

PREFACE

This book is the product of more than 30 years of work with young children and families from very diverse backgrounds. I have worked as a practitioner and a researcher, an administrator and a policy maker, a trainer and an evaluator, as well as a consultant to many school districts, state departments of education, and educational foundations to help identify and promote effective practices and policies for young children who often have no one to speak for them. My own personal history also includes being raised in a large Hispanic family that experienced many of the conditions described in this book. In fact, what I witnessed as a child from a non-mainstream home growing up in 1950's and 1960's America combined with my professional experiences and knowledge has fueled my continued sense of urgency about the messages in this book.

As a practitioner, I have personally witnessed what a difference hopeful attitudes, well-informed outreach, skilled instruction, and well-supported teachers can make for children and families who are often stressed beyond their limits with the daily demands of meeting their basic needs. I have participated in well-crafted early education programs, staffed by qualified and caring educators who successfully partnered with families who spoke no English, to joyfully educate young children and prepare them for the rigors of formal academic instruction. More recently, as a researcher, I have conducted empirical studies, published research, and synthesized the academic literature on effective preschool approaches for young children who have been deemed “at-risk” for school failure. I have also conducted hundreds of professional development sessions for early childhood practitioners who are eager for well-researched strategies they can take home and try out next week. This process has convinced me that there is a need to translate the scientific evidence into practical guidance so that teachers will have the knowledge and confidence to implement effective practices.

Unfortunately, I have also seen first hand the consequences of inadequate training, misguided practices, neglect, misunderstanding, and even outright bigotry on the life forces of bright, curious, and highly verbal children who had the misfortune to be born into poverty or raised in non-English speaking homes. I have seen first hand how children's inherent *eagerness to learn* and participate in a social community as well as their youthful quirkiness and delight in the mysteries of the world can all be muted before they ever begin formal schooling. This text offers prospective teachers, practitioners, trainers, and professional educators a perspective that represents my accumulated knowledge combined with the available scientific evidence; it is grounded in real-life experiences and guided by current rigorous research findings.

My intent is to sort through and synthesize the latest scientific evidence on development and school achievement for young children who have historically struggled with the demands of schooling; this knowledge base is then

combined with my own experiences in inner-city schools as an administrator and evaluator to offer classroom and program recommendations. Throughout my career in early childhood education, I have felt a sense of urgency about improving the conditions of schooling for children and families, particularly those who are from non-traditional backgrounds, those who speak a language other than English, and those who face the challenges of poverty. Because of my own background and professional expertise, I have focused this book on the successful education of children from linguistically diverse backgrounds and those who are growing up in poverty.

It is critically important that *all* children in this country receive high quality education that provides them with the tools to successfully navigate the currents of adulthood. Early childhood education has the potential to improve the life chances of all young children and is being touted as an answer to the stubborn reality of educational inequities. As we move forward on the early childhood agenda, it is important that we *get it right*. I believe that we now *know* enough to successfully educate *all* children; it is now a question of translating this knowledge to specific strategies and practices. It is incumbent on researchers and policy experts to make this information accessible to *all* teachers.

The preceding paragraphs were written in 2009 for the first edition of this text. As I re-read the messages for the second edition, I realized that the condition of education for young children from diverse backgrounds has changed very little, but the scientific knowledge base has expanded and deepened in the past 4 years. We have deepened our understanding of how multiple languages influence the young brain, the consequences of growing up in poverty, as well how to design educational interventions that benefit all young children, including dual language learners (DLLs). The achievement disparities among different groups of children in this country has not abated, while the numbers of children growing up in poverty and in homes where English is not the primary language continue to expand. Therefore, the sense of urgency described earlier is even more profound.

We know that young children can thrive and benefit from well-designed instruction; we know that young DLLs will experience cognitive and linguistic advantages when their emergent bilingual abilities are supported; we know that young children from low-income homes can make enormous progress in programs that attend to their emotional, social, and cognitive needs; we know that dual language and immigrant families are eager for their children to succeed and will collaborate with teachers when approached with sensitivity and respect; and most importantly, we are developing the procedural knowledge to apply this information in real programs with *all* teachers.

