Creating Environments for Learning: Birth to Age Eight is designed for college courses taught at 2- and 4-year institutions that focus on quality early childhood learning environments and curriculum. The book’s content spans the birth to age 8 range and is appropriate for teachers-in-training as well as practicing teachers in family childcare homes, childcare centers, preschools, or elementary schools.

How did this book come to be written? Philosophically, I value play as the primary way of learning for young children and have become increasingly alarmed that children’s time for play is disappearing. Through play, children construct knowledge by engaging in self-chosen, integrated experiences at their ideal levels of development. Play is a time-honored, tested, and valued method of learning in early childhood.

Why has play diminished in early childhood settings? I believe this has occurred for several reasons. As we’ve entered the era of accountability, teachers worry about whether children will be able to achieve all the standards or outcomes if they are involved in self-chosen activities. Additionally, children now spend many more years in group settings. Children may find the same materials present for several years as they stay in the same classroom or even when they move from classroom to classroom. Boredom due to lack of challenging and interesting environments results in children displaying behavioral issues. Teachers often mistakenly reduce the amount of play in favor of more teacher-controlled groups, hoping to manage children’s behavior. Finally, in an overemphasis on safety and cleanliness we’ve often stripped children’s environments and lives of many types of experiences and challenges.

In the past, many teachers believed that play was the only catalyst for learning. However, most teachers now realize that children’s learning through play is profoundly affected by the social and physical environments. If we want to prevent boredom and help children meet outcomes primarily through play, we need to intentionally design environments that provide children with the materials, tools, and challenges that allow development to flourish. For children to gain the most from play, we also need to be available to scaffold children’s learning.

I believe that if we want to preserve play, we must ensure that teachers are able to integrate developmental and curricular outcomes into play-based learning. To do this, teachers must have a deep understanding of the outcomes they want to achieve, know how to design a “rich” environment to realize the desired outcomes, and understand their role as facilitators. Quality environments are the foundation upon which a quality, play-based curriculum is built.

Important Elements in a Resource for Designing Environments for Learning

How do we learn about quality environments? Our Montana early childhood higher education program demonstrates the belief in the importance of the environment by requiring a course on early childhood learning environments. The following are the criteria we want a textbook resource to possess. In developing and writing this textbook, I have strived to meet each of these criteria:

We want a textbook that not only provides basic information on environments, but also helps students to see environmental possibilities. To enhance children’s learning, we believe that teachers must be able to develop “rich” environments, but this can occur only when it is built upon a firm foundation of knowledge.

We want students to consider early childhood theories, child development, current research, and curriculum standards and outcomes in designing environments. For students to understand the importance of these areas, they must be transparent in the
textbook, with specific research information and citations. This information must then translate research and theory into practice and be written in user-friendly language. Since many early childhood programs struggle with financial barriers, the book needs to contain many practical, inexpensive ideas.

It is also important that the interests, developmental levels, and cultural and geographic backgrounds of the children in the classroom be considered in establishing environments. The book needs to provide information and an abundance of examples that assist students in seeing that every effective early childhood environment will be unique based upon these criteria and that a cookie-cutter approach will not be effective.

Finally, the book needs to cover the entire early childhood age range, from birth to age 8. Even if students will work exclusively in Pre-K programs, they need to understand the full early childhood age range since many Pre-K children will be developmentally advanced and ready for more challenging activities.

**New to This Edition**

This book continues to meet the philosophy previously stated and the goals set forth for the first edition of the book. However, this second edition expands upon this foundation by including information on curriculum development. Without understanding how curriculum is developed, it is difficult for students to advocate or design a play-based curriculum. Students must also be prepared to use the latest research as they design their early childhood environments, plan curriculum, and defend the use of play as a teaching method. Therefore, this revised edition provides the most up-to-date information on research, curriculum standards, and play-based learning. Furthermore, this edition continues to focus on creating a resource that is practical, interesting, and understandable through examples and photos. Here is a list of the key changes to this edition:

- A new chapter on curriculum development
- An additional 35 photos and 40 replaced photos. The 141 photos in the textbook will help students to understand concepts described in the book
- The Pearson eText contains embedded videos in each chapter, providing direct links to illustrations of classrooms, children’s development, curriculum in action, teaching practices and more. Look for the play button in the margins of the chapters
- Reorganized chapters so that the information on dramatic play and blocks come earlier in the book, allowing students to build upon this knowledge as they learn about curricular areas
- Eliminated the chapter on safety and health, and integrated this information throughout the book to make this information more meaningful
- New research and information
- Updated curriculum standards
- New topics, including a section on routines and a section on engineering

**Features of This Text**

This textbook combines “the basics” or foundational information about how to arrange an environment with an exploration of the characteristics and abundant examples of centers rich with materials and possibilities. Several themes and features are embedded throughout the book.

- **Content and examples** from each age group—in infants and toddlers, preschoolers, and primary grades—in the entire early childhood age span provide information on how to work with a variety of age groups.
● **Scenarios about children and teachers in classrooms** introduce each chapter, illustrating how research appears in practice.

● **Photos** from a variety of programs across the country are interwoven throughout the chapters, helping to illustrate points and bring theory and principles to life.

● The specific **role of the teacher** in relationship to each center provides information on how to facilitate learning (specifically, in promoting concept development and using and developing children’s vocabulary unique to each center).

● **Research citations** help students to understand the knowledge base upon which learning environments and curriculum are built.

● Specific topics and strategies assist students in understanding and meeting the needs of **diverse learners**, such as special sections on English language learners and children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

● **Curricular standards** and **children’s developmental progression** related to each learning center assist students in understanding the goals and content to be facilitated in each learning center.

● Numerous examples provide information about how teachers consider children’s **individual needs and interests** in designing the environment and curriculum.

● **Inexpensive tips** for environmental design and materials provide practical ideas.

● **End-of-chapter exercises** and **Apply Your Knowledge** boxes found throughout the text help students apply and demonstrate their learning.

● Comprehensive **environmental checklists** at the end of each chapter provide a tool to assess early childhood environments and review chapter content.

● Content and examples from a **variety of settings**, such as special sections on family child care and afterschool programs, allow students to see the application of information to different environments.

Throughout the book you will notice the term **teacher**. This is used as an inclusive term to designate providers, educators, educators, and practitioners, whether working with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, or elementary-age children in home, center, or school settings. I hope that this text will be used by current and future teachers as a building block for designing environments where children can learn through play, be challenged to grow, learn needed content, explore friendships, experience wonder and joy, and make new discoveries.

**Instructor Resources**

The following instructor resources are available for instructors to download at www.pearsonhighered.com. Click on **Educators**, then click on the **Download Instructor Resources** link.

● **Online Instructor’s Manual (0132868369)**. The Instructor’s Manual gives professors a variety of helpful resources supporting the text. These include chapter overviews, teaching strategies, classroom activities, and discussion questions.

● **Online Test Bank (0132868377)**. The *Test Bank* contains multiple-choice and essay (short-answer) questions. The items are designed to assess the student’s understanding of concepts and application to classrooms.

● **Online PowerPoint® Slides (0132868431)**. A collection of PowerPoint® slides is provided for each chapter.

● **Computerized Test Bank Software (0132868350)**. Known as TestGen, this computerized test bank software gives instructors electronic access to the Test Bank.
items, allowing them to create and customize exams. TestGen functions in a variety of LMS formats.

- **Course Management.** The assessment items in the Test Bank have been converted to operate in a variety of LMS formats.

**Acknowledgments**

There is a saying that it takes a village to raise a child. The same may be said about writing a textbook. A book is not written by an individual in isolation. Books build upon the research and knowledge of others. Others also provide support, encouragement, critiques, and examples. It would be impossible to list all of those who provided inspiration, support, and encouragement in writing this book. However, I would like to mention a few people who provided outstanding assistance. First, I want to thank my daughter, Lisa Bullard. Lisa reviewed, critiqued, and edited chapters; made trips across the country with me for photo shoots; provided sketches and personal photos; and provided examples of practice from her experience in a range of early childhood settings. Danny, Scott, and Christopher Bullard (my sons), Justin O’Dea (my son-in-law), and Dave Browning (a special friend) also deserve thanks for the many ways they assisted with the book—providing ideas, computer assistance, and photos—and for their patience with my preoccupation and the countless hours that I spent writing.

In addition to my family, many others deserve special recognition. I want to thank Eve Malo, my long-term mentor and friend who edited several chapters and provided wise advice about writing and this book. Cathy Jackson also deserves special thanks for being a masterful, creative teacher who contributed photos and inspiration for the book. I wish to thank the following reviewers for their helpful comments: Katie Champlin, Des Moines Area Community College; Patricia A. Crawford, University of Pittsburgh; Lori Harkness, Stephen F. Austin State University; and Leslie Marlow, Berry College. I also wish to thank Janis Bullock and the University of Montana Western early childhood faculty members, especially Jeff Jensen, Libby Hancock, Lucy Marose, Jen Gilliard, and Pat Adams, who provided thoughtful comments and reviews of chapters. Others who provided important support include Susan Parker and Sheila Roberts. Invaluable input and encouragement were also provided by editor Julie Peters.

There were also many early childhood programs, teachers, and students who provided inspiration for the book. I want to especially thank the programs that allowed me to photograph their settings for this book, including Blessings Abound Family Child Care Center; Bozeman HRDC Head Start; Jen Gilliard’s Child and Family Development Institute; Davey Hagland’s Starting Small Preschool; Brenna Randall’s Little Buckaroos; Cardinal Bernardin Early Childhood Center; Spokane Community Building School; Karl Wolf’s Central School kindergarten classroom; Elly Drigger’s Central School kindergarten classroom; Curious Minds: Early Care and Education Center; Helen Gordon Child Development Center; Mentor Graphics Child Development Center at Wilsonville, Oregon; North Idaho College Children’s Center; Renaissance School of Arts and Science; Silver Bow Montessori; A.W.A.R.E. Inc. Early Head Start Program; Spirit at Play Center; Cozy Kid’s Corner; and Middle Creek Montessori. Without their cooperation, generosity, and dedication to contributing to the field this book would not be the same product that it is.

**Julie Bullard**

*University of Montana Western*
chapter 1
Understanding the Importance of the Environment

Learning Outcomes
After reading this chapter, you will be prepared to:
• Explain why the environment is important in children’s learning
• Describe how an effective environment supports developmentally appropriate practice
• Explain how behavioral issues can be reduced through environmental design
• Discuss how major theorists and early childhood approaches confirm the importance of the environment
• Describe the role of the teacher in creating effective learning environments
Close your eyes and visualize an environment from your childhood that evoked positive emotions. Remember how you felt when you spent time there. Think of the sounds, smells, and experiences in this place. Now sketch this special space, compose a brief poem depicting this place, or write a list of descriptive words that capture the essence of this environment.

Over the past years, I have asked hundreds of students to engage in this exercise. There are common threads in the students’ descriptions of their favorite places. These special places typically include exploration, rich sensory experiences often involving nature, and freedom to choose activities. This place was a refuge that the student had in some way personalized or made his or her own. Is this true of your special environment?

Do the children you know or work with today have environments that meet these needs? This book will explore ways that allow us to create rich environments that become the kinds of places that children will remember as their favorites; places of rich sensory experiences, exploration, choice, and freedom—a personalized, pleasant refuge.

Why Is the Environment Important for Children’s Learning?

The environment we are in affects our moods, ability to form relationships, effectiveness in work or play—even our health. In addition, the early childhood group environment has a very crucial role in children’s learning and development for two important reasons.

First, young children are in the process of rapid brain development. In the early years, the brain develops more synapses or connections than it can possibly use. Those that are used by the child form strong connections, while the synapses that are not used are pruned away. Children’s experiences help to make this determination. The National Scientific Council of the Developing Child compares the development of the brain to constructing a house, stating, “Just as a lack of the right materials can result in blueprints that change, the lack of appropriate experiences can lead to alterations in genetic plans.” They further state, “Building more advanced cognitive, social, and emotional skills on a weak initial foundation of brain architecture is far more difficult and less effective than getting things right from the beginning” (2007, p. 1). Because children’s experiences are limited by their surroundings, the environment we provide for them has a crucial impact on the way the child’s brain develops (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007, p. 43). Not only does experience affect the development of the brain, but new research also reveals that the environment affects whether or how genes are expressed (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010).

The second reason that the early childhood group environment has such a strong role in children’s development is because of the amount of time children spend in these environments. Many children spend a large portion of their wakeful hours in early childhood group settings. For example, a baby beginning child care will spend up to 12,000 hours in the program. This is more time than he will spend in both elementary and secondary school (Greenman, 2005a, p. 1). Children will typically spend another 4,000 hours in kindergarten through third-grade classrooms.

The early childhood environment that this baby enters will reflect the teacher’s philosophy, values, and beliefs about children and learning through either deliberate design or lackadaisical overlook. It provides messages to all those who enter—children, parents, and staff. Is this a place where I am welcomed and where my physical, social, and intellectual needs will be met? Is this an environment where I am seen as worthwhile?
and competent? Do I passively receive information in this environment, or am I actively engaging in the construction of knowledge? Does someone think I am special enough to provide a beautiful environment for my benefit? Anita Rui Olds, a well-known environmental designer, believes that we should design our early childhood environments for miracles, not minimums. She states:

Children are miracles. Believing that every child is a miracle can transform the way we design for children’s care. When we invite a miracle into our lives, we prepare ourselves and the environment around us. We may set out flowers or special offerings. We may cleanse ourselves, the space, or our thoughts of everything but the love inside us. We make it our job to create, with reverence and gratitude, a space that is worthy of a miracle! Action follows through. We can choose to change. We can choose to design spaces for miracles, not minimums. (2001, p. 13)

In this chapter we will examine the environment with regard to developmentally appropriate practice, discuss how environments reduce behavioral issues, review environments through the eyes of theorists, examine early childhood approaches that emphasize the environment, and finally examine the teacher’s role in the environment. This chapter builds the foundation for the remaining chapters in the book, helping us on our quest to design environments for miracles.

The Environment and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Drawing upon the views of a variety of theorists, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the largest early childhood association in the world, wrote a position statement titled Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Several principles set forth in the DAP position statement relate to the environment. We will explore these principles and relationships.

As you read this section, you will note that each description of how the environment supports the developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) principles discusses the “well-designed environment.” This is because the environment can either provide support or act as a hindrance to meeting the principles of developmentally appropriate practices. When the environment is well-designed, it supports DAP principles.

Importance of Play

“Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 14). A well-designed environment allows children to participate in in-depth play opportunities. The environment “is the backdrop to play, supplying content, context, and meaning” (Cosco & Moore, 1999, p. 2). The value of play has a long history within early childhood. In the early 1800s, Froebel, often called the father of kindergarten, stated, “Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood for it alone is the free expression of what is in the child’s soul” (Froebel, 1912, p. 50). Play continues to be valued in early childhood today as exemplified by its inclusion in the DAP principles.

Play has been recognized globally as not only an important learning tool but also an important right for children. For example, play is included in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), an international, legally binding instrument. Worldwide, all children engage in play. However, the cultural context determines how play is expressed, the role of adults in the play, the type of play that is encouraged...
Understanding the Importance of the Environment (whether individual or group), and gender roles in play (Johnson, Christie, & Wardle, 2005). Play allows children to practice cultural roles and to try out new roles. “During play, children not only explore and reproduce cultural roles and expectations of gender, race, and class, but also test and resist these cultural conventions as they set up and break down boundaries in their play groups” (Wohlwend, 2005, p. 78).

