Preface

Your Early Childhood Practicum and Student Teaching Experience: Guidelines for Success is designed for students who are assuming the responsibilities of teaching young children while receiving guidance and supervision. Students may be taking part in a variety of student teaching experiences. These may include capstone courses for one-year certificate programs and for associate degree programs, practicum experiences in a community college setting, as well as traditional early childhood programs in a four-year university setting. This text offers both theory and practical application to guide each student to a successful conclusion of the practicum and student teaching experience.

I have mentored and supervised countless preservice teachers over the years. Students’ recurring questions and comments became the impetus for this book as it became readily apparent that there was a need for a reality-based guide to shepherd students through this important experience.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

Special care has been taken in this edition to provide additional focus on professional behavior, lesson planning, portfolio development, diverse family structures, cultural diversity, inclusion, and working with children who have special needs. Current information on national and state standards, reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, and assessment has been included.

This edition includes the following new features:

• Learning outcomes placed at the beginning of each chapter to help students understand what knowledge and skills they should be developing
• Teacher dispositions and foundational competencies for student teachers
• Discussions in Chapter 4 about Positive Behavior Support (PBS), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Functional Behavior Analysis (FBA), and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP)
Preface

- Universal Design for Learning and expanded information on technology
- Response to Intervention (RtI)
- Expanded and updated information on diverse family structures and family systems such as families headed by grandparents, families with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) parents, military families, single-parent families, families experiencing poverty, and homeless families
- Expanded focus on inclusion of and on working with children who have special needs and with their families
- Expanded focus on professional behavior and appropriate professional language
- Expanded coverage on lesson planning, with sample formats
- Electronic portfolio development, interview portfolio, and interview brochure
- Updated websites

DIVERSITY COVERAGE

The education of children with special needs is an essential component of this book because of the increasing demand for inclusion practices in early childhood programs. Another recurring theme throughout the book is the importance of culture and human diversity. There is a focus on examining cultural assumptions as students are asked to think about those aspects of their cultural experience that might influence their interactions with children and adults. Important issues related to family diversity are included, and there are questions for reflection to help students develop cultural competency.

FEATURES OF THE BOOK

This book provides an opportunity for present and future early childhood preservice teachers to benefit from the experiences of those who have recently gone before them. Each chapter contains “Voices of Reality: Student Teachers Speak,” which are quotes from recent early childhood student teachers. I believe it is important for students to reflect on their experiences and to share their stories with others. Relatively little research has been reported concerning the student teaching experience itself. Therefore, the anecdotal comments, quotes, and eclectic wisdom of early childhood student teachers and teacher educators have been included as valuable teaching and learning tools.
In addition, this book is a reference containing research-based practical advice on such topics as developmentally appropriate practices and teacher competencies. Great care has been taken to include a broad range of early childhood experiences from birth through age 8. The book places special emphasis on being professional as well as ethical.

The book guides students from the early days of preparing to begin the practicum through the final days of the experience, as well as everything in between. The author provides real-life examples in each chapter as an effective way to help students understand how to apply the suggestions given. Activities are suggested at the end of each chapter to encourage student reflection and application of the information.

Communication is emphasized as an important skill for teachers. Consequently, there is an overview of strategies and key questions for improving communication with both children and adults.

**FORMAT AND CHAPTER SEQUENCE**

Chapter 1, “Preparing to Begin Student Teaching,” includes techniques for making a good first impression, examination of personal assumptions and beliefs, initial meetings, personal preparations, and development of a support system. Real-life examples are provided to help students understand how to apply the suggestions given.

Chapter 2, “Becoming a Professional,” focuses on ethics as a foundation for being a professional. It discusses what it means to become a professional, ethical guidelines and professional standards, confidentiality, sources for professional decision making, professional growth as a team member, as well as expanded sections on use of appropriate language in the workplace.

Chapter 3, “Establishing Effective Professional Relationships,” focuses on establishing positive relationships with your cooperating teacher and college supervisor, developing effective communication skills, and stages of student teaching. Practical suggestions are provided to encourage dialogue.

Chapter 4, “Guiding Young Children in the Classroom,” considers discipline and guidance, guidance strategies, class meetings, and real-life ethical dilemmas. This chapter provides an in-depth look at the guidance function as essential to the student teacher’s success in the classroom. Additional topics include Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS), Positive Behavior Support (PBS), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA),
antecedent-behavior analysis, and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIP), along with Response to Intervention (RtI).

Chapter 5, “Classroom Management: Environments and Routines,” addresses the concept of meeting children’s needs through the physical environment. It includes topics related to physical space, emotional climate, safety, classroom routines, time management, and transitions.

Chapter 6, “Observations and Evaluations of Student Teaching,” considers the purposes and format of observation. It includes topics related to making the most of the observation/evaluation process.

Chapter 7, “Assessment of Young Children,” discusses the purposes of assessment, standards, examples of formal and informal assessment, types of authentic assessments, and alternative assessment. Examples and formats for data collection are included, and the linkage between assessment and teaching practice is discussed.

Chapter 8, “Supportive Instruction,” deals with relating instruction to young children’s ways of knowing, multiple intelligences, applied concepts of developmentally appropriate practice, integrated curriculum, the project approach, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and technology. Important concepts related to curriculum and how children learn are included.

Chapter 9, “Understanding Diverse Communities and Interacting with Children’s Families,” begins with a discussion of changing cultural demographics. It includes topics such as breaking down cultural barriers, developing positive home–school relationships, creating culturally friendly classrooms, conducting conferences with parents, and recognizing nonverbal cultural codes. Practical suggestions are provided, and questions are suggested for students’ reflection on their own culture and their experience with diversity. Additional topics include diverse family structures and family systems such as families headed by grandparents, families with one or more LGBT parents, military families, single-parent families, and families experiencing poverty.

Chapter 10, “Completion of Student Teaching: Looking Ahead,” gives practical suggestions for leaving your student teaching practicum, discusses the final evaluation of the student teaching experience, and provides tips for planning in the areas of networking, résumé writing, applications, and interviews. Interview portfolios and interview brochures are also included.

**USING THE BOOK**

Instructors are encouraged to select the chapters relevant to the needs of their particular students. For example, if students are already familiar
with their practicum site, then portions of Chapter 1 may be omitted or skimmed. If students are already employed in childcare settings, then portions of Chapter 10 may be omitted.

INSTRUCTOR RESOURCES

Supplementary products have been created to support this text. The Online Instructor’s Manual includes instructional tips and the Online Test Bank includes assessment items. These resources can be downloaded at www.pearsonhighered.com.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation for the love and support of my husband, Frank, and my three children, Jessica, Zachary, and Katie. They continue to be a source of inspiration and strength.

I also wish to express appreciation to the many students and cooperating teachers who offered their support and contributed in one way or another to this book. Additionally, I am grateful to Julie Peters, the Early Childhood Education Acquisitions Editor at Pearson, who has provided invaluable support and advice.

Thank you, also, to those who reviewed this book and provided valuable comments: Diana Douglas, Johnston Community College; Chukwunyere Okezie, Marygrove College; and Melissa Romero, Lourdes College.
LEARNING OUTCOMES

After you have read the chapter, you should be able to:

1. Describe the roles of the cooperating teacher, the supervisor, and the student teacher.
2. Discuss what you can do to prevent cultural misconceptions between yourself and your children and their families.
3. Explain the relationship of teacher dispositions to your success as a student teacher.
4. Give examples of what you can do to prepare for initial meetings with your cooperating teacher, your children and their families, your supervisor, and your administration.
5. Summarize the importance of FERPA to your role as a student teacher.

Pearl S. Buck’s characterization of teaching as a sacred vocation may sound somewhat dramatic. It contains, however, basic elements central to successful preservice teaching. Many veteran teachers agree that the best teachers have a passion for teaching that may be compared to a sacred calling. They have an intense desire to teach. They may describe it as a wish to make the world a better place or to make a difference in
human lives—one child at a time. They have the courage to believe that all children can learn, regardless of their diverse cultural backgrounds and abilities. They also have a sincere love of the young, as indicated by the respect, dignity, and concern that they show each child.

Successful students find that they are embarking upon a career that is a life choice, not a nine-to-five job. They think about “their” children after they leave school; they become consumed with the desire to improve each child’s well-being in a holistic sense. They focus on social, emotional, and physical concerns as well as academic improvement. In other words, they exhibit what Pearl Buck describes as a passionate, visionary concern and love for living creatures.

❖ FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR DAY 1

Now that your passion, vision, and love for children have been acknowledged, how do you prepare to begin this all-important student teaching experience? What are your concerns? What excites you as you anticipate your first days and weeks?

Voices of Reality: Student Teachers Speak

I am bubbling with excitement. The possibilities for touching and helping to shape these lives are endless; and to think that I may have a hand in this impact fills me with warmth from head to toe.

Karla S.

I’m terrified of failure. I’m afraid that I won’t be able to balance being friendly and firm, and the students won’t like me. What if my lessons are all a flop? What if I can’t get the kids to understand and make the connection?

Luke B.

I am mostly afraid that I will not be adequately prepared for the job that lays [sic] ahead of me. That I will not be able to be a successful student teacher. That I will fail.

Meisha T.

I’m excited to get started. Concerned about not having control of the class, fitting in at the school, working with my co-op. I’m just a bit nervous (but again excited).

Jamal D.

I met my co-op. She gave me a building tour and introduced me to the principal, and I called today to remind her I’m starting tomorrow. . . . I know it will be successful.

Keeley N.
After an informational meeting for the early childhood student teachers who were beginning their practicum or their student teaching the next day, the students voluntarily shared their feelings in a small-group setting. You may be a little surprised by their candor. Some expressed strong self-doubt, whereas others exuded confidence. You may find yourself somewhere between these two extremes.

Most students approach a practicum or a student teaching experience with a mixture of nervousness and excitement. This is normal. Sometimes it is helpful to realize that you are not alone as your emotions swing among enthusiasm, excitement, frustration, and anxiety. You may recognize the feeling of butterflies in your stomach, periods of restless sleep, loss of appetite, or any combination of these reactions. Anytime you begin a new experience with uncertain outcomes, you may have mixed feelings. However, there are several steps you can take to lessen your uneasiness and increase your chances of success before you begin. Generally speaking, the student teaching practicum is a rewarding, positive experience for everyone involved.

