Here is the textbook early childhood educators have been waiting for. This entire text focuses on early literacy in preschool, leading up to children’s accomplishments in kindergarten. *Early Literacy in Preschool and Kindergarten: A Multicultural Perspective,* Fourth Edition, presents a rewritten, updated approach to exploring literacy with preschool and kindergarten children. The current recognition that learning to read and write can emerge naturally in young children has led the authors to develop a fresh approach that uses multicultural children’s literature to involve all children in their own learning, even dual language learners. This is a practical book combining theory and research with fun, hands-on activities for children and their teachers. Emergent literacy is the result.

To support such development, this text presents ideas to involve teachers, teaching assistants, student teachers, and their children in a unique approach that uses literacy spin-offs from children’s picture books as activities in every classroom learning center to engage children in speaking, listening, writing, and reading. These books also introduce children to the multicultural world around them in a meaningful way through multicultural book characters children can identify with—such as the Korean girl Yoon who wouldn’t use her name, the African boy William who built a real windmill to electrify his dark village, the African American girl Grace who ran for class president when she learned no presidents were female, or the Hispanic boy Mario whose mud tacos taught everyone a lesson about teasing.

Teachers and student teachers learn to use puppets, dolls, character cutouts, block figures, unit blocks, drums, painting, MP3 recorders, e-books, computers, role-playing, storytelling boards, and story drama to bring these book characters to life. Children take it from there, converting their adventures with these multicultural characters into accomplishments in speaking and listening, letter writing, practice reading, and storytelling, to name a few.

The text consists of nine chapters describing how literacy emerges in preschool programs, and a final 10th chapter continuing these skills in kindergarten. The core knowledge necessary for children to write and read is presented according to the NAEYC’s literacy curriculum criteria, and culminates with the Common Core State Standards in kindergarten. All literacy emergence is illustrated with spin-off activities from multicultural picture books, which readers learn how to choose and use.

Beginning with chapters on how language develops in young children, the chapters continue showing how rhyme, rhythm, and song promote children’s phonological awareness, and how young children learn to speak and listen through story reading and storytelling. Next comes a chapter showing how drawing helps children transition into writing, and how writing evolves from scribbles to pictures to letters. Then comes reading emergence, the home book experience, and types of reading instruction and assessment used in kindergarten.

Teachers can use this approach with ease through helpful checklists such as *Choosing Multicultural Picture Books* (Chapter 2), *Learning Center Checklist* (Chapter 3), and *Choosing Predictable Multicultural Books Checklist* (Chapter 8).
Assessment of children’s skills is an ongoing affair that teachers can also accomplish with ease using the Book Involvement Checklist (Chapter 1); Spoken Language Checklist (Chapter 5); Eye–Hand Coordination Checklist, Drawing Skills Checklist, Visual Literacy Checklist (Chapter 6); Early Childhood Emergent Writing Checklist (Chapter 7); and Early Childhood Emergent Book Reading Checklist (Chapter 8); plus Print Concepts Rubric, Phonological Awareness Rubric in kindergarten (Chapter 10). Acquiring books can be accomplished through bookstores, publishers, and websites listed, or inexpensively with the 57 paperback books from Scholastic listed in the Appendix.

The information presented has been carefully researched. The author’s photographs of children engaged in exciting multicultural literacy activities should stimulate original ideas in every reader. Thus, Early Literacy in Preschool and Kindergarten: A Multicultural Perspective, Fourth Edition, should help both teachers and student teachers to solve the problems of “What kinds of reading and writing activities are really appropriate for such young children?” and “How should I go about implementing these activities successfully?”

New Content in the Fourth Edition

- **A multicultural focus** includes new book spinoffs about teasing and bullying, support for dual language learners, new translation software for home languages, and features on multicultural books adjacent to their corresponding activities.

- **Coverage of technology appropriate for preschool programs** includes a list of new tools and a discussion about each tool’s age-appropriate and educational uses, NAEYC principles to guide the use of technology and interactive media, and relevant multimedia programs and websites.

- **Up-to-date research on early literacy** that helps teachers choose effective brain-development activities, such as using nursery rhymes, chanting, and steady beat sounds to increase attention to language among young learners.

- **Early Phonological Awareness** is covered in Chapter 3, discussing the importance of immersion in language activities involving word sounds for young children, and provides examples for teachers to use in the classroom.

- **Print referencing** is covered in Chapter 8, describing the process by which preschool children can begin to read certain words.

- **Word-segmenting** coverage in Chapter 4 shows how to help children divide speech into separate words through poetry book rhymes and how to teach syllable awareness through fun reading activities.

- **Common Core State Standards for foundational reading skills and anchor standards in kindergarten** are covered, providing a way for teachers to determine children’s basic skills and how best to help students progress.

- **The importance of informational texts in kindergarten** is covered in Chapter 10.

- **Response to Intervention** is discussed as an early intervention strategy to head off protracted failure in children’s academic programs from K–12.
Support Materials for Instructors

The following resources are available for instructors to download on www.pearsonhighered.com/irc. Instructors log in, then enter the author or title of this book, select this particular edition of the book, and click on the “Resources” tab to download textbook supplements.

Instructor’s Resource Manual and Test Bank

The Instructor’s Resource Manual and Test Bank includes essential content and teaching strategies plus multiple-choice, true/false, and short answer questions for each chapter. It also provides classroom handouts.

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—J.J.B. and L.P.
CHAPTER 1

Foundations of Early Literacy

In this chapter you will learn to:

• Explain the meaning of early literacy
• Describe examples of emergent literacy
• Describe early literacy skills identified by research
• Discuss early childhood curriculum criteria
• Assess children’s literacy achievements
• Demonstrate what technology is appropriate for preschool programs
The Meaning of Early Literacy

Literacy begins at birth. Right from the start infants try to communicate with those around them through crying and cooing, smiling and babbling. As toddlers, they pay close attention to their caregivers, striving to imitate the sounds they hear, the gestures they see—all the while attempting to make sense of the world around them. For all young children from every culture, early literacy is a process of meaning-making.

For most of us, however, literacy means being able to read and write. Does “early literacy” therefore mean that young children can learn to read and write naturally before they enter kindergarten or first grade, where they receive formal instruction? The answer to this question is quite different today from what it was not many years ago.

Today’s research shows us how reading and writing can develop naturally in a continuum from infancy onward as young children make sense of their world through playful exploration. It shows how children’s brains take in this information, extracting their own rules from it to help them learn. It also shows how teachers and the other adults around children can build on children’s own ideas (scaffolding) to help them develop the skills necessary for reading and writing. Such research has changed our minds forever about the way children develop and how we can best support their growth.

We now know, for instance, that reading and writing are outgrowths of the same communication urge that drives children to express themselves orally. Thus, speaking and listening are also a part of early literacy. We now know that given the proper tools and adult support, children can teach themselves early reading and early writing skills. This textbook describes how this can happen in the preschool and kindergarten years.

Examples of Emergent Literacy

Educators use the term emergent literacy to describe children’s natural development of reading and writing skills. For example, Bardige and Segal (2005) describe a 3-year-old child who pretends to read, holds the book correctly, retells the story, and turns the pages more or less at the right time as displaying a high level of emergent literacy skills. Emergent literacy is the reading and writing knowledge and behavior of children who are not yet conventionally literate. In other words, they have not been taught how to read and write, but they may have learned many of the reading and writing skills on their own (Jalongo, 2011).

Brain research has shown us that circuits in the brain are set up for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers to emerge naturally into speaking the language they hear spoken around them (see Chapter 3). It is not necessary to teach them. But learning to read and write must be converted by young children in this language module of the brain by hearing and seeing words in their spoken and written forms. In other words, speaking is natural but reading and writing are not. Young children can either emerge into reading and writing naturally if the circumstances are right, or they have to be taught conventionally, or both. (See Figure 1.1.)
By the time they are preschoolers, ages 3 through 5, children are fully engaged in emerging into early literacy—listening, speaking, and their own experimental reading and writing—especially if the adults around them support their literacy efforts by providing materials and activities for them to progress. For youngsters who receive little support in this regard, their drive to communicate and emerge into early literacy may not progress as smoothly. Becoming literate may take additional effort or a longer time for those youngsters.