Through play, children learn the rules for social interaction, build social competence, and practice self-regulation. While playing, they can adopt the persona of another, trying out their role and seeing a new perspective. Play allows children to “construct meaning from emotionally challenging experiences” (Haight, Black, Ostler, & Sheridan, 2006, p. 210). Additionally, play can help to alleviate stress (Hirsch-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009).

Play in a rich environment also provides the vehicle for optimal cognitive development (Hirsch-Pasek et al., 2009). During play, children actively participate in an integrated activity, often solving complex dilemmas. Because the players control the action and the play script, the play is at the child’s ideal developmental level (Johnson et al., 2005). Play also encourages flexibility in thinking and risk taking (Sluss, 2005). Lev Vygotsky, a famous Russian theorist, believed that play served several additional purposes. First, play encourages abstract thought by separating meaning from an object. For example, a building block might become a boat, house, or phone. Second, play allows learning to be supported or scaffolded by more competent peers. Third, play encourages self-talk, which leads to greater self-regulation (Johnson et al., 2005).

Play Characteristics. Although there are many definitions of play, the characteristics usually include the following. Play:

- is voluntary,
- requires active involvement of the participants,
- involves symbolic activity (pretend is involved),
- is free from external rules; instead, rules are determined by the players,
- focuses on the process (the act of creating) rather than the product (the final result),
- and is pleasurable (Sluss, 2005).

Piaget (1962) described three cognitive stages of play. The first stage, called practice or sensorimotor play (birth to age 2), is characterized by repetition with children practicing the same activity repeatedly. For example, you might see a toddler fill a bucket and then empty it out, only to begin the cycle again. The second stage is symbolic play (age 2 to 7). Piaget further divided this stage into constructive (creating and inventing with materials), dramatic (pretend play where one thing represents another), and sociodramatic play (pretend play with other children involving mutual reciprocity). During this stage, children use an object to stand for something else. For example, a child might pretend a plastic banana in the dramatic play area is a telephone. Experts stress this is often the beginning of representational thought. Stage three, which involves games with rules (ages 7 to 11) such as tag, four-square, board games, card games, and so forth, include clearly defined roles and clear-cut rules (Sluss, 2005).

Social Descriptions of Play. In addition to these cognitive descriptions of play, there are also social descriptions of play. Experts once considered these stages of play. However, some now believe that, in addition to development, play styles, temperament, and culture affect the type of play the child engages in (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2001).
The social descriptions of play as developed by Mildred Parten (1932) include the following:

- Unoccupied—uninvolved in play.
- Onlooker—the child watches others play and may ask questions.
- Solitary—the child plays alone, not interacting with others.
- Parallel—the child plays near others. She may mirror the play of the other child, but typically does not engage in conversation.
- Associative—the child begins to play with other children.
- Cooperative—the child plays in a group. This play is characterized by shared, defined goals.

Observing the type of play children participate in can assist the teacher in establishing an environment that supports their play. For example, if children are engaging in parallel play, the teacher would make sure there were duplicate or similar items for mirroring the play of another.

Worldwide there is concern about the opportunity for children to participate in play. Poverty, violence, an over-reliance on media entertainment, inadequate space, and an overemphasis on academics affect children’s ability and time for play (Milteer et al., 2012). For example, studies in child care centers between 1982 and 2002 found that the prevalence of pretend play had dropped from 41% to 9% (Hirsch-Pasek et al., 2009). In addition, time for play is also reduced by changing cultural values, including valuing arranged, structured activities over free play. The International Play Association (1989), in response to these alarming trends, developed a declaration of the child’s right to play. They stress that play is critical for children’s physical health, mental health, and education, and that we must ensure that children have the opportunity to play in educational, family, and community settings.

Play, engaged in by children throughout the world, is a very important vehicle for children’s development. A rich environment can support children’s play, providing social, emotional, physical, and cognitive benefits.

**Active Learning Is Important**

“Always mentally active in seeking to understand the world around them, children learn in a variety of ways; a wide range of teaching strategies and interactions are effective in supporting all these kinds of learning” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 14). Children in the early years need to have concrete experiences to learn. As stated by Bredekamp and Copple (1997), “Children need to form their own hypotheses and keep trying them out through social interaction, physical manipulation, and their own thought processes—observing what happens, reflecting on their findings, asking questions, and formulating answers” (p. 13). A well-designed environment provides children with multiple opportunities to construct their knowledge through first-hand experiences. In addition, the well-designed environment allows multiple forms of interaction (peer to peer, child and teacher, small group) and provides many opportunities for the teacher to scaffold children’s learning using a variety of different techniques such as modeling, demonstrating, questioning, and providing direct instruction.

**Domains Are Related and Influence Each Other**

“All the domains of children’s development and learning—physical, social and emotional, and cognitive—are important, and they are closely related. Children’s development and learning in one domain influence and are influenced by what takes place in other domains” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 11). A well-designed environment can
facilitate development across domains. First, it provides experiences that integrate learning. For example, as children build with blocks, they are using both gross and fine motor skills. In addition, they practice cooperative and language skills as they build structures with other children. Furthermore, cognitive skills are used as they problem solve building issues and learn about shapes, weight, and balance. Second, a well-designed environment allows children to be independent, to exercise control, and to build competence and mastery. These skills assist a child in developing a healthy self-concept (“I can do this!”). When children have a healthy self-concept, they are more likely to be successful socially and academically.

**Learning Follows Well-Documented Sequences, Becoming More Complex Over Time**

“Development proceeds toward greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 12). In addition, “many aspects of children’s learning and development follow well-documented sequences, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 11). Within a classroom, you will have children who are at different places in the developmental sequence. For example, in a 4-year-old classroom, you might have a child who can count by rote to 10 but who is unable to count a set of objects, another who can count a set of objects to 20, another who is able to recognize numerals and match them to a set of objects, and still another child who is performing some simple addition and subtraction. The well-designed environment provides math manipulatives at each of these levels.

**Development Is Variable**

“Development and learning proceed at varying rates from child to child, as well as at uneven rates across different areas of a child’s functioning” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 11). A well-designed environment provides a variety of materials and activities that meet the needs and interests of individual children. For example, in the manipulative center at Tiny Tots, Jamal and Isabel are both sorting. Jamal is sorting bugs by two attributes (size and type). Isabel is sorting keys by one attribute (type of key). John is completing a 12-piece dinosaur puzzle. Tyrone and Sarah are working together on a 25-piece jigsaw puzzle of a turtle. By having open-ended materials (materials that can be used in a multitude of ways) such as the keys and plastic bugs, and closed-ended materials (materials that can only be used one way) such as the different levels of puzzles, all children in the center are able to choose tasks that interest them and meet their varying abilities.

**Social and Cultural Contexts Influence Learning**

“Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 13). A well-designed environment assists in cultural understanding by accurately reflecting the lives of children and families in the program. Children see themselves reflected in the classroom materials chosen, in photos After a family who is Chinese introduced the children to a tea ceremony, the teacher extended their learning with this dramatic play center.
of themselves and their families, and in the written and spoken language used in the classroom. Multicultural books, pictures, music, art, manipulatives, and dramatic play props representing children in the classroom as well as other cultures expand the children’s understanding (for an in-depth discussion of culture see Chapter 2).

**Biological Maturation and the Environment Interact**

“Development and learning result from a dynamic and continuous interaction of biological maturation and the environment” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 12). The well-designed environment provides a range of challenges, so that as a child successfully completes a challenge, another one awaits. For example, after the child has completed the 12-piece puzzles, she can tackle the 18-piece puzzle. The child can work with others or work alone. She controls the amount of time she spends engaged in a particular activity. This freedom allows children to be self-directed learners, learning from both the physical and the social world. It also recognizes and honors the individual child’s maturity level. As stated by Maxwell (2007), “Physical attributes of the environment may therefore be just as critical a part of a quality childcare program as teacher education and experience” (p. 240).

**Practice Advances Development**

“Development and learning advance when children are challenged to achieve at a level just above their current mastery, and also when they have many opportunities to practice newly acquired skills’” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 15). A well-designed environment allows children to practice skills in an authentic way (using skills in a real-life context rather than through drill). For example, children will use their developing writing skills in a variety of centers, such as labeling their artwork, creating signs for their block buildings, and creating menus in the dramatic play restaurant. Authentic tasks are more engaging and a more effective way to learn than those same tasks performed through drill or direct instruction (Cooper, Capo, Mathes, & Gray, 2007).

**Development Occurs in the Context of Secure, Consistent Relationships**

“Children develop best when they have secure, consistent relationships with responsive adults and opportunities for positive relationships with peers” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 13). The well-designed environment is a place where children and adults can find sanctuary, nurturance, comfort, compassion, and community (Greenman, 2005a). Relationships flourish as children have the opportunity to play with peers in self-chosen activities. The one-on-one time with an adult that often occurs as children interact in learning centers also facilitates positive relationships.

**Experiences Shape Future Dispositions and Behaviors**

“Children’s experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning, such as persistence, initiative, and flexibility; in turn, these dispositions and behaviors affect their learning and development” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 15). A well-designed environment provides multiple ways of learning the same skill through different learning centers. For example, children might learn math skills as they keep time to the music in the music center, classify in the manipulative center, engage in a math activity on the computer, complete a recipe in the cooking area, or build in the block center. They might represent what they are learning through music, art, dance, or writing. This allows children to choose the learning modality that is most effective for them, while exposing them to a wide range of different learning options. Persistence and initiative are increased when children have the opportunity to learn in ways that are interesting and motivating to them.
Early Experiences Are Critical

“Early experiences have profound effects, both cumulative and delayed, on a child’s development and learning; and optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning to occur” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 12). The early years are critical for children’s current and future learning. An effective environment is one way that we provide the experiences that children need to develop optimally.

The developmentally appropriate practices principles inform the teacher, who is the environmental designer. These well-designed environments then support developmentally appropriate practices.

Reducing Behavioral Issues Through Environmental Design

In addition to helping support developmentally appropriate practices, a well-designed environment reduces behavioral issues, allowing the teachers to spend more time scaffolding learning. The environment can help prevent behavioral issues in three ways.

1. Children who are actively engaged in developmentally appropriate, interesting activities that they choose usually display fewer behavioral issues. Because the well-designed environment provides children with many choices at different developmental levels, children’s unique skill levels, preferred learning styles, and interests can be addressed.

2. The well-planned environment provides private retreats and activities that assist children to manage emotions.

3. The teacher intentionally designs the layout of the environment to prevent common behavioral issues.

To prevent common behavioral issues:

- Teachers design learning centers (dedicated areas, indoors or outdoors, that have intentional purposes) that allow small groups to work together, without interruption from others.
- Dividers are placed between areas to provide a protected space for play, and to assist children to stay focused.
- Clear boundaries keep materials in one area from interfering with other areas. For example, shelves are placed between the art and block areas, which prevents trucks from running under the easels.
- Fighting over limited resources is prevented by having a sufficient number of materials (for very young children, exact duplicates are often necessary).
- Interesting, enticing materials in every center keep children from all congregating in one place.
- Organized and labeled shelves allow children to keep materials orderly and to locate the materials that they need.
- Materials and books are in good condition and beautifully displayed, causing the children to want to take care of them.

This aesthetic, private retreat space was developed by children and their teacher at Spirit at Play when they were completing a project on birds.
● The floor plan is developed to prevent children from seeing it as a racecourse. For example, when an obvious circular path is available it invites children to run (see Chapter 5 for sample floor plans).

● Density (the number of children in a given space) is reduced, since crowding increases the likelihood of aggressive behavior (see Chapter 6 for research and information on density).

● Children’s health and safety needs, including restful places to sleep or relax, are planned for.

If you have behavioral issues in your class, first examine the environment to see if a change could solve the problem. For example, I was a consultant to a program where the following occurred:

The teachers were very frustrated because three children were running their large Tonka trucks (housed in the block area) under the art easels. The day before I arrived, one of the easels had fallen, splattering paint everywhere. The teachers had placed the children involved in time-out, but the next day they again drove the trucks under the easel. At this point, the teachers banned these children from the block area for one week. When I arrived, I observed that there was no clear division between the art and block area. In my opinion, the children crawling on the floor may have been focusing on their play and oblivious to the easels. After our discussion, the teachers redesigned the room, placing clear dividers between the art and block area. This solved the problem, where the punitive approach did not.

We have seen how the well-designed environment supports developmentally appropriate practice and how it can reduce behavioral issues, allowing the caregiver to concentrate on positive interactions with children. Now we will examine the historical roots of the environment as a key early childhood learning element.

Theorists and Approaches Supporting the Importance of the Environment

Theorists and early childhood approaches and philosophies support the need for a rich environment. Just what does a “rich” environment mean? What are its characteristics? We will begin our discussion with Maria Montessori, who is credited with designing and promoting beautiful, child-size environments filled with engaging materials. Maria Montessori’s philosophy influenced both Piaget’s and Vygotsky’s theories (Mooney, 2000), which we will examine next. Lastly, we will discuss the perspective of Loris Malaguzzi, who built upon the work of Piaget and Vygotsky as well as other theorists to develop the Reggio Emilia approach (Rankin, 2004). Examining the theorists and approaches assists us in understanding the historical and philosophical foundations for designing learning environments.

Montessori

As we prepare orderly, clean, aesthetic environments using child-size furnishings and beautiful materials, we can thank Dr. Maria Montessori, an Italian physician, who was the first advocate of such settings. The carefully prepared environment is a key component of Montessori’s philosophy. She states:

The immense influence that education can exert through children, have the environment for its instrument, for the child absorbs his environment, takes everything from it, and incarnates it in himself. (1995, p. 66)

According to Montessori, the child must find the environment motivating, so he or she is interested in pursuing the available activities. The child will then want to “conduct his own experiences” (Montessori, 1995, p. 92).
Montessori stressed that the environment needs to liberate the spirit, promote independence, allow activity, and be beautiful, safe, and orderly. It is necessary that the environment be orderly to prevent children from wasting their energy seeking materials (Standing, 1957). Additionally, Montessori believed that when children play in an orderly environment, this desire for order becomes part of the child.

Child-size environments, according to Montessori, not only applied to furnishings, but also the proportions within the entire building (windows that are near the ground, low door handles, shallow steps) (Standing, 1957). She promoted using low, open shelves to display self-correcting materials (e.g., knobbed cylinders to seriate by size are placed in a frame that will only allow the correct-sized cylinder to fit). Maria Montessori also advocated providing real working tools (knives and scissors that cut, shovels and trowels that actually dig holes, quality paints and clay) to children.

She also believed in beauty. According to Montessori, the environment and materials should be clean and have harmonious colors. However, she also stressed that materials should be practical. For example, she replaced several expensive, beautiful marble tables that had been donated to the Montessori center with more practical, simpler, wooden tables that could be easily moved by the children.