TERMINOLOGY OF STUDENT TEACHING

Depending on the geographical area, the customs, and/or the characteristics of a particular educational program, the terms used to describe student teaching and the key people involved may vary greatly. Student teaching may be referred to as a practicum, a professional internship, or a field experience. You may have chosen the setting of your student teaching practicum or you may have been assigned a location unfamiliar to you. Regardless of these differences, there are generally three key people involved in the experience.

[Note: For the sake of simplicity and consistency, gender references, when used at all, will be female. This choice of gender in no way implies bias related to role or position of authority.]

- **Cooperating teacher:** This person is sometimes referred to as the co-op, the lead teacher, the supervising teacher, the master teacher, or the clinical teacher. She will supervise work, model good teaching practices, and mentor your professional growth on a daily basis.
- **Supervisor:** You may be assigned to a supervisor. This person is sometimes referred to as the college/university supervisor, the teacher trainer, the off-campus supervisor, the practicum instructor, or the clinical supervisor. She will make regular visits and serve as a mentor and resource to both you and your cooperating teacher.
Chapter 1 Preparing to Begin Student Teaching

- **Student teacher:** As a student teacher, you may sometimes be referred to as an *intern* or an *apprentice*. You will experience a consecutive period of supervised planning and teaching during which you will assume increasing responsibilities. This experience may be part of a course in which you are currently enrolled, or it may be the culminating experience undertaken after the completion of your education coursework.

Regardless of these differences, you have a wonderful opportunity to influence the lives of children and to embark upon a personal journey of growth.

❖ **MAKING A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION**

You have completed all your prerequisites, and now you have the opportunity to shine as you polish your professional skills. You want to get off on the right foot by making a good first impression.

**Develop a Knowledge Base**

You have been assigned to a child development center or to a school for your student teaching experience. Unless you are already quite familiar with the setting for your practicum, consider doing some homework before you begin your student teaching. Try to locate information about your center or school on the Internet. Many child development centers and public or private schools have their own website. If your assigned location is part of a public school system, you can go directly to your state’s Department of Education site and locate your district and specific school. State websites include such information as enrollment, enrollment stability, class size, programs available, teacher absenteeism, and assessment results. If your school is either a private facility or a center specifically for infants and preschoolers, you may be able to obtain informational booklets printed for prospective students and their families. You will make a better first impression on your cooperating teacher and school administration if you are knowledgeable about the school itself, its mission, and its **demographics**.

❖ **EXAMINATION OF PERSONAL ASSUMPTIONS AND BELIEFS**

Be aware of your own reactions to the diversity or apparent lack of diversity you encounter in your placement. We may assume that everyone’s teacher education curriculum has included elements of multiculturalism and diversity training. As students in a **pluralistic society**, you have been taught to avoid stereotypes of particular socioeconomic, racial, or ethnic groups.
Nevertheless, it may be helpful to reflect once again on your personal expectations. You pass through the local neighborhoods on your way to your practicum each day. Do you have preconceptions based on your impressions that the neighborhoods apparently include children of high-income families or children of impoverished families or children of a particular racial or ethnic background? Our own culture is so entwined in every aspect of our existence that “it becomes the invisible script that directs our personal lives” (Hollins, 1995, p. 72). You may strongly believe that you harbor no stereotypes, but “most teachers, though unknowingly, discriminate against culturally different students by lacking the sensitivity, knowledge, and skills necessary to teach them properly” (Diller & Moule, 2005, p. 2). Whether you are a member of a minority culture or a member of the White middle-class majority, you may be unaware of your own biases that can be inadvertently communicated to children and coworkers.

**Reflective Inquiry to Raise Awareness and Reduce Harmful Assumptions**

Accordingly, as you begin your early childhood practicum, you may consider several topics for ongoing reflective inquiry. These reflections may become particularly significant if your own cultural heritage differs from that of your children. The likelihood of this cultural diversity increases as our nation continues to experience demographic changes.

### 1.1 Questions for Self-Reflection

1. What are my own beliefs about young children from particular cultural groups?
2. What are my assumptions about young children from particular socioeconomic groups?
3. What beliefs do I have about instruction that may reflect my own biases concerning cultural values?
4. What similarities and differences do I believe exist between social interaction in the classroom and social interaction in the children’s home environments?
5. What significant experiences do I believe young children may bring to the classroom?
6. How much do I know about the cultural values, beliefs, and practices in the homes of my young children?
7. How much do I know about political and/or social influences within the local community that may affect interactions with the families of my young children?

Based on Hollins, 1995.
Part of your lifelong professional growth as a teacher involves developing the ability to be objective, empathetic, and sensitive in your responses to the needs of young children and their families. Few, if any, of your children will have your exact family background. You will strive for shared understanding. This is not an easy task (Hollins, 2008). At one time or another, you may be communicating with children and families of widely diverse backgrounds, including but not limited to the following: African American families, Asian American families, Native American families, single-teenage-parent families, stepfamilies, families in which grandparents are acting as substitute parents, families with children who have special needs, and families with gay, lesbian, or transgender parents. No one expects you to have perfected your communication skills by the time you become a certified teacher. You may feel uncertain at times. Nevertheless, your humility, honesty, flexibility, energy, and dedicated advocacy for young children and their families will enable you to be perceived as a caring teacher. As the famous quote by an unknown author says, “No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Potential for Cultural Misconceptions

You may or may not be surprised to learn that data collected by the National Education Association (NEA) indicate that more than 90% of teachers in the United States are White, and the majority of these come from middle-class backgrounds (Fuller, 2001; Gay, Dingus, & Jackson, 2003). At the same time, the number of children from minority backgrounds is increasing rapidly. In some states—California for example—the majority of the children in school programs are from cultural minority groups (Fuller, 2001). The population of immigrant children in our schools is also increasing rapidly; reports indicate that over 3 million children are considered English language learners. Many of these children and their families experience “struggles with [both] a new culture and a new language” (Miller & Endo, 2004, p. 786).

With so many differences between the culture of the teachers and the culture of the children, the potential exists for misconceptions to develop between schools and families. In fact, “the student’s culture is often in conflict with the culture in the school” (Ducette, Sewell, & Shapiro, 1996, p. 363). This cultural mismatch may have a negative impact on children from particular cultural groups that are historically underserved in our public school systems (Hollins, 1995). Therefore, curricular and instructional interventions may be necessary to legitimize the connections between traditional learning in the schools and learning in the children’s home and community environments (McCarty, Lynch, Wallace, & Benally, 1991; Moll, 1986). We know that “children learn and grow best
in schools where parents and teachers understand one another, share similar visions, and collaborate on guiding children” (Grant & Gomez, 2001, p. 130). As schools become increasingly “diversity-enhanced,” all educators must intentionally transform their schools, if necessary, to create an inclusive climate of trust and cultural engagement that promotes social justice (Howard, 2007). Therefore, suggestions for preventing misconceptions and increasing understanding will be discussed later in the text.

❖ DISPOSITIONS AND COMPETENCIES

Your teacher preparation program has a responsibility to ensure that you are qualified to join the teaching profession. Education professionals must have not only strong academic preparation and mastery of pedagogy but also nonacademic competencies, “such as communication or interpersonal skills, which are as critical to success as those in the academic domain” (Tyminski, 2009, p. 1). In other words, becoming a successful teacher requires more than making good grades in coursework; it also requires the demonstration of “teacher dispositions” (Hallam, 2009; Katz & Raths, 1985; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2006; Ros-Voseles & Moss, 2007). These dispositions are generally defined as values, beliefs, and attitudes that the teacher demonstrates in observable, professional behaviors (Tyminski, 2009).

Colleges and universities have some process of evaluating your teacher dispositions and foundational competencies throughout your teacher preparation program. These evaluations are intended to be helpful and generally serve several purposes, such as the following:

- Provide information to students considering teaching careers as they make their career decisions
- Advise students concerning the nonacademic criteria that will be considered in decisions regarding admission to teacher preparation programs
- Provide students with feedback as to their progress toward mastery of program objectives
- Serve as basis for decisions about completion of graduation requirements and recommendations for teacher certification

Students generally find it helpful to complete a self-assessment of their progress toward meeting teacher dispositions and foundational competencies. A sample self-assessment is included for you to use and review. You may wish to ask your professor or someone else who knows your work to assess your progress on this form and compare the results with your self-evaluation.
### 1.2 Teacher Dispositions/Foundational Competencies Self-Assessment

**Course # and Name:** ________________________________________________________________

**Within the professional context to which I aspire (for example, teacher certification), I rate myself on each of the standards listed below:**

**KEY:**  3–Proficient  2–Partially proficient  1–Does not meet proficiency  N/A– Not applicable

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<th>Communication/Interpersonal Skills</th>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Express myself effectively in written and oral English to communicate concepts, assignments, evaluations, and expectations with members of the learning community such as college faculty, students, parents, administrators, and other staff</td>
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<td>Demonstrate communication skills that are responsive to different perspectives represented in diverse classrooms and/or other professional environments</td>
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<td>Exhibit the necessary interpersonal competencies to function effectively with students and parents, and to function collaboratively as part of a professional team</td>
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**Emotional and Physical Abilities**

|   |   |   |   | Work under time constraints, concentrate in distracting situations, make subjective judgments, and ensure safety in emergencies |
|   |   |   |   | Demonstrate the physical stamina to work a contractual day and perform extended and additional duties of a school professional such as parent conferences, after-school events, and other assigned duties |

**Cognitive Dispositions**

|   |   |   |   | Organize time and materials, prioritize tasks, perform several tasks at once, and adapt to changing situations |

**Personal and Professional Requirements**

|   |   |   |   | Arrive (and be on time) for professional commitments, including classes and field experiences |
|   |   |   |   | Seek assistance and follow supervision in a timely manner, and accept and respond appropriately to constructive review of my work from supervisors |
|   |   |   |   | Demonstrate attitudes of integrity, responsibility, and tolerance |
|   |   |   |   | Show respect for self and others; and refrain from making emotional, verbal, or physical threats or intimidation |
|   |   |   |   | Project an image of professionalism |

*Students should submit an explanation for each item checked “1” or “N/A.”*
INITIAL MEETINGS

Being the conscientious student that you are, you have done your homework concerning the demographics of your practicum or student teaching site. You have addressed your own cultural assumptions and beliefs regarding your children and their families. Now, have you considered how you will communicate effectively with professional colleagues whose experiences, beliefs, and assumptions may be different from your own?