Nevertheless, the preschool years are the natural time for young children to develop early literacy skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As researchers learn more about the processes of reading and writing, they realize that the earlier adults can support young children in their natural development of literacy skills, the more successful children of every culture will later be in their ability to read and write in the elementary school years. The International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 1998) tell us that the most important period for literacy to develop is from birth through age 8.

These two leading professional organizations long ago adopted a joint position statement, *Learning to Read and Write: Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Young Children*. Included in this statement is a “Continuum of Children’s Development in Early Reading and Writing” to illustrate how children function at different levels of their development. (See Figure 1.2.)

Preschool children may function at either or both of these two phases, especially if the adults around them encourage their development and provide appropriate experiences. But it is the preschool and kindergarten teaching staff (including teachers, teaching assistants, student interns, and volunteers) who can benefit most from knowledge of this continuum by learning to provide suitable literacy activities for children at their appropriate levels of development.

How should teachers help children acquire these skills? They should do so by recognizing that it is the children who construct their own knowledge. The teacher’s role is to engage children’s interests, to set up challenging literacy activities, and to support children in their progress. Teachers should not spend their time standing at the front of the class and teaching the whole group. They should not be putting chil-

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**FIGURE 1.1**
Emergent Reading Behaviors

- Listening to stories
- Discussing stories
- Making up stories
- Pretending to read
- Holding a book right side up
- Retelling a familiar story
- Turning the pages at the right time
children through word and letter drills, or having groups of children recite, chant, and review letters, sounds, and numbers over and over.

The goals for preschool and kindergarten listed in the NAEYC position statement's continuum are meant to be developed interactively and not in isolation as children work and play together in the classroom. Children’s earliest experience with print is not about letters and sounds, but meaning. Although letter knowledge is important in their development of literacy, children should acquire this skill through meaningful classroom experiences. (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000).

Children, in fact, emerge into literacy in a manner somewhat similar to their acquisition of oral language (Vukelich & Christie, 2009), although individual children’s progress varies greatly, depending on the support of those around them and
Children at an early age observe and interact with family members who use words in speaking aloud often, in reading to children, in making lists, writing letters, using the computer, reading newspapers, playing games, shopping, going to restaurants, or watching television.

Children construct their own concepts about words and print from listening, observing, and being involved in these activities.

Children test their beliefs about how written language works by trying it themselves through imitation and play (e.g., pretend reading; scribble writing).

Children modify their beliefs based on the response they get from others or on their own new observations and understandings.

Children then construct and try out more sophisticated systems of writing and reading.

FIGURE 1.3
Emergent Literacy Progression

The print environment of the home. Most children try to imitate the adults in their environment. If those adults read and write, most of the children will want to copy them. Figure 1.3 illustrates children’s potential steps of natural literacy emergence.

What about the children in your program? Have they shown any indication of a self-acquired knowledge of print, for instance? Can they scribble or print their names? Do they hold a book right side up and turn each page separately?

Some children learn to read on their own before they enter school from stories read to them at home, from computer programs they use on their own, and from the printed material they see around them. Most children, however, need assistance to be involved in appropriate literacy activities and need to be supported in their literacy emergence. Such assistance often includes emergence literacy activities such as those in Figure 1.4.

FIGURE 1.4
Emergent Literacy Activities

- Interactive storybook reading
- Shared reading with Big Books
- Storytelling; flannel boards; puppets
- A print-rich environment
- Pretend play; story reenactments
- Shared writing
- Drawing as writing; journal writing
- Letter recognition games
Preschool and kindergarten programs that include a self-directed learning environment feature a book center, block center, listening center, manipulative/math center, science center, music center, art center, and dramatic play center to promote such emergence. Literacy learning is then integrated into all of these centers.

Note that the Emergent Literacy Progression in Figure 1.3 names the child as the initiator of the progression. It is the child who acquires literacy through his or her own efforts (with support from the teacher), and not the teacher who imparts the knowledge. Too many teachers unfortunately believe that they are the ones to teach early literacy. Thus they have groups of children recite, chant, and review letters and sounds over and over, as noted previously. They do not realize that although reading achievement may look like it is just about letters and sounds, it is not. Learning to read is about meaning (Neuman & Roskos, 2005).

**Early Literacy Skills Identified by Research**

A new national emphasis on the teaching of reading and writing throughout the elementary curriculum now includes preschools. The teaching of specific literacy skills that have been identified through research is currently being mandated for inclusion in the curriculum of elementary schools and preschools. Experimental research reveals the skills and concepts that young children need to master to become proficient readers and writers and the most effective strategies for teaching this content (Vukelic & Christie, 2009).

Whereas emergent literacy is a developmental progression that originates naturally within a child and leads to reading for understanding, most scientifically based reading research programs (SBRR) believe that children must master the skills that enable them to process print before comprehension becomes possible. According to this approach, these skills come from the outside and must be taught. The core knowledge and skills that research has identified for young children to become successful readers include those in Figure 1.5.

This research also claims that children’s phonological awareness, phonemic awareness, and alphabet knowledge should be increased through explicit instruction. Whereas emergent literacy places heavy value on the social and meaning-based aspects of literacy, research-based reading relies on the visual and auditory processing aspects of literacy (Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky, & Seidenberg, 2002).

Researchers looking for the causes of dyslexia—a reading disorder resulting from a defect in the brain’s processing of graphic symbols—found that phonemic

**FIGURE 1.5**
Core Knowledge and Skills

- Vocabulary development (recognizing expressive and receptive language)
- Phonological awareness (recognizing spoken words and their syllables)
- Phonemic awareness (recognizing individual sounds in words)
- Alphabet knowledge (recognizing letters and their sounds)
- Print awareness (recognizing commonly used written words)
awareness played an important role in reading success for all young children. Preschool children who learn to categorize words based on their first, middle, and last sounds show the most improvement later on in reading and spelling (Shaywitz, 2003).

Brain Research

Earlier researchers did not have the high-level tools and techniques now available to demonstrate how reading relies on brain circuits already in place for language. New techniques allow neuroscientists to actually see someone’s brain at work as the person reads. These researchers are able to track the spoken printed word as it registers as a visual icon in the brain. This is then converted into sound whose meaning is stored in the brain. (Shaywitz, 2003).

What does this knowledge mean for teachers of preschool children today? Should they abandon the informal emergent activities they were pursuing with their children and take up formal teaching strategies? Not at all. Instead, educators and parents alike need to interpret carefully the latest research findings. The teaching of specific literacy skills (such as phonics) in infancy is not necessary. Educators can rely on other psychological and educational research to support their efforts to foster emerging literacy (Bergen & Coscia, 2001).

In other words, educators need to be aware of the core knowledge and skills that research has identified as important for young children to become successful readers. (See Figure 1.5.) Then they need to find interesting ways to incorporate those skills into their emergent literacy curriculum already in use. Such skills can be blended into an emergent literacy curriculum. Many preschool have done exactly that. They have devised a comprehensive literacy program of blended instruction that includes emergent literacy activities along with directly taught vocabulary, phonological awareness, alphabet, and print concepts in small and large group settings (Christie, Enz, & Vukelich, 2011). Figure 1.6 lists the components of such a Comprehensive Literacy Instruction program.