The goal of the environment according to Montessori is, “As far as it is possible, to render the growing child independent of the adult. That is, it is a place where he can do things for himself—live his own life—without the immediate help of adults” (Standing, 1957, p. 267). In this environment the child becomes “increasingly active, the teacher increasingly passive. It is a place where the child more and more directs his own life: and in doing so, becomes conscious of his own powers. As long as he is in a state of dependency on the adult he cannot grow as he should” (Standing, 1957, p. 267). However, Montessori also felt that the teacher plays a very critical role, since children only have access to the materials that the teacher provides (Montessori, 1995). In addition, teachers observe children, provide very specific guidance to children on how to use the materials, and support them when needed. However, they show respect for the worker and do not interrupt unless it is necessary. The competent teacher “must make her presence felt by those who are seeking; and hide from those who have already found” (Standing, 1957, p. 280).

Piaget

Like Montessori, Piaget believed that children learn through play, with curiosity driving their learning. He stressed that children construct their knowledge through active involvement. As stated by Piaget, “Experience is always necessary for intellectual development . . . but I fear that we may fall into the illusion that being submitted to an experience (a demonstration) is sufficient for a subject to disengage the structure involved” (Duckworth, 1964, p. 174).

However, more than just experience is required. “The subject must be active, must transform things, and find the structure of his own actions on the objects” (Piaget, 1964, p. 4). In addition to experimentation, the child must be interested in the learning experience (DeVries, 2004). Without interest, the child will not exert the effort to make sense.
of the experience. Piaget believed that cooperation is also helpful for active learning. Cooperation helps people experience moral dilemmas and conflicts, and to become aware of differences in opinions and viewpoints, thereby creating cognitive disequilibrium (Bullard & Hitz, 1997). Disequilibrium is an uncomfortable state where new information challenges one’s existing knowledge, beliefs, or assumptions. When this occurs one might assimilate the information, working it into his current thinking and belief system, or the person might accommodate or modify her thinking or belief. For example, a child might see a horse for the first time and think “cow,” assimilating this new animal into their current thinking. However, if someone tells the child it is a horse she might create a new category of animal, accommodating or changing her thinking. Piaget stressed that, “Active physical and mental interactions of the child with the environment (physical and social interactions) that permit construction are seen as the most important school-related factor in cognitive development” (Wadsworth, 1989, p. 165). Piaget also believed that the child needs to be able to transform space. This includes looking at things from a different angle, such as looking down upon a scene on the classroom floor from a loft.

According to Piaget, the teacher is a guiding mentor, who encourages initiative, experimentation, reasoning, and social collaboration. She arranges safe, supportive environments for spontaneous exploration where learners are free to choose from many alternatives (Bullard & Hitz, 1997). Like Montessori, Piaget believed that to be effective the teacher needs to be a careful observer, so that he can set up environments and experiences that challenge children.

Vygotsky

When you think of Vygotsky, you probably think of his best-known theory, the zone of proximal development. This zone is the difference between what we can independently accomplish and what we can accomplish with assistance from a more competent peer or teacher. This assistance is called scaffolding. Like that of a construction crew, this support helps us to reach a higher level.

Like Piaget, Vygotsky also believed that children actively construct their own knowledge, and that play is a vehicle for doing so. Both theorists believed that play promotes both cognitive and social learning. According to Vygotsky, play, especially pretend play, should be the leading activity for preschool and kindergarten-aged children. Vygotsky defined play as an activity that involves an imaginary situation created by the children in which they take on roles and follow a set of rules related to those roles (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). As children play, they use language to negotiate roles, enact scenes, and determine processes, furthering their development (Mooney, 2000).

In addition to play, preschool children should also engage in what Vygotsky called productive activities, such as storytelling, block building, and art and drawing. Pre-academic skills are considered beneficial, but only if they emerge from children’s interests, are considered meaningful to children, and occur in a developmentally appropriate social context (Bodrova & Leong, 2007). According to Vygotskians, motor activities (statues and stop-and-start games) can also assist with development, especially self-regulation and attention.

When children enter first grade, learning activities become the leading activity. “Learning activities are adult-guided activity around specific, structured, formalized content that is culturally determined” (Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p. 210). However, children at this age still use models (manipulatives and graphic representations). Vygotskians also stress that children themselves need to understand the learning goal and learn to judge their work according to a standard or acceptable level of performance.

To follow the Vygotskian approach you must be a careful observer who uses the information learned to plan hands-on, interactive environments and to scaffold children’s learning. Since Vygotsky believed that learning occurs in a social setting, you would
provide opportunities and encouragement for children to work together (Mooney, 2000). In addition, Vygotskians often support the quality of children’s play through helping them develop play plans (see Chapter 7 for more information).

Malaguzzi and the Reggio Emilia Approach

Malaguzzi, the “philosophical leader” of the Reggio Emilia inspired approach, scaffolded his approach upon the work of other theorists including Montessori, Piaget, and Vygotsky (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002, p. 9; Rankin, 2004). Like the previous theorists, he believed that children construct knowledge through active engagement with the environment. Similar to Vygotsky, he stressed the importance of social interaction in developing children’s mental constructions.

In the Reggio approach, teachers base the educational environment and activities upon the **image of the child**. The child is seen as unique, curious, capable, competent, having potential, relationship seeking, an active constructor of knowledge, and a possessor of rights rather than needs (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002; Gandini, 2004). This image affects the way that teachers work with children. They view themselves as co-constructors of knowledge, or as partners in children’s learning.

**Apply Your Knowledge**

What adjectives would you use to describe your image of the child? How does this image affect the way you interact with the child?

The Reggio Emilia environments are referred to as the “third teacher” (the parents and teachers are considered the other two teachers). Several principles support this concept (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002; Gandini, 2012). In the Reggio Emilia approach, the environment:

- Is aesthetic, containing beautiful materials and spaces. There is intense attention to detail in every environmental feature, with no overlooked corner, wall, ceiling, or floor.
- Is highly personalized, reflecting the culture and interests of the inhabitants through photos, materials, artwork, and transcriptions (Gandini, 2004).
- Promotes active learning through abundant **affordances**, or opportunities to learn that include many choices, provocative displays, and a variety of open-ended, intellectually stimulating materials. The school is a “workshop for research and experimentation, a laboratory for individual and group learning, a place of construction” (Ceppi & Zeni, 1998, p. 14).
- Encourages interaction with materials through the use of **provocations** (activities, materials, or questions that provoke thought, problem solving, and creativity), many different types of objects (realistic objects, colorful...
beautiful objects, natural objects, authentic furniture, tools, and utensils), beautiful displays that highlight materials, and mirrors that are placed to see objects in new ways (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007).

- Encourages children to represent their ideas in many different types of media. Each center has an *atelierista* (a trained visual arts teacher) and an *atelier* (shared arts studio). In addition, many classrooms have mini-ateliers. Malaguzzi gave art a new meaning (Rankin, 2004) by using art as a tool to express one’s ideas, thoughts, and knowledge, and also to further one’s thinking. As one creates art, knowledge, ideas, and thoughts become visible and new questions, ideas, and thoughts emerge.

- Welcomes children, families, and teachers and views them as the three subjects of education. As stated by Rinaldi, “everything that happens to one affects the other” (2001, p. 53). The Reggio community is characterized by empathy, close bonds, a sharing of knowledge, fears, and hopes, and a construction of common values and shared meanings (Ceppi & Zeni, 1998, p. 11).

- “Fosters encounters, communication, and relationships” (Gandini, 2004, p. 17) through the design of activities and space. Spaces are available for children to work in small groups, and to work individually if they choose. Common areas, such as a central piazza, encourage children, parents, and teachers from different groups to interact. The environment is also rich in documentation of group efforts. It is a “living testimony to interactions that happen in the environment” (Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007, p. 42).

- Provides rich sensory experiences that encourage “investigation and discovery using the whole body.” The environment itself (walls, floors, ceilings) is also multi-sensory, with different sensory media so each individual person’s needs can be met (Ceppi & Zeni, 1998, p. 8).

- Provides transparency. Light is everywhere, shining through low windows; reflected in shiny mobiles and mirrors hung from ceilings, walls, and lofts; shining from interesting light features; flowing through transparent fabric, beautiful glass objects, colored transparency film in windows, and child-created murals on plastic sheets; and explored with light tables. Children can look from one space to another, outside, or into another classroom. It is also a metaphor for openness and transparency in sharing learning through documentation (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002).

- Brings the outside world in. This includes the natural world and the social world (the community and culture). The program experiences “osmosis with the world outside. A school should not be a sort of counter world, but the essence and distillation of society surrounding it, it is a part of the larger world” (Ceppi & Zeni, 1998, p. 6).

- Supports flexibility and creativity through encouraging children and adults to use objects and space in imaginative ways.

- Provides reciprocity. The environment is not passive; instead it is like a living being, conditioning and being conditioned by children’s and adult’s actions (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002; Gandini, 2012).

The Reggio Emilia teacher is a keen observer who is an active listener and interpreter. She uses this knowledge to design flexibly planned curriculum and to establish provocations that help children think more deeply and to question their assumptions. The curriculum occurs at a leisurely pace and flows naturally from the children’s and teachers’ ideas (Gandini, 2004). The teacher also collaborates with children, coworkers, families, and the community to form a “community of learners” (Fraser & Gestwicki, 2002).
Montessori, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Malaguzzi all valued the environment as an important teacher of young children. They each also valued the teacher as an environmental designer and as a scaffold of children’s learning. In the next section, we will further examine the teacher’s role in supporting children’s learning.

**Guidelines for Creating Effective Learning Environments: Role of the Teacher**

Teaching effectively through the environment requires the teacher to be concurrently aware of the children in her classroom (their developmental levels, cultural backgrounds, interests, learning styles, dispositions, and behavioral nuances) and the early learning guidelines, curriculum standards, and program outcomes appropriate for her age group. She must use this information to design relevant, engaging environments and to make needed environmental changes as the year progresses. Finally, she must be available as children use the environment to scaffold their learning. In this section, we will discuss the prerequisites for establishing the environment, some key points for environmental design, and the teacher’s role once she has designed the environment. Each of these points will be further explained in chapters throughout the book.

**Prerequisites for Establishing a Rich Environment**

Teachers must have knowledge and skills before even beginning the environmental design. To design the environment you must be aware of:

- Child development and developmentally appropriate practices. This knowledge forms the basis for planning and developing curriculum and the environment.
- Individual children’s developmental level and interests, so that environments can be developed that are meaningful to each child. This is often accomplished through informal assessment techniques such as observation and child interviews and discussions. Interviews with families can also provide important information. One toddler center sent a small plastic bag to each family before the program began and asked them to place pictures or items in the bag that demonstrated their child’s interests. The teachers then collected these and used the information as the basis for designing the environment.
- Children’s cultural background, to ensure that experiences and environments are relevant to each child. Garcia states that we must seek information “like an ethnographer” (2003, p. 16), a researcher learning about the culture of the children and families we serve. Being aware of our own culture and how it affects our values, beliefs, and practices is a first step in cultural competence. We are then ready to begin to learn about the culture of others. Gathering general information about the culture of the children through activities such as reading, talking to community leaders, and inviting guest speakers to the program can assist us in cultural understanding. Knowing that each family is unique, we can use the general knowledge acquired to talk to each individual family about their specific values and practices (Marshall, 2003).
- Curriculum standards and early learning guidelines (what children at different ages should know and be able to do), so that you can develop an environment and scaffold children’s learning in meeting these standards.
- Your own and your program’s philosophy. The philosophy we have is often implicit or hidden, but it affects our beliefs and therefore our actions. We each have values and preconceived notions based upon years of our own personal
educational experience about the role of the student, teacher, and learning environment. We have also formed beliefs about different cultural and family characteristics. Think about your beliefs in regard to single parents, same-sex parents, grandparents raising children, children who are homeless, and children who come from different racial or ethnic backgrounds than you. These beliefs create a lens through which we view the world, families, children, and the classroom. By uncovering our belief system, or making our values more explicit, we can examine them to see if they are consistent with early childhood theory and philosophy.

**Designing the Environment**

After you have met these prerequisites, you are ready to begin the environmental design process. You will need to:

- Design your floor plan. If you follow the principles of developmentally appropriate practice, you will typically develop separate learning centers in your classroom (see Chapter 5 for a detailed description).
- Consider design outcomes (aesthetically pleasing, home-like), design elements (softness, texture, color, and lighting), and design palettes (ceilings, walls, and floors). You must also consider noise and the density of children per available space (see Chapter 6 for more information).
- Consider the health and safety of children and adults.
- Design each learning center, stocking each with an abundant variety of developmentally appropriate, culturally relevant, interesting, and intellectually stimulating materials. You will want to include both open-ended and closed-ended materials. Children can use open-ended materials (those that have more than one type of use) such as buttons to classify in multiple ways; pieces of fabric to make into capes, headaddresses, or doll blankets; or clay to create whatever one can imagine. Closed-ended materials have a specific or a clearly defined use, such as puzzles. Chapters 7 through 17 provide information about designing each specific center.
- Provide an effective context for learning through developing a schedule that allows time for using the centers, designing smooth transitions and routines that support the flow of the day, providing effective grouping methods to meet children’s needs, and observing and documenting children’s development and interests so you can support children’s learning and share their learning with others (see Chapter 3 for more information).

**Interacting with Children in the Environment**

Of course, the teacher’s role does not end with the classroom design. As children use the environment, you will need to be available to support their learning. You will do this in a variety of ways, including observing, scaffolding learning, supporting peer interactions, acknowledging them as learners, assisting them to follow rules, keeping them safe, and documenting their learning.

**Observing.** Observation is critical in helping you to determine children’s interests, development, dispositions, and need for support. The information gained assists you in building relationships with children, choosing relevant materials and activities, and evaluating how classroom spaces are used. Close observation will also assist you in determining your immediate role. Is it to observe children’s play, to scaffold learning for an individual child or small group, to become a play partner, or to roam the room providing needed assistance?
**Scaffolding or Supporting Children’s Learning.** We can scaffold children’s learning in a variety of ways, including modeling, asking open-ended questions, providing new language, presenting additional information, offering additional materials, and through being a play partner. However, when we scaffold children’s learning, we must always be careful not to inadvertently interrupt or redirect their play (Sluss, 2005). We will examine each of these forms of scaffolding individually.

**Modeling.** There are many situations where children can be assisted in learning through a more competent model. For example, you might model the use of a tool (spoon, hammer), technique (stacking two blocks, using a slip to join two pieces of clay), social skill (modeling a gentle touch to a toddler, using conflict resolution steps with a preschool child), physical skill (hopping, yoga position), or cognitive skills (using one-to-one correspondence, tagging items as you count them).

**Asking Open-Ended Questions.** Open-ended questions encourage multi-word responses that have more than one correct answer. Open-ended questions invite conversation, require thinking and problem solving, and ask children to share ideas, theories, thoughts, emotions, and reasoning (Kostelnik, Whiren, Soderman, & Gregory, 2012). In contrast, closed-ended questions often ask the child to recall factual information, answer a yes or no question, or state a preference. The child typically answers the closed question in one or a few words. Table 1.1 provides examples of both types of questions.

**Using Rich, Descriptive Language and New Vocabulary.** As you interact with children, you can insert descriptive language and introduce children to new vocabulary. Each center and each activity have unique vocabulary associated with them. For example, when the teacher at Discovery Bay Childcare changed the dramatic play center to a garage, the children learned many new words, including mechanic, automobile, carburetor, dial, gear, and engine. When the teacher later changed the area to a hospital, there was a new set of vocabulary: immunization, x-ray, anesthesiologist, and physician.