WHAT IS NEW IN THE SECOND EDITION

This edition has been substantially reorganized, streamlined to focus on the most relevant issues and research, and includes a whole new chapter (Chapter 4) dedicated to instructional strategies and classroom practices with video links,

illustrations, sample lessons, and practical examples. The new Chapter 4 is designed to provide teachers, curriculum supervisors, and professional development specialists concrete guidance, or what I call procedural knowledge, about how to apply the latest research findings to improved classroom practices. In addition, the research reviewed and synthesized has been updated to include important new findings from cognitive neuroscientists, program evaluators, psychologists, and early childhood researchers.

The second edition of *Getting It RIGHT for Young Children From Diverse Backgrounds: Applying Research to Improve Practice With a Focus on Dual Language Learners* also has an updated title. The new content includes the following:

- An updated profile of early childhood demographics, preschool program attendance, and funding trends for ECE
- A summary of state early childhood standards and how they address the needs of children from diverse backgrounds
- New scientific evidence about development during the early childhood years
- New research on the impact of growing up with more than one language during the early childhood years
- An overview of program effectiveness for young DLLs
- Seven current myths about the development and education of young DLLs
- Strategies to engage families from diverse language and cultural groups
- A new Chapter 4 that focuses on practical and proven strategies for teaching young DLLs, including how to foster oral language development, assess progress, and engage families
- A new section on promising applications of technology for young DLLs

ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS

The new Chapter 1, “Early Childhood Education, Diversity, and Educational Equity: Current Realities,” is a condensed and more tightly focused version of the original Chapters 1 and 2. In this edition, the issues of early childhood education and its potential to promote educational equity, the changing demographics of families and young children, as well as current state and federal policies are all described succinctly. The importance of high-quality early childhood in addressing educational inequities is also discussed in Chapter 1.

In the new Chapter 2, “How Research Continues to Expand Our Understanding of Child Growth and Development,” I review the latest scientific evidence about young children’s early development and the role of enriched early learning environments as well as positive, nurturing relationships. The impact of growing up in poverty is thoroughly discussed as well as the potential of high-quality ECE interventions. The literature about resiliency and what early childhood programs can do to promote resiliency in children who are living in disadvantaged circumstances is reviewed. Chapter 2 also offers early childhood programs guidance on how to design practices that will enhance the personal

resilience of young vulnerable children. Specific teaching strategies that have been shown to be effective for children who are facing difficult early challenges are described. In addition, methods for reaching out to families who are struggling economically are suggested.

In Chapter 3, “Research on the Growth and Development of Young Dual Language Learners,” I discuss the latest research from multiple disciplines centered on the impact of growing up with more than one language on cognitive, linguistic, socioemotional, and academic development. The process of second language acquisition during the early childhood years, including the stages of sequential second language development, are presented with examples of how teachers can individualize instruction based on each child’s stage of English language development. The most common approaches to the education of young DLLs are described in addition to the research evidence on their effectiveness. Chapter 3 also discusses effective family engagement practices and presents seven common myths about young DLLs.

In Chapter 4, “Practical and Proven Strategies for Teaching Young Dual Language Learners,” Elizabeth Magruder and I describe in detail many specific teaching strategies that are based on the research summarized in Chapter 3. The importance of establishing agreed-upon program goals for language development and implementing a comprehensive curriculum are discussed. The specific instructional components of research-based best practices for DLLs that promote oral language development based on a personalized oral language learning approach (POLL) are presented with examples and illustrations. Detailed guidance on how to assess language growth and academic progress are provided in Chapter 4. Effective family engagement strategies for DLL families are also presented.

Finally, the new Chapter 5, “The Road Forward for Young Children from Diverse Backgrounds,” describes the policies that will be needed to systematically improve our practices to achieve the vision recommended in this book. In order to create a stable, sustainable, and effective system we will need to do the following: 1) bolster our national will, 2) continuously improve and incorporate rigorous research, 3) link early childhood to national educational policies, and 4) advocate for sufficient resources to achieve substantial progress for *all* children. The progress we have made during the last 5 years is discussed as well as the additional efforts needed going forward. Specific implications for instructional practices based on the evidence presented throughout this book are summarized in this chapter. In addition, the elements of an intentional, comprehensive curriculum for children living in poverty is presented along with the supports that teachers and families will need to successfully implement such an approach. Finally, a completely new section on the promise of technology for young children from diverse backgrounds is included in this section.