Communicate with the Cooperating Teacher

Your first few conversations with your cooperating teacher are crucial in getting off to a good start, because they communicate your interest and initiative. They also give you the opportunity to discuss expectations (yours and hers) and to ask questions.

Accordingly, plan your part in those conversations. You may want to develop a few questions to ask your cooperating teacher. To formulate these questions, think about what specific skills you wish to develop or strengthen, what content-area thematic units you may wish to develop, what discipline approaches you favor, and what concerns you have regarding children diagnosed with special needs. Several examples of questions for initiating conversations are listed in Figure 1.1.

I have reviewed the Department of Education Teacher Dispositions/Foundational Competencies Policy and understand that if the criteria listed above are not met satisfactorily, I may be denied the opportunity to continue in the professional preparation program and/or to complete the extensive internship component of the curriculum.

Candidate Signature ___________________________ Date __________

Candidate’s PRINTED Name ___________________________

NOTE: The College has a legal obligation to provide appropriate accommodations for students with documented disabilities. If you have a disability and are seeking accommodations, you should register with the College’s Disability Services (800-000-0000) and notify your course instructor and academic advisor of your specific approved accommodations, as appropriate. Students should initiate this process as soon as possible (prior to the start of classes and/or field experience).

(Tyminski, 2009, p. 9).
In addition to thinking of questions to ask, consider what you want to communicate about yourself to your cooperating teacher. One way of doing this is to imagine yourself in the role of cooperating teacher. What qualities would you want your student teacher to display? Are you looking for a person who demonstrates enthusiasm and excitement? Are you hoping for a student teacher who takes the initiative to jump right in and be an active participant with the children rather than one who remains a passive observer? If you believe you have these characteristics, how will you communicate them to your cooperating teacher in those initial conversations? Remember also that your cooperating teacher may feel a little nervous about beginning this important mentoring relationship with you, particularly if she has not had many practicum students.

**Communicate with the Children**

You will find that all children, even the youngest ones, are quick to notice the presence of a new face in the room. Your cooperating teacher...
may suggest an appropriate time for introductions, such as during a morning group time. Notice how the children address the adults in your placement; you will want to follow the customary practice when you introduce yourself. Some schools allow children to call teachers by their first name; others prefer a title followed by their first name; still others require a title followed by their last name.

You may want to plan an age-appropriate name game to introduce yourself and to help you learn the children’s names. You may want to bring one of your favorite children’s books to share. You might suggest to your cooperating teacher that you will create a bulletin board display with pictures and/or objects that reveal interesting information about yourself that you can share with your children. The children will have a natural curiosity about who you are, so expect them to ask questions of all kinds. Do not be surprised if young children ask personal questions, so think about ways (such as using humor) to deflect questions you do not wish to answer. Remember also that anything you say about your activities away from school will probably be repeated at home, so use your discretion.

You may want to get off to a good start with your children by preparing an activity to help you learn their names. You may also want to prepare a collage or poster that you can use to introduce yourself to the children.
Preparing to Begin Student Teaching

Sample activities that student teachers enjoy using as icebreakers or get-acquainted activities include the following:

- **“All About Me Bag” Activity.** Put items in a paper bag that tell something about you, such as your favorite children’s book, your baby picture, a picture of your family, or objects related to your hobby or special collections. Take each item out of the bag, one at a time, and tell a story about it. As a follow-up, you may give your children the opportunity to prepare their own “All About Me Bags” to share.

- **“Classroom Quilt” Activity.** Cut a sheet of construction paper to make a quilt square. Decorate it with pictures or drawings that tell something about you. Put your name on it and say what you think your square says about you. Give your children an opportunity to make their own squares to share. Then, tape these squares together to make a classroom quilt for display in the room.

You may create your own variations of these get-acquainted activities. Many teacher websites are available to help you find ideas as you are thinking about activities to try. For example, take a look at www.education-world.com and tips.atozteacherstuff.com.

**Communicate with Families**

Parents and other family members will be curious about who the student teacher is, so you may want to write a brief letter of introduction to send home with each child. Share your letter with your cooperating teacher. She may have some suggestions and/or she may want to add her own note to your letter. Information that students frequently put in their letters includes the following:

1. Length of time you will spend in your practicum or student teaching placement
2. Your role (e.g., observer, teacher’s assistant, student teacher)
3. College or university affiliation and degree and/or certification being pursued
4. Prior teaching or relevant volunteer experience
5. Hobbies
6. Contact information

Remember that your letter to parents and families is often their first introduction to you as an early childhood educator. Be careful to check its spelling, punctuation, and professional appearance so that you present yourself in a professional manner. A sample letter is presented in Figure 1.2.
Maintain Confidentiality

As you begin your student teaching practicum, you must have heightened sensitivity to the importance of maintaining confidentiality. You will have access to personal family information, school records, and medical information concerning each child in your care. You will observe behaviors that trouble you and others that delight or amuse you. You need to discuss this confidential information and your observations with your cooperating teacher.

Remember that some view your role as a teacher to be as sacred as that of a clergyperson. It is understandable that you may feel uncomfortable with that comparison. However, you may find that children and parents confide in you about personal matters. If you find yourself being drawn into conversations that make you feel uncomfortable, then tactfully pass the matter on to your cooperating teacher. For example, some parents may view you as an expert in child rearing. They may ask your advice concerning their child’s bed-wetting problem or how to prepare their child for the arrival of a new baby. You should direct these parents to your cooperating teacher, who may guide them herself or direct them to a supervisor who may, in turn, direct them to professionally trained community resources.

Figure 1.2 Sample Letter of Introduction

(Date)

Dear Parents and Families,

I would like to introduce myself to you. My name is _____________, and I will be spending the next twelve weeks with your child as a student teacher in _____________’s room. I am completing my _____________ degree at _____________ in Early Childhood Education. While in your child’s classroom, I will be working under the close supervision of _____________ as I complete planning and teaching activities.

My previous teaching experience includes a practicum in Early Childhood Education at ___________. I also have volunteer childcare experience at ___________. Over the next few weeks, I hope to teach many lessons that will include music and movement because my college minor is in performing arts.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or if you would like to participate in class activities during my student teaching. You may reach me by phone at _____________ or by email at _____________. I look forward to meeting you and working with your child.

Sincerely,
Another aspect of confidentiality relates to professional discretion. Remember not to discuss events using the real names or descriptions of children, parents, or teachers. Remaining silent is preferable to being considered a gossip. Comments and discussion should be held with your cooperating teacher or your college supervisor in private, not shared with family and friends. Be careful not to discuss specific people or events in the hallway or the teacher’s lounge. A comment that is overheard can have extremely detrimental effects.

You may wish to take photographs of the children in your care or in your early childhood classroom. However, to ensure the privacy of the children, you must speak with your cooperating teacher concerning school policies and obtain permission of the parents before taking photographs for any purpose. Schools and individual early childhood programs may have restrictive policies regarding the use of photographs to protect the children from any potential harm.

FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal privacy statute with which you should be familiar before you begin your practicum or student teaching experience. You may have been given the opportunity to sign a FERPA form granting specified individuals access to your education records when you entered college. FERPA also may have been discussed in your foundational education courses.

The federal government published revised FERPA regulations in December 2011. The entire regulatory publication is quite lengthy; however, a user-friendly version for parents and students may be found at the following website: www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/pdf/sealea_overview.pdf.

The revisions in FERPA include, for example, controlled use of data from student records for the purpose of program evaluation “to ensure that all students have access to a quality education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, p. 2).

The FERPA statute generally requires educational programs to request written consent from parents or students age 18 and older before disclosing any personally identifiable student information. Since early childhood education is considered a program covered by FERPA, you should review this privacy and confidentiality statute to make sure you are following the regulations. If you have any questions regarding the disclosure of student information, you should check with your cooperating teacher, your supervisor, and your professor.
Communicate with Your Supervisor

If you have been assigned a college supervisor, she will play a vital role in your development. She will be available to offer support not only to you but also to your cooperating teacher. You may wish to talk with her at the beginning of your practicum. A checklist of topics to cover in that initial meeting may be helpful. Figure 1.3 provides some example topics.

Remember that your supervisor can be an invaluable source of information, someone with whom you can share your frustrations as well as your joys, your advocate, and your supporter. Three-way communication among you, your supervisor, and your cooperating teacher may encourage the sharing of ideas and perspectives.

In addition, your supervisor plays a vital role in your success. She is often your best source of information about campus news of deadlines for graduation and deadlines related to program opportunities. If you live off campus and/or commute from home to your placement, your supervisor may be your only link to this important campus information.

Communicate with the Administration

In your early days at the facility, you may be able to meet the director of the child development center or the building principal. This administrator will be a helpful source of information regarding the history

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**Figure 1.3** Sample Topics for Meeting with the Supervisor

- Exchange of email addresses, home phone numbers, and cell phone numbers
- Requirements such as creation of a student teaching journal, notebook, or dialogue journal
- Frequency of observations
- Format of written feedback and discussion related to observations
- Policies regarding illness or personal emergencies
- Expectations regarding attendance at professional development workshops, in-service days, or faculty meetings
- Expectations regarding participation in parent conferences or home visits
- Policies regarding student teaching during the college’s scheduled holidays
- Procedures regarding final evaluations, recommendations, and certification requirements
Preparing to Begin Student Teaching

Getting to know your administrator is an important way to get your student teaching off to a good start. Make sure to have a friendly smile and a greeting whenever you see her.

and mission of the school. In addition, she can describe the teaching and learning philosophy that guides educational practice. In many child development centers and schools, the administrator may function as a hands-on learning leader rather than as an inaccessible paper pusher.

The administrator provides the support necessary to ensure that children achieve the intended outcomes (Dufour, 2002). In fact, pre-service teachers often declare that “it is the school, not the university [or college], that is the real center of [their] teacher education” (Eisner, 2002, p. 577). Therefore, keep in mind that the administrator, as the school leader, can also add a new dimension to your teacher education.