Children begin school with a vast difference in the number of words in their vocabulary. For example, in one study the total number of words children heard before the age of 4 was 13 million for children who were from low-income homes versus 45 million for children from the highest economic group (Hart & Risley, 1995). This has

*Table 1.1 Sample Closed and Open Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closed Questions</th>
<th>Open Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What shape is this?</td>
<td>In what ways are circles and ovals the same or different?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What color is the bird?</td>
<td>Why do you think the bird is brown?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should we skip or hop across the room?</td>
<td>What are other ways that we can move across the room?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is this a moth or butterfly?</td>
<td>How are the butterfly and the moth the same? How are they different?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the salt affect the ice?</td>
<td>What are ways that we can make the ice melt faster?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can you make applesauce from apples?</td>
<td>What are other things that we could make with the apples?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a profound effect on children’s later success in schooling. However, as an early childhood teacher you have the opportunity to help change this statistic by exposing children to rich, descriptive language in the way that they learn best, in an authentic context.

Encouraging Language by Using Parallel Talk, and Expanding and Extending Speech. You can use parallel talk with young children to describe what the child is doing or what you are doing. For example, “Oh, you are laying your baby down so it can go to sleep.” “You are stacking two blocks.” “I am going to get a clean diaper for you now.” To increase the child’s vocabulary you might also expand the child’s sentence. For example, the child says, “Baby sleep,” and you might say, “Yes, you are rocking your baby to sleep.” When extending the child’s speech you add additional information and model appropriate grammar, sentence structure, and pronunciation. For example, when a child says, “I have a truck,” you might respond, “Yes, you have a shiny red dump truck.”

Presenting Additional Information and Enhancing Children’s Background Knowledge. When the teacher has background information about a topic, she can naturally introduce information during interactions with children. For example, Tom has a butterfly and moth in his classroom. Garmai and Amberly are looking at them. Tom mentions that the butterfly is called a monarch and that it can fly over 2,000 miles. He tells Amberly that this is how far she flies when she visits her grandmother. Amberly says, “But I am in a big plane, and the butterfly is flying with just its own wings. It must get really tired.”

Assisting Children to Carefully Observe and Reflect Upon Their Learning. Teachers assist children to observe and reflect in many ways. Tom says to Garmai and Amberly, “Look at the butterfly’s and moth’s antennas.” The children carefully observe through magnifying glasses, noting that the butterfly has a round club at the end of its antenna while the moth does not. Tom lets them know that this is one way that you can tell moths and butterflies apart. Later Tom asks the children if they would like to draw the butterfly and moth, providing the children a way to demonstrate and reflect upon what they learned.

Offering Additional Materials. Children may need additional materials to move to the next step in a project or to think or create in new ways. Julio is building a play guitar at the woodworking center and wants to make the guitar strings. Anne, his teacher, provides some fishing line for him. Jonathon and Saleena are building a multi-level block structure. The teacher provides a pulley, allowing the children to build an elevator in their building. Teachers can also ask the children what materials they think would help them to complete their project.

Being a Play Partner. The younger the child, the more time the adult will spend as the child’s play partner. In most cases, you will want to follow the child’s lead, engaging in give and take actions and communication (Post & Hohmann, 2,000). Azura, a teacher in a toddler classroom, sits with Lisa and Torrence pretending to eat lunch. Lisa pretends to pour Azura and Torrence milk. Azura says “thank you”; Torrence then also says “thank you.”

Supporting Peer Interactions. As a teacher, you may need to assist children to solve conflicts they are unable to resolve themselves, to interpret and provide words for children’s actions, and to help children enter play. Children who are successful in play entry often begin as onlookers watching the other children play. This allows them to understand the play, the roles, and the plot. They often begin entry by playing next to the group, engaging in a parallel activity. Teachers can assist children to enter play by scaffolding, modeling, giving children desirable props, suggesting roles, or entering the play with the child. There is a more in-depth discussion about peer interactions in Chapter 2.

Acknowledging Learners. We acknowledge learners when we show a sincere interest in what they are doing, document and display their work, and use encouraging
language. Encouraging statements reflect the child’s effort, provide very specific information, encourage the child’s judgment on his work rather than your own, and often lead to further interaction. Encouragement can boost children’s self-confidence, persistence, and acceptance of their own and other’s efforts (Gartrell, 2011).

In contrast, praise tends to be more generic, focusing on the completed product and on the adult’s judgment about the product. Praise may lead children to feel “conditional acceptance” (Gartrell, 2011, p. 265). Instead of developing intrinsic or internal satisfaction with what one has done, frequent praise can make children dependent on external acknowledgment making them think they are only worthwhile when someone else states they are. For example, a Head Start teacher, Tanya, shared with me her rude awakening to the dangers of praise. Each day when Laurie entered the classroom, Tanya told her how pretty she looked. When Laurie went to kindergarten, she came home and told her mother “I’m ugly.” Her mother was stunned and asked Laurie why she thought so. Laurie said, “Mrs. Taylor never tells me I’m pretty, so she must think I’m ugly.” Laurie had become conditioned to praise; without it, she did not feel worthwhile. It is important to acknowledge learners, but to be cautious with praise. Table 1.2 provides examples of praise and encouragement.

**Apply Your Knowledge** Two children have spent the entire center time building a multi-floor castle. They are proudly showing the castle to you. What are some encouraging remarks you could say to the children?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Praise</th>
<th>Encouragement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good job.</td>
<td>This is the first time you’ve completed the entire puzzle. I bet you feel proud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the way you cleaned up.</td>
<td>You are working very hard putting away all the blocks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great artwork.</td>
<td>I see that you put a lot of detail in your picture, like adding all the branches on the tree. That must have taken a long time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Helping Children Engage in Sustained Play

Some children have a difficult time beginning or sustaining play. It is helpful if teachers have children make a plan before the play period, offer a child a choice between activities, and make sure that there are activities that have high appeal to the child. It is also important to examine the environment to make sure that it is not visually overwhelming, that there are clear divisions between centers to reduce distractions, and that noise levels are controlled.

### Reminding Children of the Rules

Reminders of rules may be especially needed when children are new to your classroom. Studies have found that teachers who spend more time at the beginning of the year helping children learn the rules and routines have a greater number of children who are actively engaged later in the year (Guthrie, 2000). Often you will be reminding children of interaction rules. For example, when Nancy grabs Salena’s truck, you might say, “Salena is playing with the dump truck right now. Do you want to get a different truck or do you want to ask Salena if you can play with her?” You may also need to remind children of rules that assist in keeping the room orderly, “You need to put the puzzles away when you are done using them.” Children might also need
reminders about the appropriate use of equipment and materials, “The sand needs to stay in the table. When sand gets thrown, it can get in someone’s eyes and that really hurts.”

Intervening When Needed to Provide for Safe Play. It is important to intervene if children are hurting each other physically or emotionally. You must also make sure that children are not engaging in behaviors that could seriously injure them. However, as stated by Greenman (2005b), we must be very thoughtful about when to intervene.

The drive to protect our children is profound and easily can lead to cleansing their lives of challenge and depth. Early childhood is a time when children begin to live in the world and hopefully learn to love the world. They can’t do this when fenced off from the messy richness of life to live in a world of fluorescent lights and plastic toys, two-dimensional glowing screens, and narrow teaching instruction. Scrubbing and polishing raw experience in the name of health and safety scrapes away the natural luster and meaning of childhood. Many of the wonders and joys of childhood that fuel the best in our adult selves are birthed in the unavoidable messes, bumps, bruises, and tears that come with exuberant exploration. (Greenman, 2005b, p. 7)

Documenting Learning. Another important role of the adult is to document children’s individual and group learning. You might capture children’s play through anecdotal records (brief, focused descriptions of a situation), photos, transcriptions of their conversations, tape recordings, video recordings, samples of their work, and so forth. Documentation can enhance children’s learning by making their learning visible, by demonstrating that we take their ideas and work seriously, and through allowing children and teachers to “revisit” ideas. It promotes teacher’s planning and evaluation with children, supplies information for communicating with parents, provides a history of the school, and can become a powerful tool for advocacy (Katz & Chard, 1996, pp. 3–4).

Enhancing and Extending the Learning Beyond the Learning Center Time

To take full advantage of the environment as a learning tool we need to extend the learning beyond the center time. One technique is to use small- or large-group discussions to enhance the learning. You can use small and large groups to:

Introduce Center Activities and Materials and Build Excitement. Veronica was introducing a bubble center that was going to be in the sensory table. She set out a variety of objects (funnels, sieves, regular spoons, slotted spoons, forks, a tea strainer, and a potato masher) and asked the children what they thought they might do with these materials. After a lively discussion and many guesses, Veronica brought out a bubble wand and asked again. Several children then guessed that they were going to make bubbles. Veronica then had the children vote on whether each item would make bubbles or not and graphed their answers. Children were eager to see if their hypotheses were correct and to try the different materials. Over the course of the next several days, all the children voluntarily visited the center.

Provide Relevant Background Experiences. Children who have a rich experience base engage in more in-depth play, leading to greater social and intellectual outcomes. Jerry had created a music center with several rhythm instruments, including many from other cultures. However, the children had very little interest in the music area. Jerry realized that the children had never seen the instruments in use. He invited guests to come in and play the various instruments. He also showed a videotape of the cultural instruments being played by a group of musicians. Because of this exposure, the children became interested in using the music center.
Introduce Challenges. Teacher challenges can provide additional interest and assist children to stretch their capabilities. For example, in Chapter 11 you will read a description of a teacher who challenged children to create tall buildings. Another teacher challenged children to create a way to get a doll from the first to the second floor of their block building. Through careful observation you will find opportunities to introduce challenging tasks for the children you work with.

Plan and Recall Experiences. Both the HighScope and Tools of the Mind (based on the Vygotskian approach) models emphasize having children make plans before playing and to reflect upon these plans after play. Bodrova and Leong (2007), discussing the Vygotskian approach, stress that planning reduces conflicts and allows children to engage in more mature, focused play. Reviewing their play plans can help children to extend the play the following day.

The HighScope model encourages beginning planning with toddlers. As discussed by Post and Hohman (2000), planning and recalling can help children to “call up mental pictures of themselves in action, to connect their ideas with actions, to communicate their intentions to others, and to begin to organize their past actions into a simple narrative” (p. 260).

Encourage Children to Share Their Work. Sharing work is a way of acknowledging the importance of what children have done. Children get an opportunity to speak in front of a group and to ask each other questions and give suggestions. Additionally, one child’s work might spark an interest in another child.

Synthesize and Discuss Children’s Learning. After the children had used the bubble center for several days, Veronica again discussed the bubbles. She and the children reexamined their initial predictions and reviewed what they had found out. Veronica placed all the items that made bubbles in one area and all those that did not in another. She asked the children what was similar about the items that made bubbles. By having this circle, Veronica was able to help children analyze and express what they had learned.

Enriching and Changing Centers as Needed
You will need to continuously observe and monitor centers to enrich and change them as additions and changes can spark children’s interest, meet their needs, and provide for more in-depth learning. For example, the children in Jocia’s toddler class had become fascinated with an alarm clock that he had added to the dramatic play area. Seeing their interest, he went to a secondhand store and purchased a variety of alarm clocks, wall clocks, and watches for the children to listen to and experiment with.

You might also introduce an element of surprise. This is often something that makes children curious, makes them wonder why, and creates new possibilities. Elements of surprise might start a discussion, provoke new ideas, or inspire interest. For example, a teacher might place a crystal in a window, hide “jewels” in the sand table, or place a mirror under a plant so one sees the underside. Min, a Head Start teacher, was studying bones with the children. One day

One of the characteristics of High Scope programs is the emphasis on assisting children to plan and recall experiences. In this video, pay special attention to the “plan, do, review” process.

Understanding the Importance of the Environment

This light table is enriched with natural (twigs, feathers, pine cones) and recycled items (beads, buttons, fabric, ribbon), allowing children to create designs of their choice. Clear glass containers highlight the materials.
she hid several bones in the outdoor sandbox. As children were digging, they discovered the bones. They were very excited, wondering where the bones came from and what kind of bones they were. All the children busily began to dig, discovering every bone. Elements of surprise cause wonderment, joy, and excitement, which are gifts that all children deserve.

Helping Families Understand the Learning Center Approach

It is also the responsibility of the teacher to assist families in understanding developmentally appropriate practices, and to keep families informed about what their children are learning. Families are often concerned about whether their children will be successful in the next level of schooling. Some parents associate worksheets with learning. When they do not see these sent home each night they become worried. Here are several techniques teachers have used to provide information to families.

Jeremy has a family night at the beginning of each year. He introduces the center approach by having the families complete activities in each learning center. Jeremy tries to choose activities that would be appropriate for children and also interesting for adults. For example, in the manipulative area, Jeremy places a collection of office items with a sign asking families to sort them in as many ways as they can think of. One year, four parents became very engaged in this activity and found 50 different ways of classifying the materials. At the end of the evening, the families and teachers gather together to reflect upon what they have learned.

Teresa makes signs to place in each center that list skills and knowledge that children acquire through using the center. She also regularly sends “Today I learned” notes to the families. While children interact in centers, she will observe and write a short note to families to tell what their child has learned that day. For example, “Chin used both math and science skills to make a block structure with a turret today. He experimented with many ideas (hypotheses) before solving the problem of how to create a turret that would balance on top of his tower.” Teresa has created a check-off sheet so that she can easily track who has sent notes to. By keeping a tracking sheet, Teresa can make sure that she regularly sends notes to each child’s family.

Teachers may also display children’s artifacts (samples of children’s “work”) on the wall or in digital picture frames. Many teachers also send artifacts and other forms of documentation from center work home. These include photos of children participating in an activity, artwork and recording sheets the child has created, or audio recordings of children reading or telling a story. At least occasionally, it is helpful to include information that describes and interprets what children learned. Many teachers save some of this work to place in portfolios. The portfolio will include artifacts with a description and interpretation for each artifact. Portfolios are typically shared with parents during parent-teacher conferences or home visits.

Rhonda, a teacher of kindergarten children, develops a booklet that describes the learning centers in her classroom. There is a photo of each classroom center, a description of what children learn in the center, and the state standards that are addressed in the center. Each year she gives the booklet to each family and the school administrators. She states, “Before I did this, families and the administrators were concerned about whether the children would be ready for first grade if they spent so much time playing. However, now that they understand that children can enjoy school and still be meeting the standards, they have become advocates for this approach.”

Programs that use the project approach often have culminating events to conclude a project. Culminating events allow the children to share what they have learned with parents and other community members. For example, one program had completed a project on “Our Body,” and decided to have their culminating event at a community health
fair. They set up displays that included webs of what the children knew before and after the project, questions the children had, art they had created, stories they had written, and materials they had used. Pictures and narratives described the center materials, children’s activities, and learning throughout the project. They also invited the public to try out a sensory walk that the children had created. For the sensory walk, the children decorated fourteen flat boxes and placed a different item in each box (e.g., sand, bubble wrap, sandpaper). Participants could walk barefoot through each of the boxes.