This book is dedicated to the children and families who have overcome obstacles to get their children to an early childhood program and depend on us to have current knowledge and skills; it is also dedicated to the teachers who

show the courage and dedication to show up every day and work on behalf of young children who need our best teachers and brightest ideas.

To make this book more useful to practitioners, real-life scenarios are presented throughout each chapter, specific curricular approaches are described whenever possible, a description of promising approaches for DLLs is provided in Appendix A, and a list of relevant resources in Appendix B. It is my hope to educate, to inspire, and to sufficiently raise the level of concern so as to improve the educational experiences for young vulnerable children. All children deserve a bright future, caring adults in their lives, responsive and challenging instruction, and an education that celebrates and builds upon their talents while meeting their academic needs. I firmly believe that all early childhood educators are capable of providing such an education.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book, and in fact, all of my work is possible because of the enduring support, patience, and affection of my husband, James Laffey. His consistent calming influence and optimistic approach toward life have kept me focused on the big picture. I also want to thank my daughter, Andrea Laffey, who assisted with many editorial tasks that helped me enormously. Chapter 4 would not have been possible without the talent and collaboration of my friend and co-author, Elizabeth Magruder. Elizabeth represents the best of our profession, a dedicated teacher who continues to deepen her knowledge and work tirelessly on behalf of young children and families while also sharing generously with her colleagues.

Also, I need to thank the reviewers, Gloria Kirkland Holmes of University of Northern Iowa, Susan Trostle Brand of University of Rhode Island, and Maureen A. Walcavich of Edinboro University. Finally, I must thank my editor, Julie Peters, and all the editorial staff at Pearson who have prodded, inspired, and nagged me at every step of this journey.

Chapter 1

Early Childhood Education, Diversity, and Educational Equity

Current Realities

Whether or not children will be successful students depends on the quality of their experiences in early childhood.

—U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES, 2003

Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Describe why there has been an increased interest in and focus on high-quality early childhood education in the past 15 years.
2. List the major trends of early childhood education (ECE), including enrollment, funding, and the demographics of which children are attending different kinds of programs.
3. Describe the importance of high-quality ECE for children living in poverty and young dual language learners (DLLs).
4. Demonstrate an understanding of basic principles of effective instruction for young dual language learners.
5. Discuss the recent state and federal ECE standards and how they are addressing the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

In the last decade, early childhood education has been promoted as a remedy for many aspects of educational inequity; it has been associated with increased academic achievement and school completion, reduced special education

placement, teenage pregnancy, welfare dependence, and incarceration rates for children from minority and low-income backgrounds (Gormley, Gayer, Phillips, & Dawson 2005; Isaacs, 2008; Magnuson, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2007; Schweinhart et al., 2005). With more U.S. children born into poverty, single-parent homes, non-English-speaking families, and unstable social conditions, along with a higher premium for educational success, the stakes for success and failure have increased for individual children as well as social institutions. Our schools and social service agencies are under enormous pressure to show concrete outcomes and benefits for those they serve. The following factors have converged to create a set of conditions that have elevated the issues of early childhood education to the forefront of our national educational agenda.

- The preschool population has become highly diverse culturally, ethnically, and linguistically.
- Greater percentages of young children from all social and economic backgrounds are cared for outside the home and family.
- There is overwhelming credible scientific evidence for the enduring educational and economic benefits of enriched preschool programs.
- There is compelling new research from neuroscientists, biologists, psychologists, and educators about the intellectual and social capabilities of infants and young children.
- The elements of high-quality preschool have been carefully designed and researched; effective teaching practices that promote long-term literacy and school success can be articulated.
- There is a significant and persistent academic achievement gap between low-income children from diverse backgrounds and their more affluent White peers; much of this test score gap is evident at kindergarten entry and high-quality early education can reduce this gap prior to school entry.
- The early childhood teaching force is threatened by inadequate preparation, low compensation, and rapid turnover.