Communicate with the Support Staff

Paraprofessionals provide direct assistance to children and families; they are supervised by teachers or other trained professionals (Pickett, 1999).

You must make yourself known to the support staff as well. The paraprofessionals, the secretarial personnel, the custodial staff, and others can make your teaching experience even more pleasant. They play a vital role in the day-to-day operations of the facility. When you need to know the most efficient process for accomplishing routine tasks, the support staff will provide that assistance.
Communicate with Friends and Family

One important area frequently overlooked by students is communication with family and friends, particularly in the early days of the student teaching practicum. Communication is crucial to having a positive experience, whether you are a nontraditional-age student or a more typical-age student commuting or living on campus. In addition, you may be dependent on the income from a job to meet living expenses while you are attending college. These and other personal topics need to be considered. Figure 1.4 lists several reflection questions about your expectations.

Whether you are a college student of typical age living on campus or a nontraditional student with multiple off-campus responsibilities, you may want to consider discussing some ground rules to help you and those with whom you live. For example, you may find that you need to develop new routines regarding bedtimes, early morning preparations for the day, and social activities. Your changes in behavior may affect other people in your life, so you need to communicate your anticipated needs and expectations if you have not already done so. Some preservice teachers express surprise at the fact that their nonteaching friends and family members have little understanding of how much mental and physical energy teachers direct to teaching even when the workday is over.

Unless you are used to working in an early childhood setting, you may find that you must adjust your daily schedule. Some preschool programs require your attendance before 7:00 a.m. because working parents have to drop their children off quite early. Many primary school programs

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**Figure 1.4 Questions Concerning Expectations**

- Who are the people with whom I will come in contact regularly outside of my teaching hours (family, friends, employers, etc.)?
- What demands do I expect these people to make on my time and energy during my practicum?
- How much time and energy do I believe I will be able to give to these people during my practicum?
- What difficulties, if any, can I anticipate? How can I prevent potential difficulties?
- What support system is in place to help me if I have questions or need to brainstorm ideas related to student teaching?
- Does my college have any policies concerning my employment or participation in extracurricular activities while I am completing my practicum?
- Do I have adequate transportation? Do I have a backup plan in case of transportation difficulties?
Chapter 1 Preparing to Begin Student Teaching

expect teachers to be on duty well before 8:30 a.m. You should get used to arriving no later than your cooperating teacher. Many successful student teachers make a point of arriving well before their cooperating teachers to open up the room and have everything ready for the day to begin.

❖ PERSONAL PREPARATIONS

Generally, your college or university will be carefully monitoring the legal and health paperwork necessary for you to participate in your early childhood practicum. You may wish to double-check to make sure that all necessary forms are in order. Some private facilities have additional requirements. Finding this out early can save you unnecessary last-minute stress.

Legal Considerations

Your college or university will be keeping a file containing copies of your criminal background clearance, child abuse clearance, and tuberculin (TB) clearance. Regulations vary from state to state. Public schools and private early childhood centers may also have different requirements. For example, some facilities require that all clearances be current, within the last 12 months. Others accept clearances no more than 3 months prior to contact with children. Check the regulations for the facility in which you are preparing to student teach (Machado & Botnarescue, 2011).

Health Considerations

You would be wise to take care of all personal health concerns prior to beginning your student teaching. For example, if you have been putting off an eye exam or a health exam for a chronic problem, then do it right away. You do not want a recurring problem to become an impediment during this important semester.

Some early childhood centers may even require a physician’s report assessing your general health. You may not have had a complete physical exam since enrolling in college. Therefore, a vision and health screening and an assessment of your need for immunizations, such as vaccines against influenza or hepatitis B, may be beneficial.

In addition, you may be asked for a physician’s assessment of your orthopedic, psychological, and neurological functioning. In other words, is there any impediment that may interfere with your ability to work effectively with young children? After all, you may be expected to lift
children and supplies, sit on the floor or on small-sized furniture, and move quickly to supervise young children.

**Stress Management**

Even before you get into the daily rhythm of student teaching, you may want to consider a plan for managing stress. Your anxiety will decrease if you follow the suggestions of effective communication previously discussed. Recognize that some stress can be a positive, energizing response to a new situation. Your attitude is the key to managing stress. You may occasionally have some anxiety. You may occasionally feel overwhelmed with responsibilities for planning and teaching. This is normal. You can manage your stress by breaking large tasks into small segments, by thorough lesson preparation, and by using positive self-talk.

The key is your response to stress. It may seem obvious, but try to find a way to relax each day, even for 10 minutes. Some students write in their journals daily; others exercise; still others meditate. You will find what works for you. In Figure 1.5, there are suggested stress-related questions you may want to ask yourself to assess your stress management.

**Time Management**

Effective time management will also help reduce stress. Several of the teacher dispositions on the self-assessment form discussed earlier in this chapter relate to time management. Examples include the following:

- Ability to organize time and materials
- Arrival on time for professional commitments including class and field experiences

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**Figure 1.5 Stress-Related Questions**

- Am I getting daily exercise, even for 10 or 15 minutes?
- Am I getting enough sleep?
- Am I eating regular meals?
- Do I engage in a brief, relaxing mental activity unrelated to school, such as doing a crossword puzzle or easy reading?
- Am I able to maintain my sense of humor?
- Do I strive for excellence, not perfection?
- Do I communicate with other student teachers to discover what works for them?
- Would I consider counseling if necessary?

If your self-assessment or your professor’s assessment indicates difficulty in either of these areas, then talk with your professor about suggestions for improvement.

In your discussions with your cooperating teacher, ask how far in advance you should have lesson plans completed so that she can review them and give you feedback. The expectations may vary from one cooperating teacher to the next, so be careful not to make assumptions based on previous experience. Timely preparation of lesson plans as well as organization of all materials needed for teaching each day is nonnegotiable. Children deserve a prepared teacher.

Some student teachers keep a calendar of due dates and professional obligations on their cell phone or iPad™. Others use a pocket planner or notebook planner. You will find the system of organization that works for you.

In addition, ask your cooperating teacher what time the building opens in the morning. Ask what time she generally arrives. Many students make a point of arriving earlier than the cooperating teacher to open up the classroom and get ready for the day. Make sure you understand these expectations from “Day One.”

❖ DEVELOPMENT OF A SUPPORT SYSTEM

A certain ambiguity is inherent in all teaching. There is no defined prescription to ensure feelings of calm and confidence. Therefore, the development of a support system is crucial to a successful student teaching experience.

Need for a Support System

As a preservice teacher, you find yourself split between two quite different worlds. For 8 or more hours per day, you function in the role of teacher, surrounded by professional colleagues. You must meet performance-based standards that describe what teachers must know and do. At the same time, you are expected to enjoy yourself, so that your enthusiasm for teaching helps foster a love of learning in each child. These are the daily challenges of the professional community you are joining.

Then, each evening, you return to your other life surrounded by friends and/or family. This split existence can be somewhat unsettling.
There will be times when you are bursting with excitement to share a highlight from your day. You may find that your nonteaching friends and/or family do not share your enthusiasm for the stories of your successes in the classroom. Similarly, they may not empathize with your anxieties and self-doubts as you confront new challenges. A sense of isolation can become overwhelming. Thus, it is important to create a support system of one or more peers who are sharing similar experiences. Lack of time and exhaustion are common complaints during student teaching. Nevertheless, you may find that phone calls, short dinner breaks, or exercise breaks with fellow student teachers are invaluable opportunities to share experiences and feelings.

Creating a Peer Group Support System

Educators who are dedicated to the concepts of lifelong learning and mutual self-improvement often express a need to talk with colleagues about matters of professional practice. The formation of teacher study groups is one way to create opportunities for dialogue within a community of educators. Birchak and colleagues (1998) promote the formation of voluntary study groups as one way for teachers to overcome a sense of isolation and competitiveness and to create instead “an investigative environment that supports individually directed growth and influences the school community at large” (p. 143). This concept of study groups may be adapted to meet your needs as an early childhood student teacher.

Accordingly, you and your fellow student teachers may benefit from the formation of supportive groups to maintain a sense of community. Students in a group should have a common interest and focus—for example, the early childhood student teaching experience. As with the teacher study groups described by Birchak and colleagues, participation by student teachers should be voluntary. It is important to define the support group by what it is not. It is not a required course; it is neither a workshop nor a seminar. It is a voluntary group of students who are sharing a common experience. They make the group into whatever they want it to be.

Accordingly, the important issue here is that students have a regular opportunity to share important events in their daily lives. They quickly learn that they are not the only ones who sometimes feel fearful, foolish, or frustrated. They share resources and suggestions. At the same
time, they take pleasure in each other’s accomplishments, whether it is
the excitement of helping a child learn a new skill or the pride of receiv-
ing a compliment from a cooperating teacher.

As an illustration, one support group of six early childhood stu-
dent teachers chose to meet every 2 to 3 weeks. The consensus was
that although time was severely limited, everyone would take a
dinner break at some point. They might as well take that break
together. These students were teaching at six different schools or
child development centers, so they did not come in contact with
one another on a regular basis. One student was placed in a large
inner-city charter school. Another student was in a small urban set-
ting. Four students were placed in suburban settings. They had dif-
f erent supervisors and were teaching children of different ages. The
only commonality was that they were all experiencing early child-
hood student teaching.

In addition, this particular group held its meetings with an educa-
tion professor who was a participant/observer. Nevertheless, the suc-
cess of the group was not dependent on the presence of an authority
figure or a mentor. The students guided the meetings, whereas the pro-
professor took a nondirective role. Comments and reactions from members
of this student support group will be interspersed throughout this text
as appropriate.

The Process of Group Support

Each support group gathering began with a brief period of informal
conversations and sharing of recent experiences. Conversations were
lively and interspersed with comments like “That happened to me too;
let me tell you about . . .” Next, students raised questions or concerns
for discussion. The group tried to focus the discussion for each session.
Topics varied greatly, depending on the needs of the group. Some
concerns included how to improve communication with the cooperat-
ing teacher and how to meet the needs of all children. A timekeeper
was appointed at each meeting so that the gatherings could be limited
to 1 hour. About 10 minutes before the time was up, the students set
a date for the next get-together and agreed on a tentative focus for
future discussion.