In conclusion, teachers play a crucial role in children’s learning by designing a rich, stimulating environment, interacting with children as they use the environment, expanding and extending the children’s learning beyond the center time period, and changing centers and adding materials to provide for more in-depth learning. In addition, teachers assist parents and administrators to understand the learning center approach. In each chapter of this book, you will find many other examples of specific ways that teachers are involved in children’s learning.

In this chapter, we have discussed the importance of the learning environment, how the environment supports developmentally appropriate practices, the crucial role of the teacher, and the recognition by theorists and early childhood founders of the importance of the environment. It seems only fitting to end this chapter with a quote from Maria Montessori, who first created the child-sized environment and filled it with beautiful, thoughtfully planned learning materials. In discussing children’s cognitive development, she states, “The first lesson we must learn is that the tiny child’s absorbent mind finds all its nutriment in its surroundings. Here it has to locate itself, and build itself up from what it takes in. Especially at the beginning of life must we, therefore, make the environment as interesting and attractive as we can” (1995, p. 97).

Sample Application Activities

1. You began this chapter by imagining your favorite childhood environment. Now think of your favorite environment today. Are there commonalities between your favorite environment as a child and your favorite environment today? What aspects of your favorite environment could you share with children through your classroom environmental design?

2. Visit an early childhood facility. What do you see in the environment that was influenced by Montessori, Vygotsky, Piaget, or Malaguzzi? Observe the teacher and record examples of the ways she is scaffolding the children’s learning.

3. You have just been hired to teach a kindergarten class in a public school with K–5 classes. Write a one-page letter to parents describing why developmentally appropriate practices and learning through play are important in kindergarten.

4. Using the information in the text, compare and contrast the Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and HighScope approaches. For additional information see the following websites:
   www.amshq.org/
   www.reggioalliance.org/narea.php
   www.highscope.org

5. Due to space constraints it was not possible to examine every theorist who emphasizes the importance of the environment in children’s learning. Conduct an Internet search looking for other theorists who stress the importance of the environment. For example, you might explore the beliefs and practices of the Waldorf method:
   www.iaswece.org/waldorf_education/index.aspx

6. Review the following Pre-K virtual tour on the Pre-K Now website to see the important characteristics of the physical and emotional environment: www.prek-now.org/resource/classroomtour.cfm

Understanding the Importance of the Environment
chapter 2

Establishing an Emotionally Supportive and Equitable Environment

Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you will be prepared to:

• Discuss the importance of supportive relationships

• Define an emotionally supportive, equitable environment using the Circle of Courage framework

• Describe the foundations of an emotionally supportive and equitable environment

• Discuss the teacher’s role in supporting the Circle of Courage
It was November when Kamiko’s parents enrolled her in preschool. They had just arrived from Japan to work on a ranch in an extremely isolated, rural, Caucasian community. Alisha, Kamiko’s teacher, knew that she should have materials in the environment that reflected Kamiko. However, she could not easily find any books or nonstereotypical images of Japanese children. She finally ordered some books, and when they arrived several weeks later she placed them in the reading area. Kamiko was elated when she discovered the books. She carried one of the books with her all day, saying “me, me” to everyone she met. She even slept with the book at nap time. The next day she again carried the book with her, showing the pictures to each parent and child as they arrived.

It was a vivid reminder to Alisha of the importance of having materials and images representing all the children in the classroom. When Alisha saw Kamiko’s reaction, she began to examine all the classroom materials. There were multicultural dolls in the dramatic play area, but none were Asian. The same was true for the multicultural figures in the block area. A multicultural poster adorned the wall, but again none of the children were Japanese. Alisha replaced the multicultural poster with photos of children in the classroom, she ordered Asian dolls, and she visited with Kamiko’s parents to see if they had any materials that she could add to the classroom. The parents brought in some empty food containers, a children’s dish set, and a Japanese newspaper for the dramatic play area. This recognition by Alisha of the family’s culture helped to build relationships. As the year progressed, Alisha continued to learn more about Kamiko’s culture and to build relationships with Kamiko and her family.

**Importance of Supportive Relationships**

Relationships are the heart of an early childhood program. Just as a plant needs to experience both sunlight and rich soil to produce a healthy plant, a child needs to experience both quality relationships and quality instruction to be successful (Ray, Bowman, & Brownell, 2006). Relationships affect children’s social skills, academic success, and brain development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004b, 2007; Ray et al., 2006). They also affect children’s feelings about the program.

Relationships between staff and children, staff and parents, among children, and among staff define the climate of a program. High quality climates assist children to feel safe, increase positive behavior, and reduce absenteeism from the program. When children are in emotionally supportive environments in the early years their achievement increases, resulting in higher social, math, and reading scores. Additionally, supportive relationships positively influence work habits and improve educational resiliency. This is especially true for children who are at risk of school failure (Ray et al., 2006).

Emotional responsiveness (acknowledging and responding to children’s emotions and needs), particularly in the early years, even affects brain development and the biochemistry of the brain. Similarly, unresponsive care can alter the brain’s biochemistry. Here’s how this works: when we feel stress, our bodies produce the hormones adrenaline and cortisol. Both hormones help the body to respond to threat. However, when these hormones are activated either frequently or for long periods, they can produce negative effects on the brain. For example, long-term elevations of cortisol can change the architecture of the brain, leading to memory and learning problems. Because young children’s brains are “particularly malleable,” stress is especially harmful for this age group (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004b, p. 2).
The child’s early experiences also determine how the stress system reacts to subsequent stress. High levels of stress can result in a stress system that responds at a lower threshold of stress and remains stressed for a longer period of time. As stated by the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, “Like the immune system, which defends the body against threatening infections but can cause autoimmune disease when it turns against the body’s own cells, a poorly controlled response to stress can be damaging to health and well-being if activated too often or for too long” (2004b, p. 2). Elevated stress can lead to an increased vulnerability for stress-related disorders (depression, anxiety, cardiovascular problems, stroke, and diabetes).

However, high-quality care in the early years leads to a lessened stress response. In addition, as you will learn in this chapter, when a child does experience stress, the responsive teacher can dramatically buffer the child’s stress response through her relationship with the child (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004b).

While teachers have limited influence over the other environments that children are in, they do have control over their classroom. When the classroom environment is emotionally supportive, children learn more, they experience less stress, and there is reduced absenteeism. How do we create an emotionally supportive environment? We will examine this question next.

**Circle of Courage: Defining an Emotionally Supportive, Equitable Environment**

Realizing the importance of the emotionally supportive, equitable environment, many curriculum developers have designed excellent models to assist teachers. In this chapter, we view the supportive environment through the lens of one of these models, the Circle of Courage. This model, simple to remember and yet profound, provides a unifying theme for services to children in multiple settings. The model, which incorporates resiliency (Brendtro & Larson, 2006) and self-worth research (Coopersmith, 1981), is used worldwide in educational, mental health, youth and family services, treatment facilities, and juvenile justice settings.

The Circle of Courage, based on Native American philosophy, is compatible with beliefs from many cultural groups. The philosophy is based on four needs (the need to belong, to achieve mastery, to be independent, and to be generous). Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (2002), the authors of the Circle of Courage, describe these in the following ways:

- **The child who experiences the spirit of belonging knows “I am loved.”** This is essential for meeting all other needs. To experience the spirit of belonging, children must have mutual connections or positive relationships characterized by deep respect. Since belonging is cyclical, the child who expresses this ideal also knows how to identify and relate to others.

- **The child who experiences the spirit of mastery knows that “I can succeed.”** This includes both academic and social competence. Mastery assists a child to have a positive self-concept.

- **The child who experiences the spirit of independence knows “I have the power to make decisions.”** This provides individual control and inner discipline, and allows the child to establish and attain goals. As stated by the authors of the Circle of Courage, “Even when it might be easier for the adults to ‘take over,’ adults will respect children enough to allow them to work things out in their own manner” (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002, p. 53).

- **The child who experiences the spirit of generosity knows “I have a purpose for my life.”** Generosity allows the child to take “responsibility for the welfare of others in the community” (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 59), and to contribute positively to the group through being caring and empathetic.
According to the authors of the model, when these needs are not met or are out of balance the child becomes discouraged and loses a sense of purpose, leading to a downward spiral (Brendtro et al., 2002). Adults often have a difficult time forming relationships with discouraged, disengaged children, and may respond to them punitively. This leads the child to react in an even more discouraged way. However, using the Circle of Courage as a guiding framework for interacting with children, designing our environments, and planning our curriculum can help children to avoid this downward spiral.

**Circle of Courage Foundations**

In order to meet the needs of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity, children need foundational skills. These foundational skills include attachment, self-regulation, and social skills (empathy and friendship skills). We will examine each of these foundational skills next.

**Attachment**

Secure attachment is at the heart of the spirit of belonging. “Attachment describes a strong emotional bond between a baby or young child and a caring adult who is part of the child’s everyday life—the child’s attachment figure” (Honig, 2002, p. 2). The attachment figure greatly influences a child’s beliefs about relationships. These beliefs become internalized templates for behavior and have a “profound effect throughout life” (Honig, 2002, p. 3). Attachment grows over time, beginning at birth and progressing through the early years. It involves a two-way interaction, with the child affecting the caregiver and the caregiver affecting the child.

Securely attached children use the adult attachment figure as a home base, feeling comfortable to explore or try new things, but returning to the caregiver for reassurance and guidance. Children who are securely attached to at least one adult have better current and future academic and social outcomes. About 70% of young children display secure attachments to one or both parents (Riley, San Juan, Klinkner, & Ramminger, 2008). However, these children also benefit from having a secure attachment to their childcare provider or teacher. There is no indication that the relationship between the child and caregiver negatively affects parental attachment. Instead, outcomes are more positive if the child is attached to both the parents and the early childhood teacher. Attachment to the teacher is even more crucial for children who do not have a secure attachment with their parents (Riley et al., 2008). While attachment is critical for young children, it is very difficult if they must detach and reattach to important people in their lives. This can cause stress and “enduring problems” (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004a, p. 4). Therefore, we must try to reduce the number of times that children are moved to new classrooms or programs or experience new teachers within the same classroom. For example, many infant/toddler programs practice continuity of care and permit teachers to move with more mobile infants into the toddler room when they become ready for this transition.

Attachment is a universal developmental aspect in all cultures. However, the way that responsiveness is demonstrated may differ from culture to culture (Riley et al., 2008). Cultural discontinuity between the child’s home and childcare or school setting can cause the child to be vulnerable to stress (Espinosa, 2006). Therefore, it is important that we observe how parents promote secure attachment, so that we can support the child and family by using similar routines and techniques (Riley et al., 2008).

Secure attachment is a critical component of the Circle of Courage, forming the basis for the spirit of belonging. The spirit of belonging is essential for meeting the other needs—mastery, independence, and generosity.
Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to control one’s emotions, actions (impulsivity), and thinking (focusing attention and planning). The ability to self-regulate predicts both immediate and long-term success. Children who have good self-regulation skills display higher self-esteem, increased academic performance, better social skills, and the ability to handle emotions constructively (Riley et al., 2008, p. 67).

Regulating Emotions. Gaining the ability to regulate emotions is one of the tasks of the early childhood years. By the end of the preschool years, most children are able to anticipate and discuss their feelings. This is very important because “when children can label a feeling, they can make the leap from unconscious experience to conscious control” (Riley et al., 2008, p. 86). Poorly managed feelings can impair learning, attention, decision-making, planning, and problem solving (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004b).

Culture affects the way that children display their emotions (Day, 2006). For example, some cultures view it as inappropriate to display anger in public while other cultures do not. In some cultures, physical affection is openly displayed, whereas in others this is viewed as inappropriate. Children learn the culturally acceptable ways to display emotions through imitation, feedback, and direct instruction (Kostelnik, Gregory, Soderman, & Whiren, 2012).

Regulating Actions and Thinking. Self-regulation of actions and thinking are also developing during the early childhood years. Self-regulation often involves delaying gratification. This is easier if children are in a predictable environment. I once worked as a houseparent for abused and neglected children. At mealtime, many of the children overate. Even though snacks were readily available, several of them hid food in heater vents, under pillows, and in dresser drawers. They were unable to delay gratification for eating because they had lived in unpredictable environments where food was not consistently available. One successful technique that children often use in delaying gratification is to distract themselves. Self-talk (verbalizing what you are doing or the next steps to take) is another technique that children use to assist in regulating both actions and thinking. A third technique that assists with self-regulation is planning. We can assist children to develop self-regulation skills by providing a predictable environment and routines, and by helping children to develop successful techniques such as using distraction, self-talk, and planning. For example, we might incorporate “plan, do, review” (see information in Chapters 1 and 3 on the HighScope method) as a way of helping children learn planning skills.

Teachers also need to be aware of typical development and make referrals to specialists where appropriate when development is atypical. Even very young children have deep and intense feelings and can experience severe mental health problems (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004b). If there are mental health concerns, teachers need to discuss these concerns with the family and refer them to a specialist. Early intervention can be critical for current and future well-being.
Children with parents who are violent, mentally ill, or substance abusers are also at increased risk for difficulties with emotional development. They will need extra support from teachers and may need assistance from counselors (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004b). Teachers must also be aware of signs of child abuse and must report suspected abuse to the proper authorities.

Learning to regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and actions are important goals for the early childhood years. Self-regulation is a foundation for achieving mastery and independence, and for interacting successfully with others or displaying generosity.

**Social Skills**

Children’s social skills build upon their self-regulatory skills. Researchers contend that social skills and knowledge are as important for school success as academic skills (Ray et al., 2006). To form and maintain successful relationships, children must identify, regulate, and manage their feelings in a constructive manner. In addition, they must develop empathy and friendship skills (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004b).

**Developing Empathy.** To develop empathy, children must first be able to engage in social perspective-taking (understanding another’s wants and thinking) and emotional perspective-taking (understanding another’s feelings). With empathy, the child experiences an emotional response as he views things from the other’s perspective (Riley et al., 2008). When 2-year-old Julian sat down and cried next to his friend Kirsten, who was sad that her mother had left, he was displaying perspective-taking and empathy. He understood Kirsten’s feeling of loneliness and demonstrated an emotional response to her sadness.

**Developing Friendship Skills.** To make friends children must learn communication, negotiation, and play entry skills. In addition, they must demonstrate the attributes of a friend. Children often learn these attributes, such as cooperation, faithfulness, and loyalty, from more competent peers or adults.

Even during the first year of life, children begin to recognize another child as a social partner. As toddlers, they begin to have reciprocal social interactions (Honig & Thompson, 1994). For example, Tabi and Tenile were washing dolls in the water table. Tabi said, “Baby wet.” Tenile handed her a towel and said, “Dry baby.” Tabi said, “Thank you.” The friendships formed in the toddler and preschool years can be quite stable over time (Dunn, 2004). One study found that 50% to 70% of children’s friendships lasted through the next year (Howes, 1989). The concept of friends changes from preschool to elementary school to adolescence. However, children typically choose friends that are similar to themselves in race, gender, behavioral characteristics, play behaviors, and attitudes (Kostelnik et al., 2012).