Together, these conditions call for a renewed and sustained effort to ensure high-quality early learning opportunities for our youngest and most vulnerable students. As of late 2013, these conditions are still prevalent; it is surprising how little the conditions of early childhood education have changed over the last four years. If anything, these factors have intensified: our populations of young children has grown even more diverse linguistically and culturally; more children than ever are being cared for in early care and educational programs; scientific research continues to confirm and deepen our understanding of short- and long-term impacts of high-quality early education during a critical period of cognitive, academic, social, and linguistic development; the achievement gap among different groups of children has not been narrowed; ECE teachers still report they do not feel prepared to effectively intervene with children from diverse backgrounds; and we continue to be plagued by substantial turnover and low compensation.

Across the states there has also been a dramatic decrease in funding for state pre-kindergarten programs. During the 2011–2012 school year, state funding for pre-K declined by more than a half billion dollars, and the average amount funded per child enrolled dropped by \$442 to \$3,841. This change is alarming because as level of funding declines, so does the average level of quality in state pre-K programs. In some states, the program quality monitoring and technical support have been reduced as a result of funding cuts. This trend is associated with the Great Recession of 2008–2012, but also shows signs of continuing past the economic recovery (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013). As state pre-K programs have shown great promise in reducing the achievement gap at kindergarten entry, promoting improved academic achievement and long-term economic benefits, this reduced level of state support and corresponding decline in quality assurances should be ringing alarm bells across the country.

The good news. Some promising trends and hopeful signs are also visible on the early childhood landscape. In President Obama’s 2013 State of the Union Address, he advocated for increasing preschool access, “Tonight, I propose working with states to make high-quality preschool available to every child in America. Every dollar we invest in high-quality early education can earn more than seven dollars later on.” This ringing endorsement of the value of quality preschool and the need to make it available to all of our young children is based on solid evidence about the long-term impacts on outcomes such as high school completion, reduced juvenile delinquency, reduced crime, and improved labor market participation.

The Obama administration has proposed a \$75 billion, 10-year federal investment in state pre-K programs that would be roughly matched by state investments. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan called this proposal the “centerpiece” of the administration’s education budget. “What is the smartest use of our education dollars?” Duncan asked rhetorically during testimony to the House Education Committee on May 21, 2013. “The answer, I believe, is that high-quality early learning is the best education investment we can make in our children, our communities, and our country.” While state budgets and local Head Start programs are threatened by budget cuts and loss of both level and quality of services to young children who could benefit from attendance (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2012), there is widespread consensus on the value of high-quality early childhood education. By any measure, the attention and focus on increasing high-quality early educational experiences for our youngest children is good news.

The scientific community has also continued to affirm the early years as critical to all future learning. Based on research from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (developingchild.harvard.edu), we know that all babies are born “ready to learn.” Although a baby’s brain possesses most of the neurons it will ever have, and major sensory pathways have already become organized to process visual and auditory information at birth, the human brain undergoes rapid development during the first few years. The

connections between neurons, or synapses, are a result of a child's experiences. Specific experiences during the first years of life provide the building blocks for future learning, health, and behavior. While the brain is continually shaped by experiences throughout the human lifespan, the experiences children have in the early years lay the foundation for later educational achievement and lifelong health.

In this book, I will attempt to outline an agenda for the future that synthesizes the most recent scientific information about the educational needs of children ages 3 through 6 and recommends practices that promote learning for **all** young children with an emphasis on children who are growing up in poverty and children who are dual language learners. No child should have to face the bleak educational future that often accompanies poverty and limited English language skills. Early childhood teachers should not have to face complex, challenging working conditions without support, resources, and proper preparation and training. Unfortunately, too many of our young children and their teachers are poorly prepared to meet the academic demands of early schooling. The costs to society are enormous: illiteracy, school dropouts, juvenile delinquency, welfare dependency, and criminal behaviors to name just a few. However, the costs to the individual children and their families are even more ruinous: unfulfilled lives and unrealized potential, stunted intellectual and emotional development, and decreased capacity to fully participate in the American Dream.