**Emergent Literacy + SBRR**

- Print-rich classroom
- Storybook reading
- Shared reading and writing
- Projects/units
- Oral language (explicit instruction)
- Phonological awareness (explicit instruction)
- Alphabet knowledge (explicit instruction)
- Concepts about print (explicit instruction)

**FIGURE 1.6**
Comprehensive Literacy Instruction
What should not happen is the resorting to a pushed-down curriculum from elementary grades using drill-and-practice, worksheets, basal readers, and academic instruction—or even any of the new technology that includes such strategies. For example, much of the early literacy software for whiteboards is nothing more than sophisticated worksheets more appropriate for kindergarten and elementary school. Even interactive programs require the teacher to initiate and control the activities. What do preschool children learn from such strategies? Neuman and Roskos (2005) believe they mainly learn the skills of pleasing the teacher though mimicking, reciting, and repeating.

Play as Learning

Sensitive preschool teachers, on the other hand, know about the many exciting activities they can provide to help their children learn words, syllables, letter sounds, writing, and reading on their own in a fun-filled manner. They understand that play is the work of preschool children. In their word-play, for instance, these children learn what words and syllables sound like; what they look like; how to say them, write them, read them; and what they mean. No need for whiteboards, worksheets, and drills.

The nature of play makes it a particularly relevant literacy at a time when the textual landscape is increasingly furnished with texts written with Wii wands or with fingers swept across screens, and filmed texts captured on cell phones and uploaded to mobile screens of all kinds (Wohlwend, 2011).

Teachers in-the-know fill their classrooms with songs about letters, dances about words, clapping games about syllables, easel painting of names, finding the
humor in funny stories, making up of children’s own stories, and children “reading” back their stories. This textbook will show you how to make early literacy learning an exhilarating part of every preschool and kindergarten classroom with “literacy spinoff” activities from most of the books described.

Early Childhood Curriculum Criteria

In recent years, the movement to standardize the curriculum of elementary and secondary schools across the nation has led most states to develop and adopt a set of standards that identify and delineate the structure and content of the subject matter that should be taught by teachers and learned by students. It is called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Preschool programs were not originally included in the standards movement because of:

- The wide range of children served
- The diversity of early childhood programs
- The variety of sponsoring agencies
- The field’s separation from elementary education
- The different philosophy of the field of early education

The field of early education is based squarely on a foundation of philosophies and theories of child development and constructivism. There are strong beliefs that (1) children construct their own knowledge, although with experts guiding the development of this knowledge, (2) learning is a do-it-yourself process, and (3) the teaching must be aligned with the child’s development (Seefeldt, 2005).

Many states have since issued standards for preschool, but not all have taken into consideration the philosophy of the field—that young children construct their own knowledge. Some states include standards for toddlers, but few include standards for children whose primary language is not English. Federally funded early child care programs including Head Start have had to adopt new and higher performance outcomes. Yet exactly what young children should learn has yet to be resolved by many of the experts involved. What should an early childhood program do?

The pressure to account for what children are learning caused many states to adopt a narrow, utilitarian view of education that focuses on children learning letter names and sounds. Some early childhood educators see standards as a threat. But others believe that standards developed on a solid research base can be useful to preschool teachers because they tell teachers what knowledge and skills children should attain. These standards then become the goals of the program. The standards of learning identifying the content that young children should learn may finally answer the question of what young children should learn during the early years (Seefeldt, 2005).
Thus, the early childhood professional association, NAEYC, has developed two sets of standards and criteria: one to guide early childhood professional preparation programs, and a second set to guide early childhood teachers and programs in what should be included in their curriculum.

The first set, *NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs*, appears on the inside front cover of this text as a matrix correlating the standards with text chapter content. Criteria excerpts from the second set, *NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, 2012* (see All Criteria Document) appear in boxes in appropriate locations throughout the chapters. Common Core State Standards affecting kindergarten programs are discussed in Chapter 10.

An example of curriculum criteria is the *NAEYC Curriculum Content Area for Cognitive Development: Early Literacy, Books* that appears in Figure 1.7.

Once the early childhood teaching staff understands that learning to read and write begins long before children are formally taught in elementary school, they can rearrange the preschool and kindergarten learning environment so that each learning center promotes literacy development according to the standards the program has adopted. They can take time daily with individuals and small groups to engage children in the identified literacy activities. They can acquaint themselves with the most up-to-date information on what works best to promote early literacy among the children of the many cultures present in most early childhood programs. They can then use this knowledge to set up exciting, child self-directed activities in each of the learning centers.

**FIGURE 1.7**

*NAEYC Curriculum Criteria: Early Literacy, Books*

*Source: NAEYC (2012, p. 14)*

**NAEYC Standards and Criteria**

Children have varied opportunities to:

- Be read books in an engaging manner in group or individual settings at least twice a day in full-day programs and a least once a day in half-day programs
- Be read to regularly in individualized ways including one-to-one or in small groups of two to six children
- Explore books on their own and have places that are conducive to quiet enjoyment of books
- Have access to various types of books, including storybooks, factual books, books with rhymes, alphabet books, and wordless books
- Be read the same book on repeated occasions
- Retell and reenact events in storybooks
- Engage in conversations that help them understand the content of the book
- Be assisted in linking books to other aspects of the curriculum
- Identify the parts of books and differentiate print from pictures
Assessing Children’s Literacy Achievements

Assessment consists of gathering relevant information to document a child’s learning. How is the child doing? Does he or she need help? Is the environment set up in a manner conducive to the child’s learning style? Are the literacy activities appropriate for the child’s stage of development? It is important for teachers to know whether a child is accomplishing the literacy goals of the program. If the child needs help, then new activities or a different approach may be in order.

To gather this information, an assessment of the child’s literacy achievement is called for. Most assessments done by teachers in an early childhood classroom are informal. They are called authentic assessments because the data are gathered while the child is engaged in real classroom activities. They consist of systematic child observations, checklists, anecdotal records, teacher–child interviews, audio or video recordings, digital photos, or samples of the child’s work. The information gathered is often kept in a child’s portfolio.

Unlike literacy assessments in elementary programs, most preschools do not use written tests. Most preschool children do not read or write. Nor do they test well. In addition early reading and writing cannot simply be measured as a set of narrowly defined skills on standardized tests. These measures often are not reliable or valid indicators of what young children can do in typical practice, nor are they sensitive to language variations, culture, or experiences of young children (Vukelich & Christie, 2009).

Renowned Russian early childhood theorist Lev Vygotsky strongly supported this point of view. He believed that careful observation of children should be considered as valid as their scores on a test (Mooney, 2000).

This text uses systematic observation of children as the basis for assessment of their literacy achievements. Systematic observation can be one of the most effective and efficient methods for gathering information about a child. The system being used depends on the purpose for the assessment and how the data will be used. A developmental checklist system is often chosen for observing young children as they work and play in literacy activities.
The items on the checklist can be the literacy goals of the program translated into observable child behavior. The checklist approach adopted by this text uses the NAEYC Curriculum Criteria as the literacy goals to be observed. For example, the curriculum criteria addressing children’s involvement with books (see Figure 1.7) can be converted into the checklist found in Figure 1.8.

Teachers can make their own observational checklists by converting the standards used in their programs or converting their program goals into observable child behaviors. In addition to such checklists, assessment data can also include photos of the child “reading” a book, a recorded interview with the child about a book he or she likes, an anecdotal record the teacher makes of the child’s reading habits, a list of books the child asks to be read, or books the child has borrowed for home use.

One measure cannot be the main source for evaluating a child’s progress. We need to assess their growth in many areas and under many conditions. Assessment should match educational goals and practices (Morrow, 2012). Also, using a tool such as a checklist needs to be done frequently by different staff members and the results discussed by all.

Such assessment data will answer questions of how the child is doing, what else needs to be done to assist the child, and how the program itself is performing (i.e., whether the standards and goals are being met). Such data also need to be shared with parents and their input recorded. Note that assessments play essential roles in interventions, in informing instruction, and in keeping parents abreast of their children’s progress. They also provide data on groups of children, which can be used for program improvements and accountability purposes. Finally, they provide evidence of achievements that parents, teachers, and program administrators can celebrate together (see Figure 1.9; Bardige & Segal, 2005).

