibit, "The Hundred Languages of Children," which has been touring the United States for several years, marvels at the beauty and sophistication of the artwork of Reggio Emilia's children. However their art comes out of careful observation and thoughtful reflection about the topics and issues they are working on.

## The Emergent "Curriculum": Projects

Much of what goes on in classrooms that use an emergent approach is similar to the types of activities that take place in any high-quality early childhood program. Children engage in a wide range of self-selected appropriate activities such as with blocks, manipulatives, art materials, dramatic play props, books, and other materials. They interact with each other and with adults in a variety of meaningful ways. It is in the emergence of curriculum, however, that such programs differ from other, more traditional programs.

Ideas for curriculum content come from observation of children's interests and activities, not from what the teachers think the children should learn (Curtis & Carter, 1996). One of the hallmarks of the emergent approach is that teachers truly listen to and reflect on what the children convey. Teachers meet with small groups of children and engage in serious dialogue about things that are important to the children (Cadwell & Fyfe, 1997). Through open-ended questions, teachers can gain great insights into what matters to them. Such discussions are frequent and ongoing. Children are encouraged to ask questions to which they find answers through their own exploration and investigation (Helm & Katz, 2001).

There are numerous examples of how children's ideas are converted into curriculum. One classic example comes from Reggio Emilia, following a suggestion by the children that the birds in their school's yard would appreciate an amusement park. This idea has been documented in a video, "An Amusement Park for the Birds" (Forman & Gandini, 1994), which follows the project from its initial mention to its culmination four months later. Continued discussion and observation by the teachers shaped the activities of this project to keep the interests and enthusiasm of the children in focus. Projects on themes and ideas initiated by the children and furthered by the teachers make up the heart of the curriculum in an emergent approach.

## Documentation

**documentation**—Keeping a careful record of the children's involvement in projects, using photographs, samples of children's work, and a record of their words, and arranging these in an aesthetic and informative manner to illustrate the process of learning.

One other aspect of emergent programs, especially in Reggio Emilia, is the careful documentation of the children's work. **Documentation** involves keeping a careful record of the children's learning process in carrying out projects. Documentation can take the form of photographs, transcriptions of audio tapes of the children's discussions, samples of their work, teacher's reflections on the learning process, and other visual evidence. Typically, documentation shows the progress of a project through several stages. Documentation should illustrate how the children began, carried out, and culminated a project (Katz & Chard, 1997). Documentation is carefully arranged to be aesthetically pleasing as well as informative and is displayed in a prominent place in the school.

Documentation serves several purposes. Children, teachers, parents, and the public can be informed through documentation (Forman & Fyfe, 1998). Children gain greater depth of understanding of the concepts they are exploring by revisiting the record or documentation of their work. Teachers, through examining and revisiting the learning process shown in the documentation, can extend children's learning by planning follow-up activities that represent a logical next step. Documentation also helps parents see in much clearer detail what their children are learning and gives parents the opportunity to expand that learning; they see not just the end product but the process involved. Finally, the public can be informed about the abilities and learning process of children, making the school an integral part of the larger society (Rinaldi, 1998).



**KEY QUESTIONS**

If there is a school in your community that follows an emergent, project-based curriculum, observe this school to look for elements of such programs, as discussed in this section. Do you see evidence of child-centered activities, projects, documentation, and a carefully arranged, aesthetic environment reflective of the children and teachers?

## Final Thoughts on Emergent Curriculum

Emergent curriculum provides an alternative to more traditional curriculum. It is based on a strong belief in children's abilities and strength, and is implemented in a carefully and beautifully arranged environment. Teachers are co-learners in an emergent classroom, learning from the children through attentive observation and thoughtful dialogue. Projects on wide-ranging topics of interest to the children engage their ideas and zest for learning. The progress of projects is flexible and leisurely, as children explore and teachers provide additional resources based on their observations. Finally, teachers organize materials they collect about each project into some form of documentation, which serves to help children, teachers, parents, and even the larger community revisit and learn more about the process of learning. Perhaps the most relevant aspect of this curriculum is that it requires teachers to let go of control; to have faith in children and in their own abilities to develop experiences that are rich and powerful.

# PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE CURRICULUM

**KEY POINT**

Families' values should be reflected in the curriculum; parents are also a source of support and resources for the curriculum.

The curriculum should reflect the backgrounds, needs, and interests of the children. One excellent resource, as you plan curriculum for your group of children, is their parents. Frequent parent-teacher communication and an open policy that conveys the school's emphasis on the importance of the family can encourage parents to be part of the early childhood program.

Parents' expertise and input can greatly enhance the early childhood program. Parents can provide information about special family, cultural, religious, or ethnic customs, celebrations, foods, or dress. They can visit the classroom to share occupational information or special skills. A parent who makes pottery, weaves baskets, plays an instrument, or knows origami will contribute a fascinating element to the classroom.