THE WHY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

Brain research over the last few decades has contributed important knowledge about how specific learning experiences during the first years of life help to shape the neural circuitry of the growing brain. Scientists have been able to document the rapid growth of brain development based on enriched learning opportunities that allow young children to make connections across different regions of the brain, process language, develop cognitive abilities, and process emotions—in effect to think, develop ideas, and become socialized into their worlds (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2007c). This research by neuroscientists, biologists, and psychologists affirms what developmental, psychological, and educational research has documented over many years: that the foundations for school and life success are established during a child's earliest years.

It has been well established that high-quality early education is a cost-effective method of improving the long-term educational and social outcomes for children living in poverty. Educational research has consistently found that high-quality preschool programs enhance children's school readiness, contribute to long-term academic success, and are cost effective (Barnett, 2008; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001). When young children from impoverished homes have the opportunity to attend early childhood programs that are of high quality, they are better prepared for the demands of formal schooling, and they



are much more likely to finish high school. In this short **video** from James Heckman, a Nobel Prize winner from the University of Chicago, Dr. Heckman makes the case for investing in early childhood education.

Many studies have also found that children from low-income households and children who are at-risk for school failure benefit the most from these programs. In fact, one researcher recently summed up the research by stating:

“[T]he findings tell the same story—that those most at risk will make the greatest gains from early childhood programs (and conversely the social costs will be the highest for a failure to intervene on their behalf)”

—(Galinsky, 2006, p. 3).

Creating the right conditions for learning and positive development during the preschool years is much more likely to be effective and less costly than waiting to address learning problems that occur later in a child’s life. The neuroscientists describe this process as “wiring the circuitry of the brain” correctly from the earliest age through enriched cognitive and social learning opportunities. Early rigorous evaluations of model programs for three- and four-year-olds living in poverty have shown returns on each public dollar invested as high as 17-to-1 with average annual return rates of 18% over 35 years (Heckman & Masterov, 2007). That is why many leading economists are advocating for larger investments in quality early education as one of the best public investments and one of the few proven routes to improved social functioning (see the Obama proposal described earlier). Many of our chronic social problems like high school dropout rates for low income children, adult unemployment and welfare dependence, as well as juvenile criminal behavior are positively effected by high-quality early childhood interventions (Isaacs, 2008; Reynolds et al., 2001; Schweinhart et al., 2005).

Why the Increased Focus on Early Childhood Programs Right Now?

Children, families, and schools are under enormous pressure to achieve higher standards based on the federal legislation No Child Left Behind (NCLB). There is a significant and enduring achievement gap between middle-class children and low-income children, particularly low-income children from minority and non-English-speaking families. Recent analyses and policy reports based on large national studies point out that much of this academic achievement gap is evident at kindergarten entry (Hart & Risley, 1995, 1999; Heckman, 2010; Lee & Burkam,

2002). This achievement gap between different groups of children is significant and becomes increasingly more difficult and costly for highly skilled, much less novice teachers to address as children get older (Education Trust, 2003a, 2003b). Many researchers, educators, and policy makers view early education as an opportunity to equalize educational opportunities and decrease the achievement gap between low- and high-income children (Barnett, 2002; Schweinhart et al., 2005). Therefore, until the impact of the Great Recession on state and local budgets, we witnessed a steady increase in state and locally funded early childhood programs with a few states such as Florida, Oklahoma, Georgia, and New York legislating voluntary preschool for all four-year-old children.

Although the most recent trend is toward reduced investments in early childhood education across the states (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), the range of funding levels, access, and quality standards varies significantly. Some states provide programs for all preschool children living in low-income communities and continue to fund at high levels; for example, New Jersey's Abbott districts were funded at more than \$11,000 per child enrolled in 2012. Other states fund pre-kindergarten efforts at much more modest levels; children in Nebraska were funded at \$944 per child enrolled in 2012 (Barnett et al., 2012). Most states use a combination of federal, state, and local funding to provide targeted early learning opportunities for children who meet certain eligibility requirements. Children from the lowest income homes and those who are learning English as a second language typically have the highest priority for educational services.