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**BOOK INVOLVEMENT CHECKLIST**

Name ______________________________________ Observer ______________________ Date ______________________

- Listens with interest to books read by teacher
- Participates in book activities before and after reading
- Looks at books on own that teacher has read
- Asks to have same book read again
- Can retell story from one of the books
- Participates in reenactment of a story
- Talks about the story with understanding
- Engages in book activities in different centers
- Can tell the difference between print and pictures in book being read

**FIGURE 1.8**
Book Involvement Checklist
Appropriate Technology for Preschool Programs

We live today in a technological world surrounded by all sorts of technological devices in the home, in the marketplace, on television, and in the hands of adults everywhere. Computers, tablets, multitouch tables, interactive whiteboards, smart phones, MP3 music players and recorders, digital voice recorders, digital cameras, electronic toys, e-books and e-book readers are some of the newer devices. Older analog devices still being used in early childhood programs include VCRs, VHS tapes, tape recorders, record and cassette players, audio book players, light tables, projectors, and microscopes.

Some of the new devices are bound to make their way into the preschool classroom. You would want them to. But which ones are appropriate? How will you know? It is important that you as a teacher have a first-hand look at the technological devices and interactive media available. Before you bring them into your classroom, you need to try them out. Figure 1.10 offers suggestions for ways you can find out about specific devices and their use in early literacy programs.

- Systematic child observation
- Literacy goals checklist
- Anecdotal records
- Teacher–child interview
- Audio/video recording
- Digital photos
- Child’s work samples
- List of books read

FIGURE 1.9
Authentic Literacy Assessment

- Try out the devices with children
- Use devices for trial period
- Visit classrooms where devices are being used
- Talk with parents who use devices
- Compare cost and effectiveness with similar devices now in use
- Read articles describing use of devices in other programs
- Visit websites featuring children and technology

FIGURE 1.10
Learning About Specific Technological Devices
You need to ask yourself how each of these new devices will help your children to learn in ways that are better and more effective than what is already being used. You may want to go online for guidance in making informed decisions on the use of technology and interactive media tools in your program. Some online websites that offer help include those listed at the end of the chapter.

These new gadgets are very inviting for children. But are they educationally sound? Will they replace the older but proven educational materials in the classroom? Many early childhood educators have expressed concern that the new technology will indeed replace children’s active involvement with traditional materials and instead invite them to spend much of their time sitting and viewing screens. Thus the NAEYC along with the Fred Rogers Center has issued a joint position statement on “Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8” (2012). Principles to guide the appropriate use of technology and interactive media from this lengthy statement are listed in Figure 1.11.

Think carefully before you make any decisions. You will need to keep a balance between the old tried-and-tested materials and the new. For example, most classrooms already have a computer used by the children. Should you purchase a new one? Older monitors are sturdier for your active youngsters than the newer and possibly tippy thin screens. If available software can be used on both, you may want to delay such a purchase.

The Chapters to Follow

As you set up your early literacy program, this text can guide your efforts. All of the chapters include multicultural book spinoff activities for the children in your own classroom. Chapter 1, “Foundations of Early Literacy,” sets the stage. Chapter 2, “A Multicultural Perspective,” discusses why this text has chosen to emphasize multicultural literacy education through picture books; how multicultural characters can lead the way; and how speakers of a different home language, dual language learners (DLLs), can benefit from this approach.

Chapter 3, “Language Emergence in Young Children,” describes how children acquire language, and how to establish an emotional, social, and physical environment with learning centers that promote early literacy through multicultural book activities in a print-rich environment.

Chapter 4, “Music as a Natural Language,” takes the reader into the music center, treating music and verse as a natural language that helps children develop phonological awareness. Teachers learn how to use poetry and chants from picture books as a prelude to singing and later reading. They then progress with their children to sound-making, singing, and reading song storybooks.

Chapter 5, “Speaking and Listening,” focuses on the listening center, book center, and dramatic play center, using story reading and storytelling as the basis for developing these skills. In learning to recognize the preschool stages of language production, teachers provide opportunities for conversation and support DLLs. Teachers also learn how to prepare for story reading and telling, how to engage their audience,
• The use of technology and interactive media should not harm children.

• Developmentally appropriate practices should guide decisions on whether and when to integrate these tools into an early childhood program.

• Professional judgment should determine if and when specific use of technology or media is age appropriate, individually appropriate, and culturally and linguistically appropriate.

• Developmentally appropriate teaching practices must always guide the selection of any classroom materials, including technology and interactive media.

• Appropriate use of technology and media depends on the age, developmental level, needs, interests, linguistic background, and abilities of each child.

• Effective uses of technology and media are active, hands-on, engaging, and empowering; give the child control; provide adaptive scaffolds to ease the accomplishment of tasks; and are used as one of many options to support children’s learning.

• When used appropriately, technology and media can enhance children’s cognitive and social abilities.

• Interactions with technology and media should be playful and support creativity, exploration, pretend play, and outdoor activities.

• Technology tools can help educators make and strengthen home–school connections.

• Technology and media can enhance childhood practice when integrated into the environment, curriculum, and daily routines.

• Assistive technology must be available as needed to provide equitable access for children with special needs.

• Technology tools can be effective for dual language learners by providing access to a family’s home language and culture while supporting English language learning.

• Digital literacy is essential to guiding early childhood educators and parents in the selection, use, integration, and evaluation of technology and interactive media.

• Digital citizenship is an important part of digital literacy for young children.

• Early childhood educators need training, professional development opportunities, and examples of successful practice to develop the technology and media knowledge, skills, and experience needed to meet the expectations set forth in this statement.

• Research is needed to better understand how young children use and learn with technology and interactive media and to better understand any short- and long-term effects.

FIGURE 1.11
Principles to Guide the Appropriate Use of Technology and Interactive Media in Early Childhood Programs

Source: NAEYC and Fred Rogers Center (2012, pp.5–11)
how to deliver stories, and how to follow up with literacy spin-off activities in every learning center.

Chapter 6, “Art as a Natural Language,” helps teachers strengthen children’s eye–hand coordination through three-dimensional art: cutting with scissors and modeling with play dough and clay. Children develop drawing/writing skills through scribbles that eventually become pictures. Digital mark-making software is discussed, as well as easel painting, chalk, and crayons. Children learn to use their eyes to develop visual representational skills, eventually learning to communicate ideas through drawing, and developing visual literacy through reading-the-pictures books. Kindergarten children writing with pictures is also discussed.

Chapter 7, “Becoming a Writer,” focuses on the writing center and instructs teachers how to encourage children’s early writing attempts such as scribble writing and random letter strings. Teachers learn how children develop the alphabetic principle, and discover alphabet books with cultural characters. They begin to print their names and use the computer keyboard. Books with cultural characters lead children into writing letters, making lists, writing messages, and writing stories with pictures and invented spelling, especially in kindergarten.

Chapter 8, “How Reading Emerges,” begins by discussing the differences between conventional and emergent reading. Then it describes emergent book reading behaviors such as book handling and page-by-page reading with grandparents in the classroom. The function of pictures in emergent reading is presented with “picture-walking” examples. Practice reading, predictable books, and retelling stories with Big Books, multicultural character cutouts, and storytelling boards follows. Story drama with several book spin-offs is also included. A new section on improving children’s emergent skills through print-referencing with picture-salient picture books is described. Finally, the chapter concludes with support for dual language emergent readers especially with bilingual pairs using bilingual computer storybook programs.

Chapter 9, “Home Book Experience,” discusses family literacy, the physical environment in the home, obtaining books, how families can support children’s literacy, and book reading with family members from different cultures. A story reading workshop is described using one of the children’s favorite books as a reading model. The father’s role in home reading is discussed with child–father books listed. Programs to support home reading such as lending libraries and family literacy packs are included with an extended example of how to use a family literacy pack.