“The quality of peer relationships in early childhood predicts later success in intellectual growth, self-esteem, mental health, and school performance” (Riley et al., 2008, p. 42). Why do friendships affect children’s outcomes? While interacting with friends, children develop interaction skills, practice reciprocity and fairness, and learn to value other’s feelings. Research also indicates that children’s interactions with groups of friends are more positive than when they interact with other peers. In addition, a group of friends is often pursuing a mutual goal, leading to discussion, negotiation, and cooperation. This leads to more problem solving and complex thinking (Riley et al., 2008, p. 43). Friends can also be helpful in coping with new situations. For example, when children move to a new classroom at the same time as a friend, the transition is easier. Having a friend in an established group also helps pave the way for other friends to join the group.
However, the peer group rejects some children. Rejected children often exhibit inappropriate social skills (Honig & Thompson, 1994), particularly communication skills (Hazen & Black, 1989). Children who are not popular are more likely to perform poorly in school and ultimately drop out (Riley et al., 2008). Children who do not have friends are also at serious risk for detrimental developmental effects (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004a, p. 3).

Teachers have a responsibility to assist children in developing the foundations for the Circle of Courage: attachment, self-regulation, and social skills. How can teachers accomplish this? We will examine the teacher’s role in assisting children to develop these skills in the next section.

The Teacher’s Role in Supporting the Circle of Courage

The teacher plays a crucial role in helping the child to feel a sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. The teacher models these characteristics, establishes an environment that assists children in achieving these values, and supports children through informal and formal techniques.

Creating a Spirit of Belonging

The teacher sets the stage for the child to feel a sense of belonging by displaying a warm, accepting attitude. This helps the child to form an attachment to the teacher. She also creates a welcoming and caring classroom community. Finally, she is responsive to all children, including those who are from cultures different from her own, children who come from low-income families, and children with disabilities.

Forming an Attachment with Each Child.

“Throughout the early childhood years, most learning depends on the formation of a nurturing relationship” (Riley et al., 2008, p. 8). When this is absent, developmental delays can occur. For example, studies of children reared in orphanages have demonstrated that the lack of attachment and responsive care results in developmental delays in social emotional, cognitive, and language development (Rosas & McCall, 2009). In addition, attachment to a primary caregiver in early childhood settings appears to reduce the levels of the child’s cortisol. Cortisol is typically highest in the morning and decreases throughout the day. However, research has shown that when children are in childcare, cortisol often rises throughout the day. This can be reduced when the child has a consistent, responsive caregiver that they are attached to (Badanes, Dmitrieva, & Watamura, 2012).

Children are more likely to form attachments to adults who are sensitive, warm, and nurturing (Riley et al., 2008), and who show unconditional positive regard for the child (Gartrell, 2011). To help form attachments, the adult needs to show genuine interest in the child and spend quality time with him. For example, the adult converses with the child, listening attentively as he speaks, and asks questions to get to know the child’s preferences. As the child and adult spend time together, they learn to “read each other,” and it becomes easier for the adult to know how to assist the child (Riley et al., 2008). In addition, children gain their feelings about their own self-worth from the adults in their environment. When the adult is warm and responsive, the child feels valuable and worthwhile. Children who experience warmth from their caregiver display greater social competence, have fewer behavioral issues, achieve more academically, and show increased reasoning skills. They are more excited about school and are more self-confident (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004a).
Establishing an Emotionally Supportive and Equitable Environment

In addition to displaying warmth, the adult must also be responsive to the child. The responsive adult treats children with respect and responds quickly to their needs. For example, the infant teacher responds to a baby’s cries. She also uses appropriate pacing during interactions, taking cues from the baby (Riley et al., 2008). For example, when the baby looks away, the teacher realizes that he is trying to escape the stimulation and respects this. The teacher creates a responsive environment and schedule that allows time and space for positive interactions.

It takes time for attachments to develop. Secure attachment is more likely when there is an ongoing sustained relationship between the caregiver and child (Honig, 2002, p. 22). Unfortunately, high teacher turnover rates in early childhood programs can negatively affect attachment by not allowing time for the attachment to develop, and by creating negative impacts when the attachment ends. In addition, frequent moves from classroom to classroom can also have negative impacts on the child. There is a relationship between the number of lost caregivers and socially withdrawn or aggressive behavior on the part of the child (Howes & Hamilton, 1993). The child who loses a person he is attached to may act depressed and have difficulty forming new relationships. Many programs that are aware of the importance of attachment are designing policies that assist children to attach to caregivers. In addition to reducing turnover, programs provide time for relationship development by assigning primary caregivers and keeping children with the same caregiver for multiple years (Riley et al., 2008). Smaller child/adult ratios also assist with attachment.

Developing a Classroom Community.
We often hear about the need to develop a sense of community, but what exactly does this mean? When there is a sense of community, there is an emotional connection among members. They encourage, support, and influence each other. Members depend on each other and feel like insiders within the group. To create a sense of community, you can:

- Make sure that all staff, children, and families are represented in the classroom displays and materials.
- Help children get to know each other and to bond together as a cohesive group. Many programs begin the year with “All About Us,” where children learn about themselves and others in the classroom. This time is also devoted to many group-building activities.

When these early elementary age children begin school at the Renaissance School of Arts and Sciences in Portland, Oregon, they create their own bucket. They use these buckets to carry art materials and their lunch when they go on field trips.

These preschool children created their faces out of torn paper as part of the beginning of the year “getting to know you” project.

Establishing an Emotionally Supportive and Equitable Environment
Allow time for children to systematically share with each other (see Figure 2.1), and to spend time interacting in both formal and informal small groups.

Set up the classroom environment to encourage children to work together. For example, provide two phones in the dramatic play area, multiple earphones to listen to a CD, two doll buggies for strolling together, wagons for pulling each other, rocking boats and swings, easels side by side with paint that is shared, two chairs at the computer center, large floor puzzles, and board games.

Be realistic about sharing. Even adults have difficulty sharing favored possessions or items they are using. Make sure that you have duplicate materials and enough materials so that all children can be actively engaged using materials that interest them.

Develop activities where children work together to complete a goal. For example, children might create a garden, paint a mural, build a house from straw bales, move together like a centipede, or make a ball bounce on a parachute.

Develop a unique sense of place in the program, one that represents the children, adults, and community in which you live. To create a sense of place, you can display photos of staff, children, and families,. Also, you can provide materials that reflect the uniqueness of the environment in which you live. For example, if you live near a beach, your playground might include driftwood that children can use for building. Many programs develop a special sense of place by encouraging children to name the classroom and develop a class mascot.

**Being Responsive to Children from All Cultures.** “Culture is defined by the values, traditions, social and political relationships, and worldview shared by a group of people bound together by a combination of commonalities that include one or more of the following: history, geographic location or origin, language, social class, or religion” (Wolpert, 2005, p. 53). Culture is learned, often being passed on from generation to generation. However, members are embedded in the cultural group to different degrees (Day, 2006, p. 29). Culture is dynamic, changing over time due to influences from cultural members as well as outside forces (Day, 2006; Johnson et al., 2005). However, there is also cultural stability. The desire of a system to maintain the status quo tends to prevail over change. Culture is a template that influences all aspects of our lives: our goals, expectations, relationships, values, roles, and perspectives. Through our culture, we learn rules that govern the way we think, act, and feel, allowing us to behave in ways that are acceptable to the group (Day, 2006, p. 29). It is critical that we understand the children’s and families’ cultures in our classrooms.

When there is a mismatch between the teacher’s culture and the child’s, there is the possibility that misunderstandings will occur (Ray et al., 2006). The difference in cultural lens, or the way we view the world because of our culture, may cause teachers to misinterpret children’s abilities or behaviors, and this may negatively affect the teacher’s ability to establish rapport with the child. This may also make it more difficult
Establishing an Emotionally Supportive and Equitable Environment

to understand the child’s needs and interests, which will affect the teacher’s ability to deliver effective curriculum. In addition, cultural discontinuity (a difference in the learning preferences, practices, and behaviors valued at home and school) can cause children to have a more negative perception of themselves as learners, readers, writers, and speakers (Garcia, 1993).

In the United States, the population of children is becoming more diverse. For example, over 26% of Head Start children (Hulsey et al., 2011) and 21% of school-age children speak a language other than English at home (Federal Interagency Forum Child and Family Statistics, 2011). Additionally, statisticians estimate that by the year 2023, 50% of children in the United States will be children of color (Nieto and Bode, 2012). However, the population of teachers does not reflect this same diversity, with 82% of elementary teachers being White, 7% Black, and 8% Hispanic. The typical elementary teacher is also female, middle income, and monolingual (speaking English only) (Aud et al., 2011).

In addition to concern about lack of continuity between the children’s home and school culture, there is also danger from bias. According to Day (2006), “Institutional bias that are manifested in monocultural, monoracial assumptions and representations in books, materials, testing, and tracking for example can cause repeated and cumulative harm to children’s growth, development and academic achievement” (p. 30).

The mismatch between teacher’s and children’s culture as well as individual and institutional bias can contribute to some children being less successful in the classroom. Achievement gaps occur between children who are black, Latino, and Native American and their white peers (Day, 2006, p. 23). For example, fewer children who are African American, Latino, or poor graduate from high school or attend college (Chapman et al., 2011). As reported by Linda Espinosa (2006), an early childhood researcher and professor, the Latino population, the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority in the United States, is the group with the lowest academic performance. She states that children who are Latino start kindergarten behind their white peers in reading and math, and these differences continue to widen as children progress through school, leading to high dropout rates. So how can we reverse this trend?

To change these statistics, we must provide an equitable education and help children experience a sense of belonging in our classrooms. Each of us has cultural scripts that guide us in our interactions, behaviors, and thinking. These scripts become our “undeniable reality” and are often unchallenged, particularly if we are a member of the dominant culture (Maschinot, 2008). We must begin cultural awareness by examining our own cultural scripts. This helps us to uncover our own worldview. For example, if you are a member of the mainstream United States you will most likely value individualism. However, recent immigrants are more likely to value interdependence (Maschinot, 2008). Think about how early childhood programs might be different if interdependence rather than independence were stressed.

After we examine our own cultural scripts, we are ready to learn about the children’s cultures. Teachers can learn about the cultures of children in their classrooms in a variety of ways. They can discuss goals, beliefs (for example, about routines, celebrations, family roles, gender roles, food, discipline), and traditions with children and families; ask parents and children to share songs, stories, food, customs, and family activities with the class; and observe the interactions of children and their families. They can also interview community members and review research and other written materials pertaining to the culture (Ray et al., 2006). As we learn about culture, we must remember that there is great variety within a particular culture. Children and their families are individuals, and we must be cautious...
about attributing specific characteristics to them simply because they belong to a particular cultural group. In other words, we must not stereotype. As stated by Day (2006), “Because we are human we share predictable, universal patterns of change with all other humans; because we are social beings, we share predictable patterns of behavior with members of our group or groups; and because we are individuals, each of us is unique and idiosyncratic” (p. 24).

We can use the information we have learned about individual children and their culture to arrange inclusive environments, plan appropriate activities, and adapt our interaction styles. This is critical if we are going to help all children to succeed.

**Culturally Relevant Materials.** Johnson et al. (2005), in discussing culturally relevant materials, state that many classroom materials are culturally neutral, such as balls, blocks, and math manipulatives. They emphasize, “Efforts to make such materials relevant to specific groups of children are humorous at best and potentially counterproductive” (p. 234).

However, many materials are not culturally neutral. It is critical that books, posters, play people, dramatic play props, puzzles, and other materials that reflect cultures be inclusive. These materials need to reflect the diversity within the program (for example, race, ethnicity, family structure, age, disabilities, gender, and occupations). In addition, we want to expose children to diversity they might not regularly experience (Wardle & Cruz-Janzen, 2004). In evaluating toys and materials for multiculturalism, consider the following (Johnson et al., 2005):

- **Materials should expose children to many forms of diversity (e.g., race, ethnicity, family structure, and disabilities).** Teachers need to integrate the materials into the environment and curriculum, rather than using them only occasionally or in an isolated way.
- **Materials need to portray the child’s culture and all cultures in a positive, authentic, and realistic light.** For example, you would not want to portray American Indians as only living in teepees and wearing headdresses, since this is not an accurate portrayal either historically or currently for many American Indians.
- **Materials should never convey that one group is better than another group.** “Unfortunately, if certain people are not represented in play materials, this invisibility is a powerful indicator of lack of importance” (Wardle & Cruz-Janzen, 2004).
- **Materials need to challenge all forms of stereotypes, such as only men or only women can have certain careers, or because you are from a particular race, you have a specific talent.**
- **Materials need to emphasize individual differences and the diversity within large groups.** Just because you belong to a specific group (female, male, African American, Caucasian, Asian American, and so forth) does not mean that you think, act, or have the same talents as every other member of the group. Many children are multiracial and multiethnic. It is important to have materials that reflect this group as well.

These puppets are an example of multicultural materials. Also note the child-created sign advertising a puppet show.
Throughout this book, you will find examples of ways teachers have made their environments culturally relevant.

**Apply Your Knowledge** Throughout this chapter, we have been reading about how essential it is to affirm each child and the child’s culture. As a frequent volunteer in my daughter’s first grade classroom, the teacher asked me to help with a Halloween party. I noticed that Sarah did not participate in the costume parade, play the games, or eat the treats. Instead, she sat quietly at her desk with tears streaming down her face. I thought that perhaps she was ill and asked the teacher what was wrong. She said that Sarah belonged to a religion that did not celebrate Halloween and her parents should have kept her home for the day. What message did Sarah receive from this experience? What message did the other children learn? What are ways that we can respect all members in the classroom when we conduct celebrations?

Many programs do not celebrate holidays for several reasons. First, many teachers believe that since families have different religious and cultural beliefs about what holidays to celebrate and the appropriate way to celebrate or not celebrate, the celebrations are best done in the child’s home or church. Second, since children are typically exposed to an extensive amount of holiday celebration outside the classroom, many teachers feel it is not necessary to also celebrate within the classroom. Holiday periods can be very stressful for both children and families. The early childhood setting may be the only setting where normal routines and activities are occurring. Third, teachers are also often concerned about whether “holiday curriculum” is the best use of children’s learning time. Instead, these programs may celebrate the end of a long-term project with a culminating event, or celebrate an author’s birthday (such as Dr. Seuss) after studying the author.

**Early Childhood Programs as a Culture.** While it is critical that the school reflect the cultures of children, families, and community, the school itself also forms a unique community and culture. The school not only translates culture but also creates the “culture of childhood,” helping all to appreciate and value this time (Rinaldi, 2001, p. 53). The culture of childhood is formed partially by the adult’s view of children and childhood. For example, if adults view childhood as a time of wonder, joy, and exploration, then they will set up experiences and environments where this is a focus. This will affect the way children experience and remember their childhood. The school culture, like all cultures, is influenced by and influences those who participate within it.

**Being Responsive to Children with Special Needs.** Children who have special needs are often, although not always, at special risk. They are more vulnerable to academic failure, due to both the disability and the lack of support and services to be successful. They might also experience a lack of social success, including peer rejection (Odom, Zercher, Li, Marquart, Sandall, & Brown, 2006) and being a more frequent target of bullies than their peers who are nondisabled (Sveinsson & Morris, 2006). Additionally, frustrated teachers sometimes increase the child’s difficulties through reacting inappropriately to challenging behaviors.