In our zeal to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for children who are vulnerable to school failure, it is critical that we *get it right*. It will do no good to have many thousands of young children spend their days in well intended, but poorly designed and ill-equipped early learning settings. We now have sufficient rigorous research from multiple disciplines that presents a compelling case for both the long-term benefits of effective early educational services as well as the features of these programs that make them effective. This book represents my analysis of the research on best practices with a focus on children who are growing up in poverty and those who are dual language learners as well as my reflections on more than 30 years of professional experiences on how to meet the needs of young, vulnerable children who deserve to be well educated, nurtured, and respected.

We now have sufficient rigorous research from multiple disciplines that presents a compelling case for both the long-term benefits of effective early educational services as well as the features of these programs that make them effective. This scientific research has grown considerably during the last 5 years and further underscores the need for comprehensive, well-designed early educational programs that prepare young children for academic, social, and life success.

WHO ATTENDS PUBLIC PROGRAMS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN?

One by-product of our increased knowledge about the effectiveness of early education has been heightened attention to the design, funding, and evaluation of early childhood education programs in most State Departments of Education. In fact, in 2006, 45 states had legislation that supported some public funding for preschool programs (Education Commission of the States, 2006); after the recent economic depression, this number decreased to 40 states plus the District of Columbia in 2012 (Education Commission of the States, 2012). These publicly funded programs range from Universal Prekindergarten (UPK), which is offered in three states, Florida, Georgia, and Oklahoma, to voluntary half-day programs offered at the local school district's discretion. Universal Pre-K programs typically are provided in local communities to all eligible children who elect to enroll and are funded through a combination of local, county, and state dollars. In California, although the state government does not fund UPK, many counties, such as Los Angeles, San Francisco, Santa Clara, and San Mateo, have decided to move forward and offer UPK themselves. California also passed a proposition that levies a 50-cent tax to each pack of cigarettes that has been used to create First 5 California also known as the California Children and Families Commission. This commission funds education, health services, child care, and other early educational programs for California's children ages birth to five.



Although 46 states provide funding for some type of early childhood education, which can range from enhanced support for Head Start—a federal program that is described in this **video**—and/or child care to half-day school year preschool programs, when we include only state-funded pre-K programs, the total number of states counted in 2006 dropped from 45 to 38 (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2006); 12 states provided no public funding for pre-K programs: Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming (Barnett, Hustedt, Hawkinson, & Robin, 2006). These states may offer some combination of federal, Head Start, or local funding for preschool programs, but they had no official state-funded pre-kindergarten program in 2006. However, in 2011–2012, 40 states plus the District of Columbia offered some form of publicly funded pre-K (Barnett et al., 2012).

Through these publicly funded programs, approximately 28% of all four-year-olds and 4% of all three-year-olds in the United States were served in state-funded, pre-K programs. When all forms of public funding, including Head Start and special education enrollments are combined, 41% of four-year-olds and 14% of three-year-olds are served through these publicly funded programs (NIEER, 2012). In addition, 2000 census data revealed that more than half (52%) of all children ages three through five who were not in kindergarten were enrolled in a public or privately funded preschool program (Lopez & de Cos, 2004). In 2000, this represented almost 5 million young children who were regularly being cared for and educated by adults outside of the home—and the numbers continue to increase annually. As of 2012, another 29% of four-year-olds were enrolled in private preschool, resulting in almost 75% of all four-year-olds who attended either public or private preschool.