Finally, Chapter 10, “Becoming a Reader,” takes both teacher and child through the transition from preschool to kindergarten. Teachers learn what is expected of children in kindergarten and what types of reading instruction can be used, depending on how educators believe children acquire literacy. A new and expanded assessment of children’s reading accomplishments using rubrics is presented.

Altogether, these chapters give the teaching staff a solid foundation in the theory and practice of using appropriate multicultural activities to promote early literacy in preschool and kindergarten children.
Summary

This chapter has defined early literacy and sets the stage for the chapters to follow. Early literacy that starts at birth is described as a process of meaning-making. Emergent literacy, on the other hand, is described and children’s progression through this natural development follows. How the core early literacy skills identified by research can be incorporated into a play-based program is discussed. Early childhood curriculum criteria describe what children need to learn. They can be incorporated into any program that focuses on children and their development levels. These criteria then serve as the basis for assessment of children’s literacy accomplishments using tools such as developmental checklists. Finally, a discussion of technology in the classroom and what is appropriate for preschool children concludes the chapter.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. Define “early literacy,” telling how early it begins and what teachers can expect from children ages 3 to 6 in their classrooms. Give examples.
2. What is “emergent literacy” and how do children progress naturally until they become literate? Give examples.
3. What are the core literacy skills research has defined, and how can they be incorporated into a play-based program? Describe in detail.
4. What early childhood literacy criteria are being used by your program? How are they integrated into your curriculum? Describe in detail.
5. What type of assessment is used to evaluate literacy achievements by the children in your program? How can curriculum criteria become a part of such assessment? Describe in detail.
6. Choose three of the Principles to Guide the Appropriate Use of Technology and Interactive Media from Figure 1.11, and tell how your program uses (or would use) such technology to support children’s learning. Describe in detail.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Chapter 1


**Helpful Websites**

Children’s Technology and Review (www.childrenstech.com)
Early Childhood Technology Network (www.ecetech.net)
Fred Rogers Center (www.fredrogerscenter.org)
International Reading Association (www.reading.org)
National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org)
Read a Story (www.readastory.org)
Tech & Young Children (www.techandyoungchildren.org)
Technology in Early Childhood at Erikson Institute (www.teccenter.erikson.edu)
United through Reading (www.unitedthroughreading.org)

**Helpful Multimedia**

*Teaching in the Digital Age Facilitator’s Guide*
CD-ROM Redleaf Press (800-423-8309)

*Literacy in the Preschool Years*
DVD (28 min.) Redleaf Press
A Multicultural Perspective

In this chapter you will learn to:

• Explain the meaning of a multicultural perspective
• Discuss why multicultural picture books should be used
• Demonstrate how teachers can use these books with children
• Show how teachers can choose appropriate books
• Describe how teachers can acquire multicultural picture books
A Multicultural Perspective

“Multicultural,” meaning “many cultures,” describes the composition of many early childhood classrooms these days. Most preschool and kindergarten programs in large cities already include children representing several different races and cultures. In many of our cities more than half the school-aged children will be non-native speakers of English or dual language learners (DLLs) by 2030. This means children must be prepared to learn in diversified classrooms (Quintero, 2005).

Teachers must also be prepared to teach in diversified classrooms. For many teachers, it is an exciting but slightly unnerving prospect. Who are these children? Will they be able to get along with one another? With me? How can I reach children from a culture or race different from my own? How can I help them learn?

The NAEYC is also concerned that teaching staff in early childhood programs will treat all children with equal respect and consideration. As a part of its NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria (2012), it lists the set of teaching criteria found in Figure 2.1. Knowing upfront what is expected of them sets the stage for teachers to become as deeply involved in their own learning as the children will be in theirs.

The multicultural perspective taken by this textbook assumes that all young children need to learn about other children who may be different from them, whether or not those children are in their present classroom. Those children may come from other cultures and speak different languages. They may look or act different. Preschool is the right time and place for young children to become aware that they all are part of an exciting multicultural nation of people. Together they will be working and playing, growing and learning, not only about the cultures of other children, but also about their own. Multicultural education seeks to respect the humanity of every person, prioritizing teachers’ and children’s personal, practical knowledge as foundational to promoting change in early childhood settings and beyond (Souto-Manning, 2013).

Teaching staff counter potential bias and discrimination by:

• Treating all children with equal respect and consideration
• Initiating activities and discussions that build positive self-identity and teach the valuing of differences
• Intervening when children tease or reject others
• Providing models and visual images of adult roles, differing abilities, and ethnic or cultural backgrounds that counter stereotypical limitations
• Avoiding stereotypes in language references

FIGURE 2.1
NAEYC Teaching Criteria for a Harmonious Classroom
Source: NAEYC (2012)
A Breakthrough

Multicultural ideas are easier caught than taught, believe many educators who have tried various multicultural teaching strategies without much success. Bringing in a Mexican piñata from time to time or having dolls of different skin colors merely trivializes the idea of a real multicultural curriculum. The multicultural perspective of this text features multicultural education as an everyday affair with children of various cultures as its primary focus, participating in spin-off activities from multicultural picture books.

Early childhood programs using multicultural literature have finally achieved a breakthrough in this regard. Preschool children, ages 3 to 5 may not understand the abstract notion of “culture” but they do respond gleefully to stories, games, and activities about children like themselves, only different. Thus programs basing their curricula on multicultural literature report success in introducing multicultural education through books. Multicultural picture books are books where one or more of the characters come from a minority culture. Multicultural literature—literature that focuses on people of color, religious minorities, regional cultures, the disabled, and the aged—plays a significant role in the development of children’s cross-cultural understanding (Harper & Brand 2010).

Harper and Brand go on to say that multicultural literature has the capacity to foster children’s understanding of their own culture as well as the cultures of others. Instead of highlighting differences, such literature affirms unity among diversity. For example, although the idea of a Cuban culture may be too abstract for most preschool children to understand, they can identify with the Cuban girl Chavi, who shows the crowd at the Calle Ocho Festival that a girl can drum just as well as a boy in Drum, Chavi, Drum. They may not understand the culture of China, but they can identify with Ling Sung, a Chinese boy who uses paintbrushes as chopsticks to become accepted in his new American preschool class in Cleversticks.

Because the focus in this text is on early literacy, it invites teachers and children to dip into the world of multicultural picture books as lead-ins to an exciting multicultural curriculum. Realistic child book characters give readers and listeners an up-close look at, for example: how Jenna, a Native American, is able to perform at the powwow in Jingle Dancer; how Luke, an African American boy, learns to play baseball like his hero, Jackie Robinson in Luke Goes to Bat; how Anna, an Anglo-American girl, and Juanita, a Navajo girl, combine their blocks in a Navajo preschool to build a bridge and foster a friendship in Building a Bridge.

This textbook presents a large selection of practical ideas and activities that involve both teachers and children in learning about a variety of cultures. At the same time, the text shows how children who become involved in book extension activities after hearing stories like these can take a step closer to emerging into literacy.

The All-White Classroom

What about “all-white classrooms,” where all children are of the same culture, you may ask? What good does a multicultural approach do for them? We say that these
children will not be isolated from different cultures for long. The melting pot of diverse people in America is closer than they may think. Early childhood is the time for all children to become acquainted with the rainbow of cultures around them. Most early childhood teachers today have come to realize that a false sense of racial superiority is isolating and does little to prepare white children to function in a diverse society (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey 2005).

It is just as important—maybe even more so—for all-white classrooms to adopt a multicultural curriculum. Multicultural picture books like the ones described in this text can serve as a necessary introduction for all children. The book spin-off activities of pretending to be one of the child characters or reenacting one of the stories can open a fascinating new world to all children no matter what their race or culture.

**Why Use Multicultural Picture Books**

Almost all research on early literacy and reading points to one particular activity as having the most significant influence on children’s learning to read. NAEYC, along with other early education organizations, has found that *reading aloud to children* is the single most important activity for building the understandings and skills necessary for reading success (NAEYC, 1998).