It is critical that the teacher establish a warm, nurturing, respectful relationship with the child who has special needs and his family. The teacher will also need to help other
children accept the child with special needs. You might help the other children understand the child’s disability through discussions, reading books, and allowing children to try special equipment the child uses. If children have questions, you will want to offer the child who is disabled the opportunity to determine how to answer the questions. The child may choose to answer the question himself, choose to tell the other child that he does not wish to answer the question, or choose to refer the question to you to answer. You will also want to make sure your environment reflects children with disabilities (for example, dolls with disabilities and assistive devices in the dramatic play area, pictures in the room that include children with disabilities, and books that show children with disabilities).

To help children relate positively with those who have special needs, you might invite guest speakers with disabilities to visit your classroom. As a classroom teacher, I invited Jason, a neighborhood man who was paraplegic, to visit my program. The children had many questions. “What happened?” “Do your legs hurt?” “Can you walk?” “How do you get out of the wheelchair?” “Can you do a wheelie?” They were especially interested in how Jason drove. He showed them the brake and gas pedal on the steering column and gave them rides on the wheelchair lift. After the initial visit, Jason became a frequent volunteer, enriching all our lives.

The Building Blocks Model. In addition to establishing positive relationships, it may be necessary to make modifications to help the child with a disability to be successful. Sandall and Schwartz (2002) have developed a successful model called Building Blocks (see Figure 2.2) that can help teachers with a process for inclusion. This process is effective whether the child has challenging behaviors, a specific disability, or an undiagnosed special need. The foundation of the model is a “high quality early childhood program,” one that they define as having “engaging interactions, a responsive and predictable environment, many opportunities for learning, teaching that is matched to the child and activity, developmentally appropriate materials, activities, and interactions, safe and hygienic practices, and appropriate levels of child guidance” (p. 11). This base is necessary for all children, regardless of whether they have special needs. It is crucial, because without it other interventions will not be effective.

If the child is not successful within the classroom even with this solid early childhood base, the teacher moves to the next block, curriculum modification. This is any modification that allows the child to participate fully in the classroom. For example, you might alter the schedule, environment, or materials; simplify activities; provide special equipment; or provide additional peer or adult support. To determine the modifications, it is important to observe the child so that you can clearly define the difficulties. Parents, previous teachers, and specialists often know what modifications have been successful in the past to alleviate issues. At times, it will also be necessary to brainstorm and experiment with different solutions. For example, Daniel, who had cerebral palsy, was unable to hold a paintbrush. Torrence, his teacher, first tried placing a pencil grip on the brush.
However, this did not work. He then put a foam curler around the paintbrush for Daniel to try. With a happy grin, Daniel said, “I can do it.”

If the child is still having difficulties after curriculum modifications are made, you will move to the next level of support called “embedded learning opportunities” (Sandall & Schwartz, 2002, p. 12). These short teaching episodes occur as part of regular classroom activities and routines.

If the embedded learning opportunities are not successful, you will move to the final building block, providing “explicit, child-focused instructional strategies” (Sandall & Schwartz, 2002, p. 13). These are more systematic, frequent, and carefully planned than embedded learning opportunities. While the other interventions occur within the normal class activities, these may require specific set-aside time on the part of the teacher and child. Throughout the book, we will be looking at meeting the needs of children with disabilities by using the Building Blocks model.

The CSEFEL Pyramid Model. The CSEFEL (Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning) has established a model to support children’s social competence and to decrease challenging behaviors (Fox et al., 2003). This model is similar to the Building Blocks model in that the foundation (the first two layers) is based upon providing responsive care and a supportive environment. The next layer of the pyramid is to provide explicit instruction to assist children in the development of social emotional skills. These three levels will provide the support needed for most children, with only 4% of children needing the final level (Sugai et al., 2000). However, for the few children who still exhibit challenging behaviors, an intensive, individualized approach is developed that includes a behavioral support plan. See Figure 2.3 for a model.

Being Responsive to Children in Poverty. Children in poverty are another group who are particularly vulnerable, and as such need the highest quality early childhood program. Yet, research indicates that when there is a high concentration of poverty in a program, the teachers are less sensitive and the quality of instruction is poorer (Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, Clifford, Early, & Barbarin, 2005).

Child poverty continues to rise in the United States. Forty-two percent of all children in the United States now live in low-income families. Children of color and those who are immigrants are disproportionately represented in this number. For example, 62% of American Indian, 63% of Hispanic, and 62% of Black children are low income, while...
only 29% of white children are low income (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, & Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, 2010).

Poverty is a risk for children, exposing them to stressors including inadequate and unstable housing, unsafe neighborhoods, and deficient prenatal and ongoing health care (Bowman, 2006; Ramsey, 2003). Studies have found that cortisol levels, a method of measuring stress, is elevated in children with lower socioeconomic status (SES) (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004b). As we learned earlier in this chapter, prolonged or frequent stress in young children can negatively affect the architecture of the brain. Unfortunately, early childhood programs sometimes add to children’s stress. This can occur when there is a mismatch between the child’s home and school culture, conflicts between the child and the teacher, or when activities and environments are set up that allow children to fail (Bowman, 2006).

Children who are from low-income families are also at greater risk for developmental and behavioral problems, particularly if there are other risk factors as well (such as inadequate parenting, substance abuse or violence in the home, or disabilities) (Bowman, 2006). For example, research continues to show that children from low-income families begin school way behind their middle or upper income peers in reading and math, and that this gap is typically not narrowed as the child progresses through school. Unfortunately, this gap between children who live in low-income families and those in upper-income families is now 30% to 40% wider than it was 25 years ago (Reardon, 2011).

As teachers, we have limited control over society’s inequities. However, there are things that we can do to assist children in poverty. First, we can assist children to develop resiliency. Resilient children overcome adversity to reach their full potential. Research has shown that resilient children show four common traits. They are socially competent, good at problem solving, have a sense of autonomy or self-efficacy (a person’s belief about her competence in a given situation), and they have a sense of purpose (Bernard, 2004). In this chapter, we discuss ways to help children develop these strengths. While our goal is for all children to develop these strengths, this is especially important for children who are growing up with adversity in their lives.

Second, we can develop respectful, responsive relationships with low-income children and their families. As teachers, we can:

- Develop high expectations that challenge children but still allow them to experience success (Espinosa, 2010).
- Help ensure that our classrooms and curriculum represent children of all income levels. For example, a study of homes might include a discussion about homeless shelters.
- Reflect upon our program policies and requests from the perspective of a low-income family. For example, is it reasonable to ask families to donate money for their child to go on the class field trip, to provide a t-shirt for tie-dyeing, to provide a gift for an exchange, or to transport their child to attend Early Head Start (a program specifically designed for low-income children and their families)?
- Provide needed services within our programs whenever possible (school breakfasts, after-school care, transportation, access to social services).
- Learn about community services and, when appropriate, refer families for needed assistance.
- Advocate for needed services for all children and families.
- Be conscious of parent work schedules, transportation, and childcare needs when setting up family events.
Establishing an Emotionally Supportive and Equitable Environment

- Advocate for equal educational opportunities for children who are low income. In areas where there is a high concentration of poverty, it is more likely that the budget per pupil is less, educational facilities and educational materials are inadequate, and that teachers are paid less and are more likely to be unlicensed. The turnover of teachers, student/teacher ratios, and class sizes are likely to be higher than if the children were in a school with more economically advantaged peers (Gorski, 2008). Children who may need the most support often receive the least.

- Examine our own biases and cultural lens and make sure that our biases do not negatively affect the child. It is sometimes difficult for those who have some financial security to understand the profound effect of poverty (Ramsey, 2003).

Amelia, a child in my classroom, often came to class smelling bad with unwashed hair and dirty clothes. Unfortunately, this affected her interactions with her peers and even with the adults in the classroom. Even though I visited with the mother about Amelia’s grooming, there was no change. I assumed that the mother was deliberately ignoring Amelia’s needs. However, 2 weeks later when I went on a home visit, I found the sewer in the house backed up and the water turned off. The sewer smell seeped into the clothing and furnishings in the house. The family hauled all the water they used up a steep hill in buckets, making water for bathing or washing clothes a luxury. Even though the family had talked to the property owner repeatedly, he refused to fix the water or sewer, saying he was “planning to tear the house down and was not willing to put any money into it.” The family, who lacked a deposit to move elsewhere, felt they had no other options but to stay in the inadequate housing. I found that my assumptions were biased and inaccurate. Due to my own upbringing and past experiences, I had not pursued why Amelia was dirty. Instead, I assumed the family did not care about her. Through the home visit, I learned the reason for the grooming issues and was able to refer the family (with their permission) to an agency that could assist them. With the agency’s help, they were able to move into different housing and Amelia’s grooming immediately changed.

To make children feel that they belong in our classrooms, we must form an attachment to every child. This begins with unconditional, positive regard for each child and family, and the establishment of a warm, respectful relationship. To demonstrate respect for children and families, we need to understand their values, beliefs, and culture and use this knowledge to create effective environments. We must make special efforts to meet the needs of those children who are most vulnerable, children who are from a nondominant culture, children who have disabilities, and children from low-income families. We will continue to examine ways that we can meet the needs of vulnerable children throughout the textbook.

Helping Children Achieve Mastery

Responsive care also forms the basis for assisting children to develop the spirit of mastery or the attitude that “I can succeed.” When a child’s needs are met, they develop the attitude that “the world will treat me well, my needs will be met in the future, and I have some control over my environment.” However, when no one responds to children’s needs they give up the expectation that they will get what they need, and “lose confidence in themselves and their abilities” (Bowman, 2006, p. 53). One day, when I was a houseparent for children who had been abused and neglected, a caseworker brought a 9-month-old baby to us with a very severe, infected burn on his little toe. Although he had to be in excruciating pain, he did not cry or show any emotion. Eventually, the toe needed to be amputated. He learned to walk and run. However, in the time he was with us, even if he was hurt, he never learned to cry. His early experiences had taught him that crying did no good; he could not expect others to meet his needs. In early childhood settings, we would
expect never to see this extreme type of abuse. However, meeting children’s needs for attention can sometimes be difficult when you are caring for many children. If adults leave children to cry when they need us, they too will learn that the world is a harsh place, where no one will meet their needs.

We must also help children to achieve mastery and develop **self-efficacy** (a person’s belief about her competence in a given situation). A wide body of research indicates that a person’s self-efficacy strongly influences her performance and motivation (Bandura & Locke, 2003). For example, a mega-analysis (a review of several research studies) showed that 11% to 18% of a child’s academic performance is due to his self-efficacy (Cohen, 1988; Schunk, 1989). Children with higher levels of self-efficacy are more motivated to try tasks and show increased persistence in completing tasks. So how can we promote self-efficacy? Here are several ways:

- Provide challenges in a variety of domains—climbing to the very top of the climber and ringing the bell, matching the numerals with a number of objects, or reading a picture book.
- Whenever possible, use individual and small-group activities rather than large-group activities. Individualized and small-group activities are more likely to meet children’s current level of development, since teachers are able to scaffold each child’s learning more effectively.
- Provide materials at increasing difficulties so that children can see their skills improving. Sandra provides math games with colored dots demonstrating the level of difficulty. Children in her room are excited when they can successfully complete the activity at the next level.

- Teach children skills they need to be successful. For example, demonstrate how to hold scissors correctly, how to use a specific art tool, or how to tag or point to items when you count them.
- Provide choices of activities to meet all children’s interests and developmental levels.
- Make encouraging remarks. “I see you are working very hard on completing the puzzle. You only have four pieces left.”
- Assist children in setting and meeting individual goals. Even very young children have goals, as demonstrated by a baby learning to crawl. You can assist children to verbalize their goals or, for very young children, verbalize the goal for them, making the goal more visible.
- Recognize when children have met their own personal goals (“I know that you had a goal to climb the climbing wall all by yourself. You did it.”).
- Avoid group competition. Instead, encourage children to master their own goals. Group competition can discourage children. As a result, they may avoid the activity. Without practice, their skills continue to fall behind their peers.
- Continue to improve your own self-efficacy. A teacher’s self-efficacy, or his belief in his ability to teach, affects his interactions with children and the way he designs learning experiences. This in turn affects children’s academic performance (Bandura, 1993).
Responsive care is the foundation in assisting children to experience a sense of mastery. We must also cultivate self-efficacy by providing challenging activities that children can successfully master, giving skill and goal-setting support, and encouraging children’s efforts.

**Assisting Children to Become Independent**

Being independent allows the child to have individual power and autonomy (Brendtro et al., 2002). The amount of independence adults expect from children is culturally based (Day, 2006). Therefore, it is important to consult with parents in determining the goals for independence in the classroom. There are many ways that the teacher can encourage independence. These include the following:

- Setting up the environment to encourage independence (materials available and accessible, children taught how to use materials, and dependable routines).
- Allowing children to do what they can for themselves and to make decisions they are capable of making.
- With assistance from children, establishing clear and consistent guidelines or rules. When rules are clear and consistent, children are able to be more independent and self-regulating (Riley et al., 2008). When they assist in creating the rules, they feel more ownership and therefore will respect the rule more (Gartrell, 2011). The guidelines or rules should be worded in a positive way, letting children know what to do rather than what not to do. However, beware of creating too many rules. Wien (2004) worked with a group of childcare centers in establishing rules. The programs agreed that all rules had to pass the following test: did the behavior harm the child, other children, or property? If not, the rule was not needed. Using these criteria, teachers discarded many rules, such as restricting the number of children in a learning center and forbidding toys from home. As the teachers discarded the rules, the setting was less stressful, quieter, and calmer; teachers spent less time monitoring and more time interacting; and the children became more independent and exercised more control over their own behavior (Wien, 2004).
- Allowing children to make choices and learn from the results. At some point, children will be required to make decisions that can have life-altering consequences. Providing children opportunities to make developmentally appropriate choices allows them to be independent and gives them experiences in making choices.

Allowing children to develop culturally appropriate independence and autonomy assists children to feel powerful and experience inner discipline.

**Assisting Children to Display Generosity**

The spirit of generosity reflects the ability to be caring, empathetic, and willing to share time and possessions with others. However, to demonstrate caring and empathy, we must be able to recognize and manage our feelings, control our behavior, and use pro-social skills to interact with others.

**Helping Children to Recognize and Control Their Own Feelings.** Helping children to control their emotions begins with reducing their frustration through setting up a developmentally appropriate environment and schedule. We need to create an environment that provides many options (spaces for physical activity and areas for quiet relaxation; spaces for being in groups but also spaces for being alone; a range of challenging, interesting activities; and enough materials so that all children are engaged). To support children, we need a schedule that alternates quiet and active activities and allows time for restful relaxation, but does not require children to stay on mats when they are

**Establishing an Emotionally Supportive and Equitable Environment**
unable to sleep. The schedule needs to limit large-group activities, instead focusing on individual and small-group activities.

We also need to help children learn skills. One of the skills young children need to learn is to identify their emotions. You can assist them through:

- Labeling their feelings (“You look excited that your mama is coming”).
- Using feeling words to describe your own emotions (“I feel worried when the water is spilled all over the floor because I’m afraid someone will slip and get hurt”).
- Interpreting the feelings of others for the child (“Rainey looks sad because you took her toy”) (Riley et al., 2008).