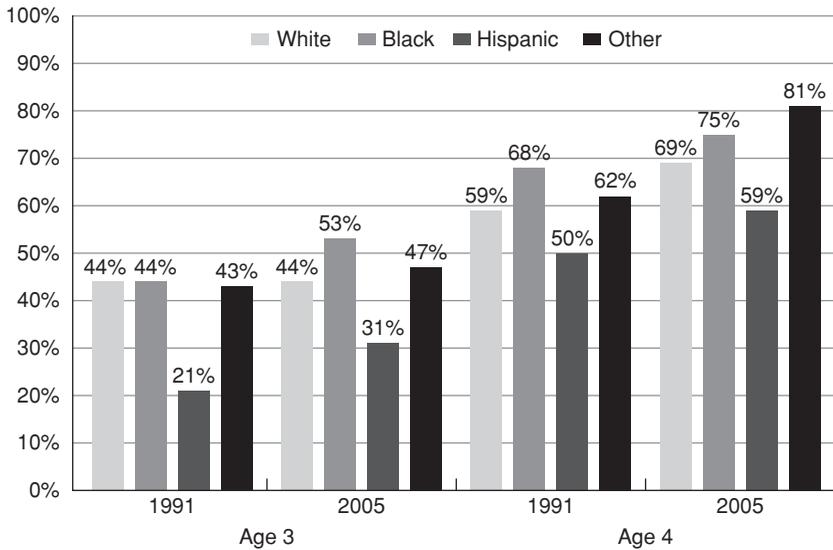


FIGURE 1.1 Preschool Education Participation by Ethnicity

(Source: National Institute for Early Education Research ([NIEER]))

Preschool enrollment rates in the United States vary by both race/ethnicity and family income levels (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Nationally, preschool children from families who earn less than \$50,000 and Latino children are the least likely to be enrolled in any kind of a nursery or preschool program.

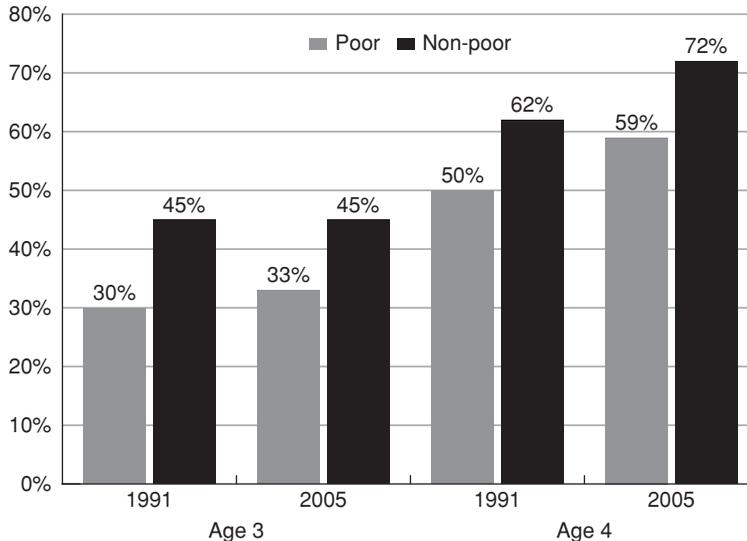


FIGURE 1.2 Preschool Education Participation by Poverty Status

(Source: National Institute for Early Education Research [NIEER])

Unfortunately, many of our most vulnerable children—those from low-income homes, those who do not speak English in the home, and those who have recently immigrated to the United States—are disproportionately not enrolled in any type of early education program (Barnett & Yarsoz, 2007). We are also finding that even when these children who stand to gain the most from early education do attend, the programs they attend are less likely to be judged as high quality (Rand, 2008).