We already understand that young children must hear language spoken around them in order to learn to speak it themselves. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that children’s success in learning to read is enhanced by having books read aloud to them. Thus, a text such as this one, focusing on a multicultural perspective of early literacy, must also focus on children’s books.

Teachers need to talk with children about the stories they read.
Most educators agree that books are a major catalyst for young children’s literacy development. Teachers talking about the stories they read with children and showing them the pictures further helps children connect the story to their lives (Gaffney, Ostrosky, & Hemmeter, 2008).

Why else should these books be read aloud? Wolfe and Nevills (2004) discuss several important reasons, including those in Figure 2.2. A great deal of research has studied the kinds of books that teachers read to young children. When the stories are positive, children develop positive self-concepts. Thus such picture books play a major role in shaping their emerging images of themselves and others.

The books we have chosen to feature here come under the category of “multicultural children’s literature” in order to respond to the rapidly changing character of our nation’s preschool and kindergarten populations. Some reading specialists found that one out of every seven children in U.S. classrooms is a dual language learner who is learning his home language as well as English. We need to recognize this diversity by being sensitive toward such language differences (Morrow, Freitag, & Gambrell, 2009).

Books Featuring Multicultural Characters

One of the most effective methods we have found for teaching young children about diversity in preschools and kindergartens is not by celebrating cultural holidays, having piñata parties, or inviting someone from another culture to visit the classroom. It is by the everyday reading of books featuring multicultural characters that the children can come to know and love. Not only by reading such books, but by integrating activities about them into every learning center in the classroom, children learn about children like themselves from different backgrounds.

Puzzles, puppets, games, playing with dolls, playing dress-up, block building, modeling clay, preparing food, and a dozen other book extension activities serve the dual purpose of acquainting children with other cultures while improving their literacy skills. Such a simple thing to do. Why didn’t we think of it before?
Chapter 2

Multicultural literature can be used to help readers identify cultural heritage, to understand sociological change, to respect the values of minority groups, and to expand their imagination and creativity. Multicultural literature and activities related to the literature can also improve reading and the attitudes among students from varying cultures (Norton, 2005; Figure 2.3).

Because children become aware of ethnicity (race) early by observing differences in skin color, hair, and facial features, they may also begin to develop attitudes about these differences—sometimes attitudes of distrust about people who are different from them. Positive multicultural literature can reverse such attitudes as children begin to identify with the book characters.

According to research, children’s attitudes changed after they were exposed to books that portrayed different ethnic groups in a positive light. The effects were most pronounced when the youngest readers identified with the characters in the stories. (Feeney & Moravcik, 2005).

When children hear these stories read over and over, they come to identify with the characters in the stories as if they were real people. They want to interact with these characters, pretend about them, build block structures for them, prepare make-believe meals for them, draw pictures about them, and make up their own stories about them—with a teacher’s encouragement, of course. Most importantly, they come to love these books and want them read again and again.

Teachers have always tried to choose books that will interest their children. What do young children have the most intense interest in? Themselves, first of all. Next on the list are other children. Thus, we understand that if information about other cultures is to make a difference in the lives of children ages 3 to 6, it should relate directly to the children themselves and their peers. It should involve the children in learning firsthand about youngsters like themselves from different racial groups or cultures. In fact, one of the most effective approaches to integrating cultural diversity into an early childhood curriculum is to help children identify with and bond with book children like themselves from other cultures.

Helps children learn to:
- Identify with book characters from other cultures
- Respect children from other cultures
- Respect children who speak a different language
- Improve their attitude toward people who look different
- Improve their own self-concepts
- Improve their literacy skills

FIGURE 2.3
Importance of Multicultural Picture Books

Multicultural literature can be used to help readers identify cultural heritage, to understand sociological change, to respect the values of minority groups, and to expand their imagination and creativity. Multicultural literature and activities related to the literature can also improve reading and the attitudes among students from varying cultures (Norton, 2005; Figure 2.3).

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Books Featuring Physical Differences

Read-aloud children’s literature that focuses on physical and racial diversity can stimulate explorations of differences in physical appearance. Furthermore, children’s books can be an important avenue for shaping how children perceive others who are different from themselves, as well as how they view themselves (Kemple & Lopez, 2009). Some books featuring physical differences among children are listed in Figure 2.4.

Spin-off Activities After Book Reading

Young children learn best from real, concrete three-dimensional experiences. Stories from books are not concrete. They are abstract. Young children aged 3 to 5 need more than the reading of a story or a program on the computer to teach them a new concept. They need a three-dimensional activity to make the concept real. On a continuum of activities from concrete to abstract an example might be “getting to know the African American book character Luke.” Follow-up learning activities about Luke from concrete to abstract (1 to 6) might include:

Concrete to Abstract Activities

1. Interacting with a real African American boy (most concrete)
2. Pretending to be Luke
4. Seeing a picture of Luke
5. Hearing a story about Luke
6. Seeing the word “Luke” (most abstract)
Thus, for children to really understand and make sense of the multicultural stories you read to them, you need to provide them with concrete spin-off experiences in all of the learning centers. Some examples are the following:

**Learning Center Spin-off Activities**

In the Art Center children can:

- Do body tracings of the children on butcher paper
- Color in the tracings, cut and mount them
- Scan book pictures; cut out and make paper dolls

In the Dramatic Play Center children can:

- Set up and pretend about a beauty/barber shop
- Pretend with multicultural dolls

In the Writing Center children can:

- Take digital photos of each other and label them
- Mount photos in a journal and write about them
- Dictate a story about the photos

In the Music Center children can:

- Sing and record “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands”
- Clap together as teacher reads the lilting verses of “Hats Off to Hair”

In the Book Center children can:

- Listen to the books being read
- Talk about what being different but the same means
- Have a multicultural doll, paper doll, or puppet tell a story

Reading any one of the books featured in Figure 2.4 can be a lead-in to a classroom full of multicultural activities about how we are all different but alike. These are only a few examples of what you can do in your own classroom with your own children. It is not necessary to obtain every book listed here, or any of these books, if you use your own ideas. Listen to how children react to the readings and the activities and to what suggestions they might give for further activities, and you are on your way. Figure 2.5 offers some suggestions.

**Book Spin-offs to Discussions About Teasing**

Read *Chocolate Me!* to individuals and small groups about an African American boy whose white playmates tease him about his dark skin color and curly hair. His mother helps him to see how beautiful he is and they bake chocolate cupcakes together. Read *Mud Tacos* about Hispanic boy Mario whose mud tacos teach Chico a lesson about
teasing. Read *Red Is Beautiful* about the Navajo girl Nashasha whose school mates tease her about her rough skin. Her grandmother teaches her how to use the ancient red *chiib* earth on her skin to heal and protect it. As you read these stories ask your listeners questions, such as:

- How would they feel if the teasing happened to them?
- What would they do about it?
- Have they ever been teased before?
- What would they do if they saw teasing happening to other children?

Another way to make the concept of teasing more meaningful is by having children be the book characters and reenacting the stories as you read them again. Put the books out in the reading center for all the children to look at. Listen to what the children say about teasing. Follow up on their ideas. Children need to hear books more than once. Be sure to read these books again.

### Using Multicultural Books with Children

#### Multicultural Characters as Role Models

Your children can come to know these cultural characters intimately by identifying and bonding with them as you read stories about how children from diverse cultures play, work, and live; how they eat, dress, and go to preschool; how they feel, act, and even “act out.” Introducing picture book characters in the stories and activities you provide is an especially effective way for children to get to know youngsters from other cultures. The experience can be almost as real as having a child from a different culture in the class.
Children seem to have no difficulty choosing these multicultural characters as role models. Youngsters enjoy the characters in their storybooks, and if the story appeals to them, they want to hear it over and over. They come to love the characters in the stories they love. (See Figure 2.6.) Some educators actually refer to children’s close identification with storybook characters as “book-character-bonding,” or “book-bonding” for short (Pratt and Beaty, 1999).