Learning to identify and use words to describe feelings is one way that children learn to manage emotions. You can also assist children in finding other ways to deal with strong emotions. At times, they will need to deal with the strong emotions before they engage in problem solving to resolve the issue (someone took their toy). At other times, the child has no control over the situation and can only deal with his feelings (parents getting a divorce). Different techniques might work better for different problems. In addition, some children respond more favorably to some techniques than to others. Marie-Élise, a teacher at Pinewood kindergarten, developed a poster to remind children of different calming techniques (see Figure 2.4).

Lisa, a teacher of toddler children, has a poster that shows children expressing different emotions. When children are unable to verbalize their feelings, they are sometimes able to point to the way that they are feeling. Julie, who teaches preschool, makes a “dial a feeling” wheel for each child, which allows Julie to know immediately if there are children who might need some additional attention.

As you get to know individual children, you will learn what techniques are most helpful for each of them, and you can then help remind them of strategies that have been successful for them in the past.

Helping Children to Manage Their Behavior. If we want children to interact positively with others, we need to help them manage their behavior. However, we need to make sure the techniques we are using are consistent with the respectful way that we want the children to interact with others. For example, if we want children to talk to each other respectfully, then we need to use a respectful tone and words ourselves even when we are frustrated. Listed below are some positive guidance techniques that can be effective in managing behavior and are at the same time respectful of the child.

Active or Reflective Listening. When using active listening, the adult reiterates what the child has said. When actively listening, you refrain from giving advice. Instead, you simply repeat what the child has said, paraphrase the message, or reflect the feeling behind the statement. If reflecting the child’s feeling, use a tentative voice to avoid sounding like

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE 2.4 Calming Techniques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When I am upset, I can:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Work it out by hammering nails into the stump or squeezing squish balls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Talk it over with a friend or the listening doll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Act it out with the doll house or puppets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Breathe it out by taking five deep breaths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Draw about it or write about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I am too excited, I can:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listen to music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Play in the water table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Read quietly in the alone box</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do yoga in the physical center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use the sand tray to make a design</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Establishing an Emotionally Supportive and Equitable Environment

a mind reader. For example, Jamaar says, “I’m not going to circle.” Using a questioning tone, you state, “You really don’t like circle?” Jamaar then explains that Andre won’t sit by him, and that Andre says he isn’t his best friend anymore and he can’t come play at his house. By using reflective listening in this case, you were able to unveil Jamaar’s real issue. Active listening encourages further conversation, validates the child, and helps the child to clarify his thoughts and feelings, often resulting in the child solving his own problem. Additionally, just discussing a problem or issue can often be therapeutic.

**I Messages.** You use an “I message” to express your own feelings about children’s behavior. An “I message” typically contains a word describing how you feel, the specific behavior that caused you to feel this way, and how the behavior affected you. “I feel worried when blocks get thrown because I’m afraid someone will get hurt.” Both adults and children are usually less defensive when they hear an “I message” rather than a “you message.”

**Natural Consequences.** These consequences occur with no intervention from you. For example, a child who goes outside without mittens in the winter may get cold hands. Natural consequences allow children to learn from their behavior and the accompanying results. They are a very effective technique that teachers can use when the consequence is not harmful or dangerous for the child or others. In addition, for natural consequences to be effective, you must be able to accept the results. For example, unwashed paintbrushes will get hard and unusable. However, you may feel that this natural consequence is not appropriate for the program or other children in the classroom. Therefore, you would not want to use the natural consequence in this case.

**Logical Consequences.** These consequences clearly relate to the behavior, but do not occur naturally. For example, if you rip a book, you need to fix it. If you hurt someone’s feelings, you need to figure out ways to make them feel better.

**Redirection and Substitution.** This technique may involve distracting a very young child with a more appropriate activity. For example, a baby is crawling toward the electrical outlet and you give him a ball to play with. When redirecting an older toddler or child, the teacher provides an acceptable substitution for the behavior (Marion, 2007). For example, if a 3-year-old child is climbing on a shelf, you might redirect her to the climber if it appears the child’s goal is to climb. If the child’s goal is to reach something that is out of reach, you might substitute a safer way to obtain the material.

**Problem Solving or Conflict Resolution.** Problem solving or conflict resolution involves assisting the child or children to solve a problem using the following steps:

1. Define the problem—Use active listening and I messages to determine the underlying issue.
2. Explore alternatives—Brainstorm all possible solutions. It is important to accept all solutions and to write them down or tape-record them for later analysis.
3. Choose a solution—Go through your brainstormed list of solutions. If anyone has any objections to an alternative, then cross the alternative off. Choose a solution that is mutually agreed upon. This may be a combination of the initial brainstormed alternatives.
4. Obtain a commitment from everyone who is involved—Agree who is responsible for implementing the solution, when it will be implemented, and how it will be implemented.
5. Set up a time to discuss how the solution worked.

Initially, children need a lot of practice and support to use this method. However, once children learn the technique they will be able to handle more problems independently and will also have acquired a lifelong skill.

Conflict resolution can be time-consuming, but when teachers take the time, children learn important skills needed to solve current and future conflicts. Note how the teacher in this video listens carefully to each child’s version of what happened and helps the children determine how they might solve this dilemma in the future.
We can help children to manage their behavior by using these respectful techniques. We are also modeling effective techniques that they can use in interactions with others.

**Assisting Children to Develop Pro-Social Skills.** In the early childhood years, children are developing skills for getting along with others. We help children develop these skills through having clear goals for our classroom, modeling, taking advantage of teachable moments to coach children, and through intentionally designing activities.

**Establish Pro-Social Goals.** Two overarching rules for the pro-social classroom are:

1. We treat everyone with respect.
2. We live peacefully with each other.

In addition to not physically or verbally hurting or bullying someone else, respect involves being friendly to others. Gartrell (2011) emphasizes that there is a difference between friendliness and being friends. Children need to have the right to choose their friends. However, they need to be friendly to all members of the class. The class can determine what being friendly means in their classroom through having in-depth discussions.

To live peacefully with each other, children need to learn to solve conflicts. To learn conflict resolution skills children need both modeling and direct teaching. It is also helpful to have a special place to go to work on the conflict if it cannot be immediately resolved. Many programs have established a peace table or peace chairs. For example, Curious Minds Early Childhood Center has a peace table. The teacher posted the different steps to resolving a conflict (listen to each other, brainstorm ideas to solve the problem, choose a solution, and try the solution out). She provided a book with pictures and words to remind children of possible solutions. Puppets are also available, since some children find it easier to express themselves through the puppet. Even 3-year-olds at Curious Minds successfully use the table and the steps to resolve conflicts.

When the conflict affects most of the class members, you might have a problem-solving circle. Anyone in the classroom can call a meeting. The teacher or child begins the meeting by describing the situation that needs to be solved. Then the class uses the conflict resolution steps to solve the issue (Gartrell, 2011).

**Model Pro-Social Skills.** As a model for pro-social living, we must develop a positive relationship with each child in our care. As stressed by Bowman (2006), “Just as children must interact verbally with adults in order to get language, they have to interact emotionally and socially to develop relationships” (p. 53). Positive adult relationships help children develop insights into others’ thoughts and feelings and help them learn to positively interact with others. This sets the stage for current and future relationships. We can help make modeling even more powerful when we make our actions explicit, verbalizing what we are doing and thinking. For example, when Carletta was crying, her teacher said, “I wonder what would help Carletta feel better?” “Maybe she would like a hug, I’ll ask her.”

Children ages 3–6 effectively use the peace table at Curious Minds to resolve conflicts.
Use the Teachable Moment to Coach Children on Pro-Social Skills. For example, this might be encouraging toddlers to “Use gentle touches” as they play with the baby. You might provide specific words a child might use. “Terrence, you can say, ‘Stop, give back my truck.’” An important role of the teacher in the early childhood years is to assist children to successfully join a group of children they wish to play with and to maintain the play. Begin by observing children’s strategies that are unsuccessful and assist them to try other techniques. Some common ways that you might assist a child include:

- Encouraging the child to watch other children to determine what the children are playing and the roles that each child has.
- Assisting the child by suggesting a role for the child.
- Encouraging the child to play alongside the other children using similar materials.
- Inviting children to play together with you; then, as the children begin to play, you can remove yourself from the play situation.
- Providing the child with a highly desired prop to ease play entry.

The teacher should also notice socially appropriate behavior and encourage it. For example, “Rosie and Tanya, I see you are sharing the truck.”

Intentionally Design Activities to Help Children Learn Pro-Social Skills. In addition to modeling and taking advantage of teachable moments, you will need to intentionally design activities to encourage pro-social skills and to assist children in understanding others’ perspectives. You might do this through:

- Reading books about feelings that solve social dilemmas, or where children see something from a new point of view.
- Enacting and discussing real and hypothetical situations. One way to do this is to develop a dilemma and have the children determine the ending. You might use role-playing, puppets, dolls, or play figures to tell the story (Gartrell, 2011). Some classrooms have designated characters that always tell these types of stories. You might create a dilemma around a situation you have observed in the classroom. For example, Maria developed the following story based on a classroom incident. She told the story using puppets and a shiny red car as a prop. “One day the children came to school and there was a brand new shiny toy car in the block area. Tim could not wait to play with it. All morning he waited. Finally, Bruce set the car down. But before Tim could reach it, Mark picked the car up. Tim went to Mark and grabbed the car. He had waited a long time and thought the car should be his.” The children and Maria then discussed the feelings of Mark and Tim and discussed what each child might do.

Assist Children to Become Culturally Competent. We have discussed the importance of the teacher being culturally competent. It is also important that we help children to develop cultural competence. We need to help children to be knowledgeable, comfortable, and respectful of people from varying cultural backgrounds so that they can engage in effective interactions and reject unfair treatment of others (Kostelnik et al., 2012). You can help children to become more socially competent by reading books and sharing music from other cultures, and by creating opportunities for children to interact with people who are different from themselves (for example, diverse guest speakers, volunteers, and field trips). You can also provide diversity materials (books, games, clothing, posters, and artifacts) in the classroom. In addition, it is extremely important to discuss hurtful comments and biased statements. You also need to immediately address any such statements in the classroom or program. Children need to learn how to recognize such statements and how to respond when they hear them.

Pro-social skills are necessary for children to make friends and to succeed in the world. In addition, they help to ensure that our classroom will be a welcoming place for all.
How the Physical Environment Supports the Circle of Courage

The physical environment presents an immediate message of either belonging or exclusion. It can provide opportunities for success and mastery, or failure and boring repetition. It can provide an arrangement of space and materials so that children can be independent, or it can be set up where teachers are the “material brokers.” It can provide spaces and activities for developing community, or be so noisy, crowded, and chaotic that this is impossible.

The well-designed physical environment can support the Circle of Courage, helping children to develop a sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. When designed as the “third teacher” the environment is also less stressful for both adults and children, allowing teachers to spend more time in positive interactions with children. Throughout this book, we will be examining ways to provide a physical environment that supports the Circle of Courage.

We can establish a positive social environment that leads to courage rather than discouragement through supporting the Circle of Courage in our classrooms. When we make decisions about individual children, create changes in our environment, or adopt new curriculums, we can ask, “Will this assist the children to develop a sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity?” When we reflect upon our interactions, we can ask, “Am I interacting with children in a way that lets them know they belong, they can achieve, they can make independent choices, and they can have and be a friend?” In establishing a Circle of Courage classroom, these and similar questions become our compass.

Sample Application Activities

1. Think about your own culture. How has your culture influenced your values (e.g., what constitutes mealtime—is it different on weekends, and what is everyone’s role in preparation, serving, and cleaning up) and beliefs (e.g., the role of children, the role of adults, how people should express emotions, and your goals)?

2. Think about institutional racism. What are examples you have witnessed or experienced?

3. Observe in a classroom. Find evidence where the teacher or children are demonstrating the Circle of Courage: spirit of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. How skilled is the teacher in the classroom you are observing in using coaching to teach children pro-social skills?

4. Use the environmental assessment (Figure 2.5) to evaluate the social-emotional environment of a classroom.

5. To view a list of children’s books, scripted stories, and activities to support social-emotional development, visit the following Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning website: http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/ This site also includes modules and video clips on social-emotional development for teachers.

6. To learn more about teaching tolerance, order a free book and video, Starting Small, from the Southern Poverty Law Center. The video also shows the use of a peace table (look under teaching kits): http://www.tolerance.org/teach/resources/index.jsp

7. To find a list of multicultural children’s books, see The Cooperative Children’s Book Center at: http://www.education.wisc.edu/ccbc/books/detailLists.asp?idBookListCat=1

8. To find a list of children’s books stressing all types of diversity, visit the Understanding Prejudice website http://www.understandingprejudice.org/readroom/kidsbib.htm
Establishing an Emotionally Supportive and Equitable Environment

The teacher develops a warm, nurturing relationship with each child in the classroom through

- treating every child with respect and responding quickly to his needs.
- observing and responding to children’s verbal and nonverbal cues.
- spending quality time alone with each child.
- advocating for ongoing sustained relationships between children and caregivers.

The teacher creates a welcoming caring community by

- developing an inclusive physical and social environment.
- expecting friendliness between children.
- assuring that all staff, children, and families represent classroom materials.
- providing activities to help children get to know each other and to bond together as a cohesive group.
- allowing time for children to systematically share with each other.
- providing time for children to work in informal and formal small groups.
- setting up the classroom environment to encourage children to work together.
- being realistic about sharing, providing duplicates of popular materials and toys and enough interesting materials that all children are engaged.
- developing activities where children work together to complete a goal.
- developing a unique sense of place in the program.

The teacher provides materials that reflect the diversity within the program and exposes children to diversity they might not regularly experience. Materials

- expose children to many forms of diversity (such as race, ethnicity, family structure, age, disabilities, gender, occupations).
- portray the child’s culture and all cultures in a positive, authentic, and realistic light.
- are integrated into the environment and curriculum, rather than being used only occasionally or in an isolated way.
- challenge all forms of stereotypes, such as only men or only women can have certain careers, or because you are from a particular race, you have a specific talent.
- emphasize individual differences and the diversity within large groups.

The teacher assists children to learn about and manage feelings through

- setting up an environment that reduces frustration (spaces for physical activity and quiet relaxation; spaces for being in groups but also spaces for being alone; a range of challenging, interesting activities; and enough materials so that all children are engaged).
- developing a schedule that reduces frustration (such as allowing time for restful relaxation but not requiring children to stay on mats when they are unable to sleep).
- labeling children’s feelings.
- using feeling words to describe her own emotions.
- interpreting the feelings of others for the child.
- providing activities that help children to identify feelings.
- using positive child guidance (active listening, I messages, natural and logical consequences, redirection, and conflict resolution).

The teacher assists children to develop pro-social skills through

- establishing pro-social goals.
- modeling.
- coaching children on pro-social skills (providing words, helping with group entry and play skills).
- teaching children conflict resolution skills.
- noticing and encouraging pro-social skills.
- intentionally designing activities to help children learn pro-social skills.
- assisting children to become culturally competent.
- immediately addressing hurtful and biased statements.

FIGURE 2.5
Environmental Assessment: The Emotionally Supportive, Equitable Environment

Source: Permission is granted by the publisher to reproduce this figure for evaluation and record-keeping. From Julie Bullard, Creating Environments for Learning: Birth to Age Eight. Copyright © 2010 by Pearson Education, Inc. All rights reserved.