Benefits of the Support Group

For many of the students, sharing was the primary reason for attending.
Hearing about each other’s experiences reduced the stress and the sense
of isolation that can build up during a lengthy student teaching practicum. For others, the focused discussion was the heart of the meeting. The quality of the information discussed determined whether students felt that their time was spent productively. All students reported that they enjoyed the meetings. Some commented on the developing sense of trust among group members. This trust allowed collaboration to become the group’s strength; it created a pathway for mutual improvement during the journey of student teaching.

An added benefit was that the students experienced the social nature of learning. They created a community in which communication flowed freely. They made sense of their experiences personally and collectively in a safe environment of their own choosing (Wink & Putney, 2002). In other words, they were experiencing the Vygotskian principles of scaffolding and social interaction that they had been taught in their child development classes and methods classes. An unintended benefit, therefore, was the personalization of this pedagogical process.

**Keeping a Human Connection**

You may find that a peer support group is neither possible nor desirable for you because of your particular personal commitments and responsibilities. You may not need such a group because your college already has a class or a required seminar that serves this purpose. If this is not the case, you may be able to maintain a connection with others by email or by phone. However you do it, the human connection and the sense of community will help you maintain a positive outlook as you discover the joys and challenges of teaching.

❖ **FINAL THOUGHTS**

You have completed all your preparations. You have already made a good first impression by developing your knowledge base about the child development center or school and its demographics. You are communicating with your cooperating teacher. You have discussed your needs and expectations with family and friends. You even have a peer support system available. You feel ready and excited as you begin the early days of your early childhood practicum.

Even so, you may relate to the thoughts of another student teacher written a few hours before dawn of the first day.
Voices of Reality: Student Teacher Speaks

The reality is beginning to hit me. Wow. To say that my feelings are completely jumbled and scrambled and topsy-turvy would be an understatement. On the one hand, I am bubbling with excitement. Fourteen weeks in which to enter the young lives of 20-plus precious individuals and to welcome these children into my own life. The possibilities for touching and helping to shape these lives are endless, and to think that I may have a hand in this impact fills me with warmth from head to toe. On the other hand, I know the awesome responsibility that this entails fills me with more than a little bit of anxiety. Okay, I'll admit it, I'm really, really scared. I wonder if it's normal to feel this unprepared. Classes in teaching and the handful of lessons developed and carried out during Junior Block are one thing, but student teaching . . . . that feels like an entirely different ball game—like jumping from the dugout, with an occasional inning of play here and there, to a regular spot in the starting line-up. WOW. Am I up to this challenge? Do I truly have what it takes to be one of those special people who “CAN”? When these questions cause me to doubt my own competency, I reassure myself with the reminder that I already possess two of the most essential tools of an educator: an intense love of children and a great desire to become a lasting influence upon young minds and hearts.

Karla S.

ACTIVITIES FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

1. List the questions and/or concerns you have about starting your teaching experience. Then identify one or more resources you can use to answer your questions and to deal with your concerns.

2. Does your practicum site have the following personnel?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Name(s)</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director/Principal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clerical Staff</td>
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<td>Maintenance Staff</td>
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<td>Health Services</td>
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<td>Paraprofessionals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Needs Support Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community Liaison Staff</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. What do you know about cultural character of the children at your practicum site? Make a list of each cultural group represented. Make a chart that includes the answers you find to the following questions (Fuller, 2001):
   • What famous people and events have shaped the history of each cultural group?
   • What famous people in each cultural group may serve as positive role models?
   • What are the major religious and political beliefs of each cultural group?
   • What are the celebration days of each cultural group?
   • What is the native language of each cultural group?
   • What are the current economic, political, and social issues that concern each cultural group?

4. Ask your cooperating teacher if there are any children at your practicum site who have been identified as having a disability. What do you know about the nature of their special needs? Make a chart that addresses the following issues (Kostelnik, Onaga, Rohde, & Whiren, 2002; Salend, 2005):
   • List the identified disabilities of the children who have special needs. What do you know about the nature of each disability?
   • Ask your cooperating teacher for information regarding children’s early intervention services or individualized written guidelines for educational services. More information about these services and guidelines can be found in Chapter 8.
   • Observe the children who have special needs. You may want to focus on a few areas such as the following: (1) how each child communicates with others, (2) how each child interacts with others, and (3) how each child reacts to sensory stimulation such as touch or sounds in the room.

5. To help you get off to a good start, prepare an icebreaker activity that you can use to introduce yourself and to get to know the children. Share this activity with your instructor and the students in your class. You may start a collection of get-acquainted or icebreaker activities that will be useful with young children at a variety of age levels.

6. Write a brief letter of introduction that you can send home with each child in your practicum or student teaching placement. Then, share your letter with a partner to receive feedback.

7. Portfolio: A copy of your letter of introduction may be included in your portfolio as an example of your effective communication with parents and families. See Chapter 6 for a discussion of portfolios.

8. Complete the sample Teacher Dispositions/Foundational Competencies Self-Assessment found in this chapter. Note any areas you wish to improve on as you continue your progress toward becoming an early childhood teacher. Speak with your professor about suggestions for improvement if you have any areas of concern.
LEARNING OUTCOMES

After you have read the chapter, you should be able to:
1. Discuss what it means to be a professional early childhood educator.
2. Summarize your ethical responsibilities to young children.
3. Explain the resources available to guide you if you are faced with an ethical dilemma.
4. Determine the professional behaviors expected of you as a student teacher in the workplace.

As a student teacher, you are already considered to be a professional. Nevertheless, you are in the initial stages of what will become a lifelong journey of learning more about yourself, about the children in your care, and about the facilitation of the teaching-learning process. You have probably heard the expression “The more you learn, the more you realize you do not know.” This is particularly true in early childhood education. We are only beginning to appreciate the impact of research on the brain development of infants and young children. For example, studies indicate that a baby is born with only 25% of its brain developed,
but by age 3, brain development is at 90% (Benesh, Arbuckle, Robbins, & D’Arcangelo, 1998; D’Arcangelo, 2000; Governor’s Commission, 2000; Wolle & Brandt, 1998). Thus, as an early childhood educator, you have important opportunities to provide the healthy, stimulating, caring environment children need for a lifetime of success. What an amazing opportunity to shape the future!

Initially, you may have been drawn to the teaching profession because you want to make a difference in children’s lives. Perhaps you will remain in this profession because you enjoy the never-ending fun and challenge of learning along with your children. The simultaneous frustration and joy of teaching young children is that you can indeed make a difference in children’s lives, but you may not know for a long time, if ever, the full impact of your influence. Your journey down the road of lifelong learning and professional development is truly one that can neither be fully achieved nor fully denied.

During the early weeks of your student teaching, perhaps you are experiencing some of the feelings expressed by these students concerning becoming a teaching professional.

As already stated, you are viewed as a professional from the moment you step into a childcare facility or a school-based early childhood classroom. Accordingly, the expectation is that you will conduct yourself with *professionalism*. This term requires some explanation.

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**Voices of Reality: Student Teachers Speak**

*This morning I had the opportunity to lead the class. . . . The students’ responses provided ideal springboards for discussions. I absolutely love these moments when I feel so completely “teacher-y!”*

Karla S.

*One of the boys in my morning class said, “Why does Mrs. K. have to go to school? I thought she already knows everything.” I told them that you can always learn something new every day. That had another student say, “Just like you, huh, Miss F.?” And I believe that is true 100%; you do learn something at any point in time on any day, at any age. “Real” teachers are always learning too.*

Nancy F.

*As I move closer and closer to “professional” status as a teacher, I have found myself viewing a professional as highly dynamic. Being a professional means always striving to be better.*

Saul D.
WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PROFESSIONAL

Consideration of what it means to be a professional is extremely important in early childhood education, just as in any other area of teaching. However, you will be called on not only to teach but also to advocate for the youngest, most vulnerable, and most powerless members of humanity. Therefore, you must be acutely aware of professional standards of practice when making decisions.

Terminology

As recently as the 1990s, some early childhood educators voiced discomfort with the use of the word *professional* as a noun to refer to early childhood teachers. To them, it implied a sense of separation or elitism. Although they called for high standards of practice, they associated the term professional with persons whose work is specialized and selective (Bredekamp & Willer, 1993; Fromberg, 1997). Others, the author included, do not believe that specialization and selectivity are necessarily bad things. Think about how you define the word professional. Does a particular image come to mind? Is this image in tune with your image of yourself as an early childhood teacher?

In contrast, the word professional used as an adjective created positive responses in the past as well as now. No one can argue with the implication that early childhood educators should exhibit ethical conduct and be knowledgeable individuals (Bredekamp & Willer, 1993). Professionalism is behavior characterized by common descriptors (Beaty, 2012; Fromberg, 1997; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2001b; Whitehead, 1929):

- Adherence to an ethical code of conduct
- Demonstrated sense of commitment and service to others
- Demonstrated mastery of a specialized body of knowledge
- Demonstrated ability to consciously *use* the specialized knowledge acquired
- Attainment of established standards and practices that control entry into the profession
- Membership in a professional organization that affects professional policy and activity
- Commitment to ongoing professional development

You may wish to add your own ideas to this list of descriptors as you reflect on what *becoming a professional* means to you.
Chapter 2  Becoming a Professional

Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards

A defining characteristic of a profession is a shared code of ethics (Bredekamp, 2011; Bredekamp & Willer, 1993; Feeney, 2012). As an early childhood professional, you have a code of ethics to guide your own behavior and to monitor the behavior of others. At some point during your early childhood courses, you may have read and discussed the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct. If not, this is an appropriate time to do so. Even if you have reviewed it in the past, this would be a good time to take another look at the overview of the Code in Figure 2.1. Certain shared values are inherent in these standards of ethical behavior. One important aspect of becoming a professional is committing yourself to these values. Therefore, as you begin student teaching, you may want to reaffirm your personal commitment, based on the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (Figure 2.2).

This affirmation of professional ideals is a good beginning. Your knowledge of the Code and your commitment to its values are merely the starting points. You must use these guidelines as the foundation on which you make ethical judgments. As you proceed through your...