To celebrate the diversity of all children everywhere, this textbook takes the distinctive approach of using such picture books as springboards into activities that not only promote early literacy but also bond children with youngsters like themselves from other cultures. In other words, by picking up a particular multicultural character-based story and reading it to the children, a teacher can involve the youngsters vicariously in the lives of children from that other culture. Afterward, in the various learning centers of the classroom, the youngsters can participate in early literacy activities that may be similar to the activities experienced by the book characters. When children take on the roles of the characters in a book, they bond with the characters.

Whether or not the culture being read about is present in the classroom makes no difference. All children can celebrate any culture on a daily basis simply by looking at or listening to cultural character picture books and following up with cultural early literacy activities. Remember your own favorite childhood books? Most were undoubtedly based on characters for whom you had a strong affinity. They were children you wanted to emulate and whose adventures you wanted to experience. Today, youngsters can be children from more cultures than ever before.

Abuela. A. Doros (1991)
Mud Tacos. M. Lopez (2009)
Tar Beach. F. Ringgold (1991)

FIGURE 2.6
Multicultural Character Books
Book Spin-offs into a Multicultural Curriculum

What can you do with a book besides read it aloud to children? You and the children can make a game of it; make puppets of its characters; build a house for its characters; make costumes for its characters; make hats or masks for its characters; pretend to be the characters; make a flannel board of it; cook a meal from it; paint pictures about it; write letters about it; tell the story to a doll; guess what happens next; make a puzzle of it; make sound effects; write your own version of it; audio-record the children’s version of it; sing it; dance it; videotape it; anything!

It is obvious that certain children’s books can be spun off into an entire early childhood curriculum. But what books should they be? That is the important question. This text takes the position that the best books to use in promoting multicultural education are quality picture books featuring cultural characters that children can easily identify with. Thus, this text’s multicultural perspective features outstanding picture books with multicultural child characters for children ages 3 to 6 as the basis for literacy development in the preschool and kindergarten.

Picture Books Are Important

Why picture books, you may wonder? Wouldn’t any storybook that could keep a young child’s attention promote literacy? Barbara Z. Kiefer (1995), author of The Potential of Picturebooks: From Visual Literacy to Aesthetic Understanding, believes that picture books offer important learnings for young children. She found that picture books inspired imaginative experiences for children. Their language in response to picture books allowed them to participate in the imaginary world created by the author and artist or to create their own images. Young children often chose a character that they wanted to be as they read or looked through a book.

Picture books allow young children to see the character in pictures on page after page. If the character happens to be a child from another culture, young listeners are able to learn firsthand about a child like themselves from a different culture by actually pretending to be that character through classroom activities and dramatizations.

In fact, one of the most effective approaches for integrating multicultural education into an early childhood curriculum is to help children identify with children like themselves from other cultures. Seeing what the character looks like in a picture book promotes this process.

Is there any precedent for using cultural character picture books as the basis for an entire multicultural curriculum emphasizing literacy? As early as three decades ago, children’s literature specialist Donna Norton (1985) recognized the role of children’s books in shaping attitudes and breaking down stereotypes. The values children gain from multicultural literature are so powerful and so persuasive that we cannot dispute them, she noted. These include:

Values from Multicultural Literature

• Children’s social development improved as they recognized that people are individuals like the interesting characters they met in the books, and not racial stereotypes.
• Their language development improved as children discussed characterizations, story plots, settings, and themes.
• Their cognitive development improved when they became involved in book-related activities that analyzed the stories and compared them to their own lives.

The United States is a multicultural nation that includes people from European, Asian, Hispanic, African, Middle Eastern, Pacific Island, Caribbean, Native American, and other backgrounds. However, our efforts to integrate this understanding into educational settings has not been overly successful, as previously mentioned. Too often our efforts at multicultural education have been superficial, celebrating occasional cultural holidays, heroes, and festivals, but with little integration into the overall curriculum. For multicultural education to be effective, it must be an everyday affair that speaks to the children.

Multicultural attitudes are developed through everyday experiences rather than formal lessons. Multicultural ideas and activities, therefore, should be thoroughly integrated throughout all activities every day—not only in fragmented units.

The multicultural book approach featured in this text incorporates the daily reading of appropriate picture books with cultural characters and extends book activities into every learning center of the classroom. An entire early literacy curriculum can emerge from such books. Does it work?

Teachers who have used cultural character picture books as lead-ins to literacy activities tell about children’s excitement in meeting these wonderful new book friends, such as Jenna, the contemporary Muscogee Creek girl who wants desperately to dance the jingle dance like her Grandma Wolfe at the next powwow, but she has no jingles to make her dress sing and there is no time to make them in *Jingle Dancer*. Her own ingenuity helps her solve this problem before Sun catches a glimpse of Moon in this present-day tale told with folktale-like repetition. The children who hear this story come up with their own problem-solving ideas for Jenna. Then they make “jingles” for their own dolls.

Another clever problem-solver is previously mentioned Chavi, the Cuban girl in a Miami neighborhood in *Drum, Chavi, Drum* who desperately wants to play the conga drums in the Calle Ocho festival—but girls don’t play drums. A mask, a costume, and her amazing drumming ability carry the day in this colorful bilingual story. Bilingual children love books written in both languages. They also love to identify and solve problems through the characters in such books.

The most wonderful problem-solver of all may be William, a real African boy who reads about a windmill and then builds himself a real windmill out of trash to create “electric wind” in *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*. This true story tells how William’s windmills eventually pumped water for dry African fields and made electricity for dark houses in rural Malawi. After hearing this story, your listeners will want to make their own paper pinwheel windmills.

Teachers, teaching assistants, student teachers, and volunteers who read cultural character books to children can plan the use of puppets, dolls, and character cutouts to help bring these book characters to life. Children take it from there,
converting their adventures with these cultural book characters into positive attitudes about all kinds of people, about books, and about reading and writing that can last them a lifetime.

The Under-use of Picture Books

Traditionally, early childhood teachers have used books in two ways: They read the stories to their children. Then they put the books back on the shelves to be looked at or read by the children on their own. What about you?

This is a serious under-use of a valuable asset. Each picture book is an extraordinary resource for activities that can be extended throughout the curriculum as noted. Picture books can lead children into art and music activities, science projects, math and language learning, physical activities, and all sorts of dramas, not to mention reading and writing activities. In other words, picture books can and should be used as introductions or lead-ins to all of your curriculum activities all year long.

The books themselves should be selected by teachers for such purposes. When planning curriculum activities, teachers need to consider using a book to introduce each experience. This is an especially meaningful way to motivate youngsters to become involved in the some of the same sorts of activities that the cultural book characters engage in. Thus, choosing the right books is an essential first step toward developing the curriculum.
Choosing Appropriate Books

Go into any bookstore or library featuring children’s picture books, and you may soon feel overwhelmed by the number and variety available. Clever cover illustrations seem to pop out at you. Catchy titles call for your attention. But which books are appropriate? They can’t all be equal in value for the children you are working with, can they? How can you choose among so many seemingly good possibilities?

For the teacher who believes it is the book itself that can lead children into an entire curriculum of early literacy and cultural activities, he or she will want to choose carefully. He or she will want several picture storybooks on the broad themes or topics that are frequently pursued during the year:

• Caring for ourselves
• Getting along with one another
• Learning about our neighborhood and our world

Some teachers organize their curriculum around the learning centers in the classroom, providing materials and activities in each center that will support the theme being pursued. Others organize their teaching around units, engaging children in preplanned activities related to the unit theme. Still others favor a project approach in which they or the children themselves decide to find out about a particular topic or theme, not knowing ahead of time in what direction their investigation will take them. In any case, the teacher will usually have some idea about a particular topic that is to be pursued. To introduce the topic, the teacher will want a picture book that contains some of the following criteria:

Criteria for Multicultural Picture Books

• Features multicultural characters
• Features characters who are realistic and not stereotypes
• Displays illustrations attractive to children and linked to the story
• Contains a minimum of text to keep children’s attention
• Contains funny, rhyming, or repetitive words
• Can serve as a lead-in to curriculum activities

Many teachers find that checklists listing important criteria such as these can help them select the best books for their children. The checklist shown in Figure 2.7 has proved helpful to many teachers who plan to use picture books as keys to unlocking a multicultural curriculum featuring early literacy.