Some parents may be particularly interested in the direction and content of the curriculum and may want to offer suggestions or ideas. These should be welcomed and incorporated into the program, as appropriate. If, however, the values of a parent seem to be at odds with the program's philosophy, the teacher or director ought to convey that, although she or he respects the parent's views, the school has its own approach founded on child development principles and research. As a last resort, a parent who disagrees with the program's direction has the option of placing the child in another school if the parent is unhappy with the program.

## SUMMARY

1. Look at the common components of the daily schedule in an early childhood program.
2. Examine some guidelines for setting an effective schedule.
3. Whether a program operates full-day or part-day will have an impact on the schedule and what it includes.
4. The schedule should be consistent and predictable, but also flexible when needed.
5. Consideration of curriculum includes both definition and examination of its elements.
   A. Curriculum needs to be directly related to the development of the children in the program.
   B. Curriculum must include relevant content to be appropriate.
6. Consider the development of written plans, including the overall curriculum, units, daily lesson plans, and activities.
7. Emergent curriculum provides an alternative to theme-based curriculum, and is based more on the teacher's observations of what interests the children.
   A. The philosophy of emergent programs, such as those of Reggio Emilia, views children as capable and strong.
   B. Projects based on children's interests are the basis of curriculum planning in emergent programs.
   C. Projects often are carried out over a long period of time—weeks, even months—as children and teachers engage in in-depth exploration of a topic of interest.
   D. Children's learning is carefully documented to show the process, not just end products.

## KEY TERMS LIST

activity time
curriculum
documentation
emergent curriculum
large group time
lesson plans
project approach

## KEY QUESTIONS

1. Visit an early childhood program and look at its daily schedule. What elements are included? Does the schedule seem developmentally appropriate by taking into account the needs of the children? Does it provide the kind of balance discussed in this chapter? Would you change anything in this schedule? Why or why not?
2. Consider the issue of child-initiated vs. teacher-initiated activity. Do you agree with the author that there should be ample time for children to make decisions and exercise independence or do you think more teacher control is important? Note that not everyone agrees on this question. Discuss this question with others in your class and consider both sides of the issue.
3. You probably know children like Rita who spend most of their day in a child care center. How are the needs of these children met? How do they differ from a child like David? In what ways can the schedule take the children's needs into consideration?
4. What are your memories of your earliest school experiences? What kinds of activities were involved? Can you glean from your recollections what type of curriculum your preschool, child care, kindergarten, or first-grade teacher might have been following?
5. If there is a school in your community that follows an emergent, project-based curriculum, observe this school to look for elements of such programs, as discussed in this section. Do you see evidence of child-centered activities, projects, documentation, and a carefully arranged, aesthetic environment reflective of the children and teachers?



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Select additional books, articles, and Web sites on topics discussed in Chapter 8.

Bredekamp, S., & Copple, C. E. (1997). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Fraser, S., & Gestwicki, C. (1999). *Authentic childhood: Exploring Reggio Emilia in the classroom.* Clifton Park NY: Delmar Learning.

Helm, J. H., & Katz, L. (2001). *Young investigators: The project approach in the early years.* New York: Teachers College Press.

## HELPFUL WEB SITES

Reggio Emilia Programs:
http://www.ericeece.org/reggio.html

Teaching Strategies, Inc.:
http://www.teachingstrategies.com

NAEYC's Guidelines for Appropriate Curriculum Content for Children Ages 3–8:
http://www.naeyc.org/resources/position_statements/pscuras.htm

For additional early childhood education resources, visit our Web site at

**http://www.earlychilded.delmar.com**

CHAPTER

# 9

# Creative Development through the Curriculum

One of the most rewarding joys of working with young children is watching them approach experiences with that spark of freshness and exuberance that opens the door to creativity. Each of us possesses some measure of creativity—some more, some less. This is especially true of young children. Unfortunately, there is a danger of their creativity being stifled through increasing pressure to conform to adult expectations (Mayesky, 1998). In this chapter, we will examine creativity in some detail.

## WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

Creativity has been defined in a number of ways. Most definitions include such concepts as originality, imagination, divergent thinking (seeing things from different viewpoints), and the ability to create something new or to combine things in novel but meaningful ways. Creativity is more likely to occur when the person possesses traits such as curiosity, flexibility, and interest in investigation and exploration.

J. P. Guilford (1962), not satisfied with the limited definition of intelligence imposed by tests that measure it by a series of single, "correct" answers, developed a new way of looking at intelligence that includes some of these traits. In Guilford's structure of the intellect, **divergent thinking** is differentiated from **convergent thinking**, both of which are involved in the creative process. Divergence, by one definition, is "the making in the mind of many from one," for instance, by elaborating on a topic as in brainstorming, whereas convergence is defined as "the making of one from many," through narrowing down many ideas to a single, focused point (Hampden-Turner, 1981, p. 104).