Your cooperating teacher and your college supervisor can provide helpful guidance when you are unsure how to handle a situation to which there is no clear answer. Their perspectives are based on years of experience as well as education.
Figure 2.1 **Abbreviated Overview of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct**

**Ethical Responsibilities to Children**

**P-1.1** Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitive, or intimidating to children. *This principle has precedence over all others in this Code.*

**P-1.2** We shall care for and educate children in positive emotional and social environments that are cognitively stimulating and that support each child’s culture, language, ethnicity, and family structure.

**P-1.3** We shall not participate in practices that discriminate against children by denying benefits, giving special advantages, or excluding them from programs or activities on the basis of their sex, race, national origin, religious beliefs, medical condition, disability, or the marital status/family structure, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs or other affiliations of their families. (Aspects of this principle do not apply in programs that have a lawful mandate to provide services to a particular population of children.)

**P-1.4** We shall involve all those with relevant knowledge (including families and staff) in decisions concerning a child, as appropriate, ensuring confidentiality of sensitive information.

**P-1.5** We shall use appropriate assessment systems, which include multiple sources of information, to provide information on children’s learning and development.

**P-1.6** We shall strive to ensure that decisions such as those related to enrollment, retention, or assignment to special education services will be based on multiple sources of information and will never be based on a single assessment, such as a test score or a single observation.

**P-1.7** We shall strive to build individual relationships with each child; make individualized adaptations in teaching strategies, learning environments, and curricula; and consult with the family so that each child benefits from the program. If, after such efforts have been exhausted, the current placement does not meet a child’s needs, or the child is seriously jeopardizing the ability of other children to benefit from the program, we shall collaborate with the child’s family and appropriate specialists to determine the additional services needed and/or the placement option(s) most likely to ensure the child’s success. (Aspects of this principle may not apply in programs that have a lawful mandate to provide services to a particular population of children.)

**P-1.8** We shall be familiar with the risk factors for and symptoms of child abuse and neglect, including physical, sexual, verbal, and emotional abuse and physical, emotional, educational, and medical neglect. We shall know and follow state laws and community procedures that protect children against abuse and neglect.

**P-1.9** When we have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or neglect, we shall report it to the appropriate community agency and follow up to ensure that appropriate action has been taken. When appropriate, parents or guardians will be informed that the referral will be or has been made.

**P-1.10** When another person tells us of his or her suspicion that a child is being abused or neglected, we shall assist that person in taking appropriate action in order to protect the child.

**P-1.11** When we become aware of a practice or situation that endangers the health, safety, or well-being of children, we have an ethical responsibility to protect children or inform parents and/or others who can.

Chapter 2  Becoming a Professional

**Figure 2.2 Statement of Commitment**

As an individual who works with young children, I commit myself to furthering the values of early childhood education as they are reflected in the ideals and principles of the *NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct*. To the best of my ability I will

- Never harm children.
- Ensure that programs for young children are based on current knowledge and research of child development and early childhood education.
- Respect and support families in their task of nurturing children.
- Respect colleagues in early childhood care and education and support them in maintaining the *NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct*.
- Serve as an advocate for children, their families, and their teachers in [the] community and society.
- Stay informed of and maintain high standards of professional conduct.
- Engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection, realizing that personal characteristics, biases, and beliefs have an impact on children and families.
- Be open to new ideas and be willing to learn from the suggestions of others.
- Continue to learn, grow, and contribute as a professional.
- Honor the ideals and principles of the *NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct*.

**Note:** This Statement of Commitment is not part of the Code but is a personal acknowledgment of the individual’s willingness to embrace the distinctive values and moral obligations of the field of early childhood care and education. It is a recognition of the moral obligations that lead an individual to become part of the teaching profession.


Student teaching experience, situations will arise in which your decisions will have consequences for children, families, and perhaps the community. You may have more than one ethical response to problem-solving situations. One source of help is the *NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct*. Other sources include your cooperating teacher and your college supervisor. Although the *Code* does not contain solutions to specific situations, it is a reference point for decision making that was developed by a consensus of professionals in your field (Brophy-Herb, Kostelnik, & Stein, 2001).
The Code of Ethical Conduct and Ethical Dilemmas

You may find that dilemmas requiring ethical judgments occur early during your student practicum. For example, in the second week of the semester, Angie D., a student teacher, reports a situation that makes her uncomfortable. A child in first grade who has been diagnosed with intellectual disabilities is pulled out of the room to receive learning support in math each day. When he returns, the other children are just beginning their math lesson. Current practice has been to occupy the child with a paper to color or to give him the same math worksheet as the more typical students. When he becomes disruptive (which is a daily occurrence), he is removed from class “for the greater good of the remaining students.” The student teacher feels bad for the little boy, but she does not want to “rock the boat” with her cooperating teacher. Her peers empathize and suggest the following problem-solving options:

- Ask your college supervisor for advice.
- Speak with your cooperating teacher and brainstorm other ways to handle the situation, such as rescheduling math time or providing adapted activities for the child.
- Perhaps your cooperating teacher can ask for a team meeting with the special education teacher, the child’s parent, and others to brainstorm and to develop alternatives.
- Above all, think of the child first and do something!

None of her peers mentioned the Code of Ethical Conduct. Nevertheless, that is perhaps the most important starting point when deciding what to do or say in a difficult situation involving young children. It may help you discover the insights of other professionals. It may help you find the personal courage to make ethical decisions that reflect best practices for all children (Feeney, Christensen, & Nolte, 2013; Freeman, 2000). According to Freeman (2000), the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct “is specific enough to guide those who need strength to shoulder their ethical responsibilities and those struggling to resolve thorny dilemmas” (p. 14).

In the case mentioned by Angie D., the Code of Ethical Conduct is helpful (NAEYC, 2005a). Section P-1.3 reminds us that we should not exclude children from programs or activities for reasons such as difference in ability. Section P-1.4 reminds us that we should involve others, including parents, in the planning process to meet each child’s needs. These sections and others helped guide Angie D. as she addressed her concerns with her cooperating teacher. In this case, the general education teacher,
the student teacher, the special education teacher, and the parents met to brainstorm solutions. As a result, math schedules were modified by the general education teacher, and math activities were adapted by the special education teacher so that this child could be included more effectively with his peers.

**Confidentiality**

Angie D.’s discussion of her concerns brings to mind another aspect of becoming a professional: the importance of confidentiality. Even if you disagree with your cooperating teacher, another colleague, or a parent, you must not vent your feelings or opinions to others in the faculty room, in the hallway, or outside the facility. If you need to discuss confidential matters that occur in your classroom, wait until you can schedule uninterrupted time with your cooperating teacher or until you can meet with your college supervisor. Discussing the situation with her peers, Angie D. was careful not to mention particular names, and students were able to voice concerns with the knowledge that the matters discussed “would not leave that room.”

In addition, as present and/or future members of the community of early childhood professionals, you must always keep in mind that confidentiality is an essential component of your commitment to professional conduct. Common examples of confidentiality pitfalls experienced by students include the following:

- **Use of school photographs.** Talk with your cooperating teacher to find out the policy of your center or school regarding taking pictures of children. You may need the written consent of parents or guardians. Using children’s photographs in your paper or electronic portfolio or on your own website may be considered a serious violation of confidentiality. Discuss this with your college supervisor before using any information in this manner.

- **Conversations at your practicum or student teaching site.** Refrain from engaging in conversations with other students or with professional colleagues that could be interpreted as gossip and/or violations of confidentiality. For example, discussions in the hallway or in the faculty/staff break room about the children, their families, your cooperating teacher, your college supervisor, or your opinions concerning teaching policies and practices should be avoided.

- **Conversations in the community.** While you are engaged in routine activities in the community, such as shopping at the grocery
store or the mall, a roommate, a friend, or a family member may ask how things are going at your practicum or student teaching site. Remember that professionalism extends to your behavior in the community. Again, refrain from making any comments that may be considered gossip or violations of confidentiality. Many communities, even those in large cities, are similar to small towns in that people you do not know may recognize you as a student or a teacher in an early childhood center or school. Any comments you make may be overheard and repeated elsewhere.

You do not have to be the one who is initiating the conversation to be gossiping. In fact, “listening to gossip is gossiping” (Bruno, 2007, p. 26). To help create a work environment that promotes trust and respect, you should refuse to listen to negative comments intended to damage someone’s reputation. This viewpoint is consistent with the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (2005a). Think about ways to respectfully remove yourself from such an unprofessional situation. You may choose to politely express your discomfort with the conversation and make a graceful exit.

You may be able to think of other situations involving confidentiality in addition to those mentioned. You should discuss any questions regarding professionalism and confidentiality with your cooperating teacher and your college supervisor. These conversations will help you develop the mutual trust and respect that lead to a collaborative partnership.

**Written Sources for Professional Decision Making**

Although you may not be faced with the same dilemma as Angie D., you will encounter other problems for which you do not have an immediate solution. Therefore, during your student teaching practicum, you may want to start a notebook of relevant guidelines and regulations to help you make professional decisions. A copy of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct should certainly be included. You may also locate written policies regarding the reporting of suspected child abuse, school attendance, rights of children with disabilities and their parents, childcare licensing regulations, and educational standards at the national, state, and local levels. You may also find it useful to include NAEYC’s Position Statements on a variety of topics. These may be obtained from the NAEYC website, www.naeyc.org. You will feel more comfortable making ethical judgments and discussing best practices for all young children when you have easy access to such information.
Knowledge and Critical Reflection

Another aspect of becoming a professional is demonstrating an ability to make decisions grounded in sound theory and practice. You must be knowledgeable about current research findings and reflect on the implications of these findings. As you talk with colleagues in the workplace and at conferences, you will discover multiple perspectives concerning what constitutes best practice. You may wish to develop a file of ideas on such topics as suggestions for organizing newsletters, recommendations for conducting class meetings, and research-based findings about conflict resolution and peer mediation strategies. Helpful websites and locations and phone numbers of community agencies would also be appropriate to keep on file (see Figure 2.3).