With these ideas in mind, let’s take the theme “Caring for Ourselves” to see what subtopics we might want to pursue and what books might relate to this theme. Two of the subtopics could include:

Who am I?
What do I look like?
Starting with these particular subtopics speaks to the self-esteem of children of different cultural backgrounds. We know that culture plays an important part in the development of children’s sense of self and self-esteem. What is the difference between multicultural and multiethnic books and people, you may wonder?

Multiethnic literature refers to the ethnicity of people who speak the same language and come from the same racial group. Multicultural, on the other hand, is a broader term that refers to the cultures of different ethnic people and their stories, songs, ideas, and history. The books you choose should reflect both.

As you consider the various books you see, first look at the covers of the books. If your children are from a neighborhood of Anglo-American, African American, or Hispanic people, you will be looking for books that show characters from all these groups on the covers. Even if your children are mainly Anglo-American, you will still want books featuring a diversity of races because your children need to know about all of them. Do any of the books you see show attractive, realistic illustrations of such children? Do the books relate in any way to this topic? Figure 2.8 shows a few of the self-concept books you may want to consider for the subtopic “Who Am I?”

Open each of the books one at a time and look at the criteria that may help you decide if this is the book for your children. For instance, as you go through the checklist for the book *I Can Do It Too!* it becomes obvious that this story not only fulfills all the criteria, but also shows pictures of a peppy African American toddler girl on thick pages like a board book. She is able to copy all the things the adults in her family do: pour juice, put on clothes, help make a cake, “read” a book, play a guitar, sip “tea,” and ride a bike. The youngest preschoolers will enjoy seeing all the accomplishments and trying them out for themselves. Older preschoolers may be able to pick out and read the large-font words in the repeated phrase “I can do it too!”

### CHOOSING MULTICULTURAL PICTURE BOOKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. Characters children can identify with __ __
2. Characters realistic, not stereotyped __ __
3. Illustrations work closely with story __ __
4. Illustrations catchy, culturally appropriate __ __
5. Story fast moving, easy to follow __ __
6. Words catchy, rhyming, or with repetition __ __
7. Stories easily integrated into learning center activities __ __
8. Publication date current (1990–2015) ____ __

FIGURE 2.7
Choosing Multicultural Picture Books
Although the illustrations of the people in this book are more cartoon-like than realistic, they are not stereotyped, but show the characters as interesting individuals. Publication dates in the 2000s, such as this book’s 2003 date, usually indicate that the artists and authors have not reverted to the unfortunate racial stereotypes of some older book illustrators.

Another example is *Cleversticks*, whose cover shows the happily surprised face and upper torso of Ling Sung, a Chinese boy using a pair of inverted paintbrushes as chopsticks to pick up cookie pieces. As you leaf through the book, you note that large, expressive illustrations show Ling Sung in his new preschool trying but failing to tie his shoes, paint his name, or tie his paint apron like his other multiethnic classmates. Then he drops and breaks his cookies, but easily picks them up using inverted paintbrushes for chopsticks. Everyone claps, and his father calls him “Cleversticks” when he comes to get him after school. Large, colorful pictures on every page keep the story fast-paced and easy for most preschoolers to follow. What a grand lead-in to a whole series of eye-hand coordination and name-printing activities this book can introduce, based on the topic “Who Am I?” Older books such as this one can often be obtained through Amazon.com.

Books like these, focusing on this wonderful sense of self, also help to fulfill one of the NAEYC (2012) social studies criteria in Figure 2.9.

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**Acquiring Multicultural Picture Books**

Where will you find such books as those described here? Most bookstores and libraries have some or all of them, or can order them for you. If you prefer to order them yourself, you may want to call or write for catalogs or go online to the websites of publishers of the books. In addition to publishers, bookstores may also be contacted...
A Multicultural Perspective

Children are provided:
- Varied learning opportunities that foster positive identity and emerging sense of self and others
- Opportunities to become a part of the classroom community so that each child feels accepted and a sense of belonging
- Varied opportunities and materials to build their understanding of diversity in culture, family structure, ability, language, age, and gender in nonstereotypical ways

FIGURE 2.9
NAEYC Curriculum Criteria: Social Studies
Source: NAEYC (2012)

online. The following companies have Web sites that include most of the multicultural children’s picture books discussed here:

www.amazon.com
www.barnesandnoble.com

For some early childhood educators, the prices of children’s trade picture books may seem prohibitive at about $16 for a hardcover book, but this cost is no more than that of other quality classroom equipment and materials such as unit blocks and art supplies. However, paperback copies of many of the same books may run only between $4 and $7 (see Appendix A, “Multicultural Paperback Books from Scholastic”). Some teachers use paperback copies of hardcover classroom books to send home for children’s families to read to them.

When we understand that young children are motivated to learn to read through listening to such books and through a hands-on acquaintance with them, we will budget sufficient funds annually for the purchase of the best cultural character picture books available. These are known as “trade books.” No longer will inexpensive, commercial, cardboard-covered books from discount stores be acceptable in the classroom book center.

Teachers who still cannot afford a good collection of multicultural trade books such as those described in this text need to contact the parents of their children to help with fund-raising projects to purchase books for their program. All parents also need to take their children to visit local libraries and obtain library cards.

Paradigm Shift

Those of us who still regard children’s picture books as merely a form of entertainment for children may need to make a paradigm shift in our thinking and realize that such books are actually the keys to unlocking an entire curriculum of multicultural activities—activities that can improve attitudes toward all people while at the same
time helping young children emerge into early literacy. In other words, these books are learning tools. *Early Literacy in Preschool and Kindergarten: A Multicultural Perspective* invites you to join in the excitement of this new approach.

**Summary**

This chapter discusses the meaning of the multicultural perspective being used in this text: that multicultural picture books can be used to help children emerge into literacy. By using multicultural picture book characters as role models, children become interested in their cultures. They not only identify with multicultural children, but at the same time are led into exciting early reading and writing activities. How these books serve as lead-ins to curriculum activities is described. Choosing the appropriate picture books themselves is discussed showing a checklist that supports this approach. Finally, how to acquire the books is explained.

**Learning Activities**

1. What is the multicultural book approach featured in this textbook, and in what ways can it help children develop early literacy? Be specific.
2. How can picture book characters become cultural role models for children? Be specific. Why is this important?
3. How can the reading of multicultural picture books help to stop teasing among children?
4. How can teachers choose books with multicultural characters to support an early literacy curriculum? Give an example of one such book (other than those described) and tell how it meets the criteria discussed.
5. How can teachers employ the multicultural curriculum approach described here if they do not possess any of the particular books discussed in this chapter? Give details.
6. What is meant by “the underuse of picture books,” and how can teachers correct this underuse? Why should they? Be specific.

**Suggested Readings**


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**Children's Books**


Chapter 2

HELPFUL WEBSITES

- Association for Childhood Education International www.acei.org
- Children’s Book Council www.cbcbooks.org
- The International Reading Association www.reading.org
- Teaching Tolerance www.tolerance.org

HELPFUL MULTIMEDIA

- Springboard to Literacy: Integrating Picture Books with Art and Cooking Activities
  DVD (25 min.) and CD-ROM (25 min.) Redleaf Press (800-423-8309)

- Start Seeing Diversity
  DVD (52 min.) Redleaf Press

- Storytelling and Story Acting with Vivian Paley
  DVD NAEYC (800-424-2460)

- The Role of Culture in Development
  Pearson Video Clips (1 min.)