As your collection of information and current research grows, you may find that you have uncovered multiple perspectives that differ in their approach to central questions. Therefore, you will have to become a critical, reflective practitioner as you make decisions based on the context of your particular early childhood community. Your cooperating teacher and your college supervisor will be helpful resources as you assimilate these perspectives and formulate your own reflective approach to teaching.

Identification and Involvement

An important step in becoming a professional is to involve yourself with others who share your interest in the early childhood field. You need to become identified with colleagues who understand what being a professional means. One of the best ways to do this is to join a professional organization such as NAEYC. Students generally have limited financial resources, but student memberships are available at a reduced rate. It is not too late to join at the student rate if you have not already done so.

This connection with your professional organization identifies you with more than 100,000 teachers, administrators, parents, and others who share your commitment to high-quality education and care of young children. The benefits for students outweigh the costs. For example, membership entitles you to receive a journal describing the most recent developments in your field and access to a members-only website at no extra charge. Other opportunities, such as attendance at conferences and seminars, are available at a reduced fee. Perhaps the most important benefit of student memberships is the heightened awareness that you share a knowledge base and a history with respected professionals worldwide.
Figure 2.3 Sample Websites for Resources File

- **American Federation of Teachers Educational Foundation (AFTEF).** With which the Center for Childcare Workforce merged in 2002. Now includes a focus on early childhood pre-K issues such as staffing needs and qualifications. [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org)

- **Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)** website provides up-to-date information on all aspects of the education and development of students who have disabilities or students who are considered gifted. [www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)

- **Early Head Start National Resource Center @ ZERO TO THREE** has links to resources and information focusing on the first 3 years of life. [www.ehsnrc.org](http://www.ehsnrc.org)

- **Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute** at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill provides research and educational information with a focus on child development and health. [www.fpg.unc.edu](http://www.fpg.unc.edu)

- **National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)** website focuses on improvement of family and group childcare, with information and assistance for providers. [www.nafcc.org](http://www.nafcc.org)

- **NAEYC** website provides information on readiness indicators, standards, best practices, and professional development opportunities. [www.naeyc.org/policy](http://www.naeyc.org/policy)

- **National Child Care Information Center** website provides a national clearinghouse, technical assistance, and links to information about early childcare and education. Links include faith-based initiatives, fatherhood, rural families, welfare reform, and many other priorities. [www.childcare.gov](http://www.childcare.gov)

Figure 2.4 is but a small sample of the organizations available to offer information, advocacy, and support for you as an early childhood teacher as well as for the parents and community agencies with which you come in contact. You can check out the professional development opportunities by going online or by writing to these organizations and others with similar goals. You may soon find that your work with diverse young children and their families will lead you in many different directions of professional development.
Becoming a Professional

Chapter 2

Professionalism and Lifelong Learning

Another aspect of becoming a professional is recognizing that you are embarking on a process of lifelong learning. Your student teaching practicum is a milestone in your career development, but it is only the beginning of your professional growth. Presumably, you have engaged throughout your education courses in collaborative learning with other students, your professors, and the cooperating teachers from previous field experiences. This exchange of ideas with colleagues will continue to be an integral part of your professional development.

Throughout your student teaching practicum, avail yourself of all opportunities to learn from colleagues. Attend in-service training experiences. If possible, accompany your cooperating teacher to educational workshops and/or conferences.

Equally important, form connections with professionals from disciplines related to early childhood education. This may sound like unusual advice at a time when you may be just starting to know your cooperating teacher, the children, and their families. Nevertheless, you

Figure 2.4 Examples of Professional Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American Montessori Society (AMS)</th>
<th>Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>116 East 16th Street, New York, NY 10003</td>
<td>2900 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000 Arlington, VA 22202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.amshq.org/">www.amshq.org/</a> (journal: Montessori Life)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cec.sped.org/">www.cec.sped.org/</a> (journal: Teaching Exceptional Children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI)</td>
<td>National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1101 16th St., N.W., Suite 300 Washington, DC 20036</td>
<td>8701 Georgia Avenue, Suite 700 Silver Spring, MD 20910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)</td>
<td>National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1726 M St. N.W., Suite 500 Washington DC, 20036</td>
<td>1313 L Street, NW, Suite 500 Washington, DC 20005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="http://www.cwla.org/">www.cwla.org/</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.naeyc.org/">www.naeyc.org/</a> (journal: Young Children)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Professionalism and Lifelong Learning_

Another aspect of becoming a professional is recognizing that you are embarking on a process of lifelong learning. Your student teaching practicum is a milestone in your career development, but it is only the beginning of your professional growth. Presumably, you have engaged throughout your education courses in collaborative learning with other students, your professors, and the cooperating teachers from previous field experiences. This exchange of ideas with colleagues will continue to be an integral part of your professional development.

Throughout your student teaching practicum, avail yourself of all opportunities to learn from colleagues. Attend in-service training experiences. If possible, accompany your cooperating teacher to educational workshops and/or conferences.

Equally important, form connections with professionals from disciplines related to early childhood education. This may sound like unusual advice at a time when you may be just starting to know your cooperating teacher, the children, and their families. Nevertheless, you
need to know the specialists who serve your diverse population of children. If you understand the roles of these other professionals, you will know when and how to access the skills and expertise they offer. Therefore, ask your cooperating teacher for assistance in meeting the special educators, the reading specialist, the school psychologist, the English as a second language specialist, the speech and language therapist, and others. Because many children who have special needs are now included in early childhood programs with their typically developing peers, your collaboration with colleagues in other disciplines is more critical than ever before.

**Professional Growth as a Team Member**

During your student teaching practicum, seek opportunities to observe and/or participate in any transdisciplinary team meetings that are held. These are meetings attended by people across (trans) various disciplines who come together with a child’s parents or guardians to coordinate services and develop plans for improving the child’s functioning. One significant characteristic of transdisciplinary teams is that people share information and learn from each other; services are coordinated with one another rather than provided in isolation.

*Participating as a team member is one of the most important experiences you can have as a student teacher. You will observe how educators and parents learn from one another, solve problems, and make decisions as a team.*
Therefore, you may be sitting around a table with the child’s parents, your cooperating teacher, a communication disorder specialist, a nurse, an administrator, a psychologist, a behavior specialist, and other support staff. Such teaming may occur for the purpose of developing an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) for a child below the age of 3 or an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for a child beginning at age 3 who has special needs. A transdisciplinary team meeting may also be held to discuss observations or formal assessment results of a child who seems to be developing in an atypical manner.

If you have a chance to participate in a transdisciplinary team meeting, you will see how team members share information, resolve conflicts of opinion, generate creative ideas to find solutions, and collaborate to make decisions. You may even be called on to share your observations. You will see for yourself how effective communication skills can lead to positive relationships between parents and professionals. You may also take some comfort in the knowledge that “no one person assumes more responsibility than another; all are held accountable together” (Westling & Fox, 2000, p. 52). In addition, you may learn helpful information that you can implement right away. An effective team approach is therefore beneficial to all participants. It can be an opportunity for learning and professional growth.

**Becoming a Professional Member of the Workplace**

Your overall appearance, including your clothing, your grooming, and your demeanor, contributes to your image as a member of the professional workplace. Some schools or child development programs have written dress codes. Others do not. If you are not sure how to dress, then choose conservative clothing.

Although most student teachers dress appropriately in the workplace, occasionally they make inappropriate choices. These unfortunate choices may result in embarrassment for the student and for the person who finds it necessary to discuss the matter with the student. This difficulty can be easily avoided by following a few guidelines. Figure 2.5 lists typical guidelines for dressing professionally. You may be able to add to these suggestions or alter them as you talk with your cooperating teacher or college supervisor.

In addition, you should be aware of your grooming and your demeanor. Hairstyles, for example, like clothing, should be conservative. A smile on your face even if you do not feel well sends a positive message to others. These personal areas of dress, grooming, and demeanor
What It Means to Be a Professional

can go a long way toward helping you become an accepted member of
the professional community.

In the early days of your field experience or student teaching, you
are told about attendance policies. Make sure that you remain vigi-
lant about your punctuality and attendance. Teachers with a profes-
sional attitude usually prefer to work even when they do not feel
well. They frequently arrive early and stay late. You may find that
you do likewise as you progress through the weeks of your student
teaching experience.

Professional Behavior in the Workplace

Professional behavior is also a critical component of a successful practi-
cum or student teaching experience. Be mindful of behaviors that you
may take for granted, such as carrying a cell phone. The safest practice
is to leave your cell phone in your car or at home. Even if you have
every intention of turning your phone off, omissions happen. You do
not want your cell phone to start ringing when you are assisting chil-
dren, teaching a lesson, or talking with parents or professional col-
leagues. Even if you are on a break or at lunch, many centers and
schools do not want you to use your cell phone for chatting or text mes-

Figure 2.5 Typical Guidelines for Professional Dress

- Make sure that when you bend over, your shirt or sweater does not rise up to
  expose bare skin.
- Make sure that if you wear white or light-colored clothing, no undergarments
  show through the fabric.
- Generally, avoid perfume, cologne, or aftershave. They may be distracting or
  cause allergic reactions.
- Generally, remove nose rings, eyebrow rings, lip or tongue rings, or any other
  piercings that may be a distraction.
- Women should observe the accepted practice regarding hemlines on skirts or
  dresses and wearing pants or jeans at the field experience site. Men should
  observe the accepted practice regarding ties, dress pants, or jeans.
- Some schools have a policy prohibiting sneakers, sandals, and flip-flops. Check
  with your cooperating teacher to find out the policy at your location.
- Avoid clothing or jewelry that makes a political or religious statement. For example,
  some schools will not allow religious jewelry to be worn by either children or adults.
saging. Another behavior you may take for granted is chewing gum. Many programs have a policy forbidding children to chew gum; you need to be a role model by not chewing gum yourself.

**Use of Appropriate Language**

Your use of appropriate language is also an important component of professional behavior. Language that may be acceptable on a college campus, at home, or in a gathering of your friends is not necessarily acceptable in the center or school where you work with children. Therefore, you must refrain from the use of profanity, even if you think you cannot be overheard. Be cautious about the use of slang terms. For example, instead of referring to your students as “kids” or “you guys,” you can say “children” or “boys and girls.” In addition, think about how you refer to the children in your care. For example, if a child in your program has a disability, use people-first language. The girl who has a learning disability (LD) is not “an LD child;” she is “a child who has LD” (Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006). Your language should be professional and respectful of human dignity at all times (Baptiste & Reyes, 2008).

Some student teachers have developed distracting oral communication habits such as interjecting the sound “uh,” “ah,” or “um” when speaking. Such sounds are called *verbal fillers* or *verbal crutches* because they fill space between spoken thoughts. Some cooperating teachers and supervisors keep a tally of how many times a student teacher uses verbal fillers while teaching a lesson, to give feedback. You also need to be mindful of making eye contact with others and using correct grammar, good diction, and appropriate speed when speaking. You may find it helpful to ask your supervisor and cooperating teacher to video record your teaching to increase your awareness of how you communicate so that you can improve if necessary.

If you are unsure of what professional behaviors are expected, speak with your cooperating teacher and your college supervisor. Your willingness to follow the guidelines for professional behavior at your practicum or student teaching location will demonstrate the positive attitude that will help you have a successful experience.

**Becoming an Informed Professional**

One final element of becoming a professional involves keeping abreast of current issues and the policy-making process. As a student teacher, you should be cognizant of societal concerns regarding the quality of
early childhood programs. These concerns will affect you in areas such as financial compensation, assessment, and standards. Therefore, it is in your best interest to know who makes these decisions and how these policies are implemented.

One way of keeping informed is to maintain your connection with your early childhood professional organization, NAEYC. Periodically, check its links regarding advocacy and recent developments. For example, the NAEYC home page maintains a site called Children’s Champions through which you can access an Action Center. This Action Center allows you to email your state’s members of Congress regarding critical issues affecting early childhood education. Through this link, you may also discover federal and state policies and legislation that concern young children. As a student teacher, your time is severely limited, but you may find it worthwhile to be aware of issues that affect your life in such a direct manner. In addition, your advocacy can make a difference in the lives of young children who have no voice in these matters.

❖ PROFESSIONAL ISSUES RELATED TO EARLY CHILDHOOD

You are entering the field of early childhood education at an exciting time of change. You have an obligation to yourself, your colleagues, and your children to be acutely aware of trends and current issues affecting your field. Your future depends on your awareness and your professional involvement.

Public Perception

Early childhood education has been called “a public relations nightmare” (Fromberg, 1997, p. 188). A common misperception is that anyone who is nurturing and motherly can use common sense to care for infants and young children. So-called dual systems of early childhood care through public schools and nonpublic settings may have contributed to this viewpoint (Fromberg, 1997).

Thankfully, the status of early childhood care is gradually changing as nonpublic settings are becoming accredited. For example, many families choose family childcare for their young children. More and more of these home providers are becoming so-called master providers who are regulated by organizations such as the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC). NAFCC accreditation is a voluntary commitment
to professionalism that at least 1,500 family childcare providers undertook in 2001 (Eaton, 2002). NAFCC (2009) reports that 8,000 members are currently caring for “an estimated 60,000 children in 45,000 households” (p. 2). These providers consider themselves to be lifelong learners who are committed to providing high-quality childcare (Weaver, 2002). They still represent a minority of providers, however. Therefore, your challenge will be to act as an advocate for your profession as you interact with the public.

Compensation

Another area of concern in pre-K early childhood education is inadequate compensation for qualified teachers. According to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), the average childcare worker earns an average of $19,300; preschool teachers earn an average of $25,700; elementary school teachers earn an average of $51,660. These figures indicate that childcare workers, including those in childcare programs, receive less than half of what the average elementary school teacher earns during the same period; preschool teachers earn barely half of an elementary teacher’s salary. In fact, “as a nation, the United States pays about as much to parking-lot attendants and dry-cleaning workers as it does to early-childhood educators” (Executive Summary, 2002, p. 9). No wonder the profession is plagued by high turnover rates of personnel!

The U.S. government’s support of childcare is ranked among the lowest in the civilized world (NAEYC, 2001a). Now, before you despair and consider changing your career choice, you should know that there are some positive examples of financing childcare. For example, in the 1980s, the military implemented an affordable, high-quality, well-financed childcare system funded by Congress. In the 1990s, North Carolina implemented the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) Project to provide funding for education of employees in regulated childcare programs. The T.E.A.C.H. Model, linking scholarship to increased compensation, has now been implemented in at least 22 states (Executive Summary, 2002).

As a professional beginning your career, what can you do? NAEYC suggests the following:

- Read position papers and join the NAEYC interest forum on financing so that you will be knowledgeable enough to engage in discussions of early childcare financing options.
- Attend professional conferences and attend sessions on finance.
Professional Issues Related to Early Childhood

- Join with others in your state to call for a well-financed system of early childhood care.
- Join with other organizations that call for a national dialogue on what is needed to adequately finance childcare.

In other words, consider becoming an advocate for your profession.

**Increased Demand for Early Education**

The good news is that early childhood education is receiving increased attention as research continues to document its benefits (Barnett & Camilli, 2002; Olson, 2002). In fact, “Senator Zell Miller, the former governor of Georgia, has called preschool ‘the most important grade’” (Barnett & Hustedt, 2003, p. 57). His sentiments are echoed by others across the country.

Georgia mandates statewide universal pre-K education for all 4-year-old children, regardless of income. Other states are beginning to follow suit, including New York, Oklahoma, and Florida. The United States has a long way to go on this issue, but at least progress is being made. You, as a new professional, have an opportunity to be an important part of this change in the public’s perception of early childhood education.

**Shortage of Early Childhood Teachers**

According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), there is no longer a clear answer to the question of whether a teacher shortage actually exists. Challenges identified by AASCU (2005) include how to agree on what makes a teacher qualified and how to retain teachers. The turnover rate is approximately 30%, owing in part to low wages. The current movement toward universal pre-K classes will only increase the demand for qualified personnel (Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber, & Howes, 2001).

Meeting this demand will take time. To become qualified early childhood professionals, persons need to complete courses or programs of study, pass standardized tests, and obtain varying amounts of experience. Then, they may receive professional credentials. NAEYC lists six different levels of early childhood professionals (see Figure 2.6).

Examine these levels and determine where you will be when you complete the program in which you are currently enrolled. These levels also indicate opportunities you may wish to consider for future growth as well. They represent one approach to increasing awareness of early childhood education as a profession.
Chapter 2  Becoming a Professional

Figure 2.6 Levels of Early Childhood Professionals

Level I
- Working under supervision in an early childhood professional role. Participating in training leading to assessment of competencies or degree.

Level II
- Successful completion of Child Development Associate (CDA) Professional Preparation Program or successful completion of training program leading to CDA Credential through direct assessment.
- Successful completion of one-year early childhood certificate training program.

Level III
- Successful completion of associate degree from NAEYC-approved program, or
- Successful completion of associate degree plus 30 units of early childhood development studies or education with 300 hours supervised teaching experience in early childhood, or
- Successful demonstration of meeting outcomes of associate degree program conforming to NAEYC guidelines.

Level IV
- Successful completion of baccalaureate degree from NAEYC-approved program, or
- State certification meeting NAEYC or NCATE guidelines, or
- Successful completion of baccalaureate degree in another area with at least 30 units in early childhood development/education including 300 hours of supervised teaching experience, including 150 hours each for at least two of the following age groups: infants and toddlers, 3- to 5-year-olds, or primary grades, or
- Successful demonstration of meeting outcomes of NAEYC-approved baccalaureate degree program.

Level V
- Successful completion of master’s degree in prescribed program conforming to NAEYC guidelines, or
- Successful demonstration of meeting outcomes of NAEYC-approved master’s degree program.

Level VI
- Successful completion of a Ph.D. or Ed.D. in prescribed program meeting NAEYC guidelines, or
- Successful demonstration of meeting outcomes of NAEYC-approved doctoral degree program.

Source: The Levels of Early Childhood Professionals are adapted from A Conceptual Framework for Early Childhood Professional Development, a position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. 1993. Washington, DC. Copyright 1993 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Reprinted with permission of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.
Voices of Reality: Student Teachers Speak

When I think of the word professional I think of being the best that someone can be. The criteria would be as follows: (1) Act professionally, (2) dress professionally, (3) give up some of your college habits . . . hmm . . ., (4) keep children’s names/gossip to yourself even though it might be hard. The list could go on and on. I believe that everyone has their own way of being a professional, but my question is, Is there a right way or a wrong way to be a professional?

Jackson L.

Teaching is an interesting profession in that we are not always seen as professional, despite training and knowledge. Being a professional teacher involves so many different facets, including teacher, counselor, nurse, and, unfortunately, sometimes parent.

Krista U.

A professional manages and balances responsibilities to students, parents, fellow teachers, administrators, and the district at large.

Saul D.

A professional is someone who is involved in a particular line of work for their livelihood.

Nancy F.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As you can tell, living the life of a professional is a complex mission. Professionalism affects every aspect of your life. You will be holding yourself to high standards of dress, behavior, punctuality, attendance, professional development, and communication with children and their families, colleagues, and members of the community. In many respects, you will be held to a higher standard of expectations than will people in the general workforce. Many educators, including the author, believe that you are not preparing for a job; you are preparing for a profession. Think about why such a distinction might be made.

As you read the chapters in this textbook, keep in mind what it means to be a professional and how you can relate your sense of professionalism to every aspect of teaching young children. You may develop your own definition of what it means to be a professional. Perhaps you can relate to the comments made by the student teachers.
Chapter 2  Becoming a Professional

ACTIVITIES FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION

1. Create your own definition of what it means to be a professional. Refer to this definition at the end of your student teaching practicum and see if your perspective has changed.

2. Put a copy of the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct in your student teaching notebook or journal. Refer to it when in doubt as to the right thing to do in a given situation. Keep a record of any dilemmas or tough decisions you encountered and how you handled them.

3. Portfolio: A discussion of and reflection on a situation in which you made a decision based on ethical guidelines for professionals can be included in your portfolio.

4. Visit the websites of two or three professional organizations that you might consider joining. List the benefits of each organization. For example, do they offer journals, newsletters, and books to their members? Do they have local, state, and/or national conferences? Do they offer discounts on services of any kinds? What fees are charged for memberships?