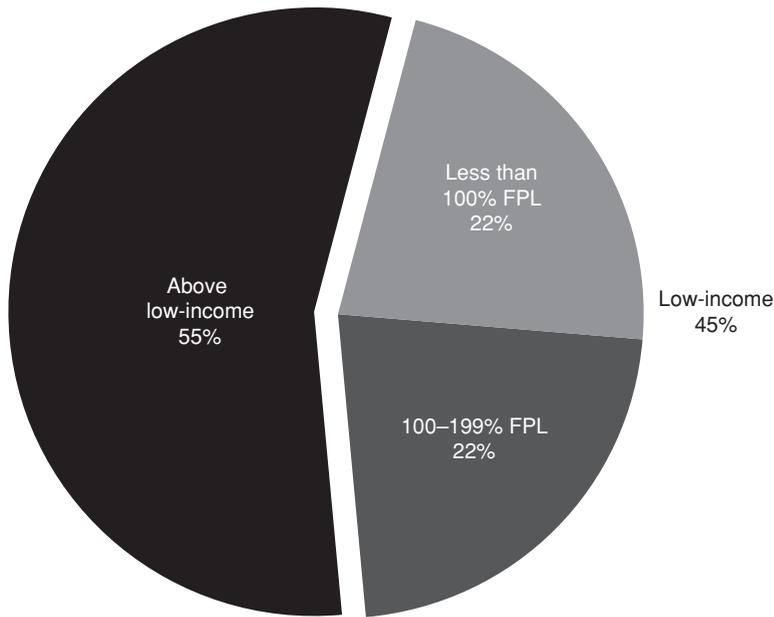
ENROLLMENT TREND FOR CHILDREN FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS. As described above, the benefits of high-quality early education are not experienced equally across different groups of children. In the first edition of this book, I reported that children living in poverty, children in immigrant families, and Latino children, especially those living in linguistically isolated households, were the least likely to enroll in preschool or child care in the nation (Espinosa, 2010). While these conditions are still prevalent, there has been progress in some states in the percentages of young vulnerable children who are receiving early educational services. For example, in 2006 the state of Arizona passed an 80-cent per pack increase on tobacco products that now generates more than \$630 million in early education, health, and social services for children ages birth to five; currently, thousands of additional children in Arizona are attending child care or early education programs with better-trained teachers and staff than was true five years ago.

Early education has become the norm for children below six years of age: in 1965, only 65% of five-year-olds attended kindergarten while by 2005 this figure had risen to over 90%. Similarly, enrollment in educational programs for three- and four-year-olds has also steadily increased during the last three decades; at age four, almost 75% of all children attend some form of “school” while more than 40% of three-year-olds attend an early education program. These programs range from state-funded public education programs to private for-profit schools. They also vary on their program goals, amount of funding, hours of operation, and quality of care and education.

“High quality early learning is like a ‘life jacket’ for low-income kids. They need the life-preserver; whereas middle- and upper-income kids already know how to swim and are not dependent on this to get ahead.”

—JEAN LAYZER, ABT ASSOCIATES
(AS CITED IN KLEIN & KNITZER, 2006)

THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF POVERTY. The number of young children growing up in poverty has been steadily increasing over the last few decades; between 2000 and 2005, the number increased by more than 11% (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2007). In the United States, a family of four that earns less than \$19,350 is considered *poor* while those making between \$19,350 and \$38,700 are described as *low income*. In 2006, 39% of all children in the United States—more than 28 million children—lived in poor or low-income families (National



Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding

FIGURE 1.3 Children by Family Income, 2011

(Source: National Center for Children in Poverty [nccp.org])

Center for Children in Poverty, 2007). As of 2011, this figure had risen to 45% of all children, more than 32 million children, who were living in low-income families (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2013) (see Figure 1.3). In 2012, the federal poverty level (FPL), for a family of four was raised to \$23,050, and the near poor were defined as those living on between \$23,050 and \$46,100. Clearly, the percentage of all children living in poverty has been *on the rise* during the past several decades. Economic inequality in America has been increasing since the 1970s. Between 1979 and 2006, real after-tax incomes rose by 256% for the top 1% of households, compared to 21% for households in the middle and 11% for the bottom fifth of households.

Unfortunately, the overall poverty statistics do not tell the whole story. There are important variations by age, race/ethnicity, and immigration history. Although children under six years of age represent 33% of the population of children under 18 years, they are much more likely to live in low-income families than older children or adults: 49% of children under three, 48% of children three through five years old, and 41% of children 12 through 17 years old live in low-income families (see Figure 1.4). Thus more than 11 million children under the age of six in the United States live in poor or near-poor conditions.

In addition, Black, American Indian, and Hispanic children are more likely to be living in low-income households than White children: 65% of Hispanic children, 65% of Black children, and 63% of American Indian children are

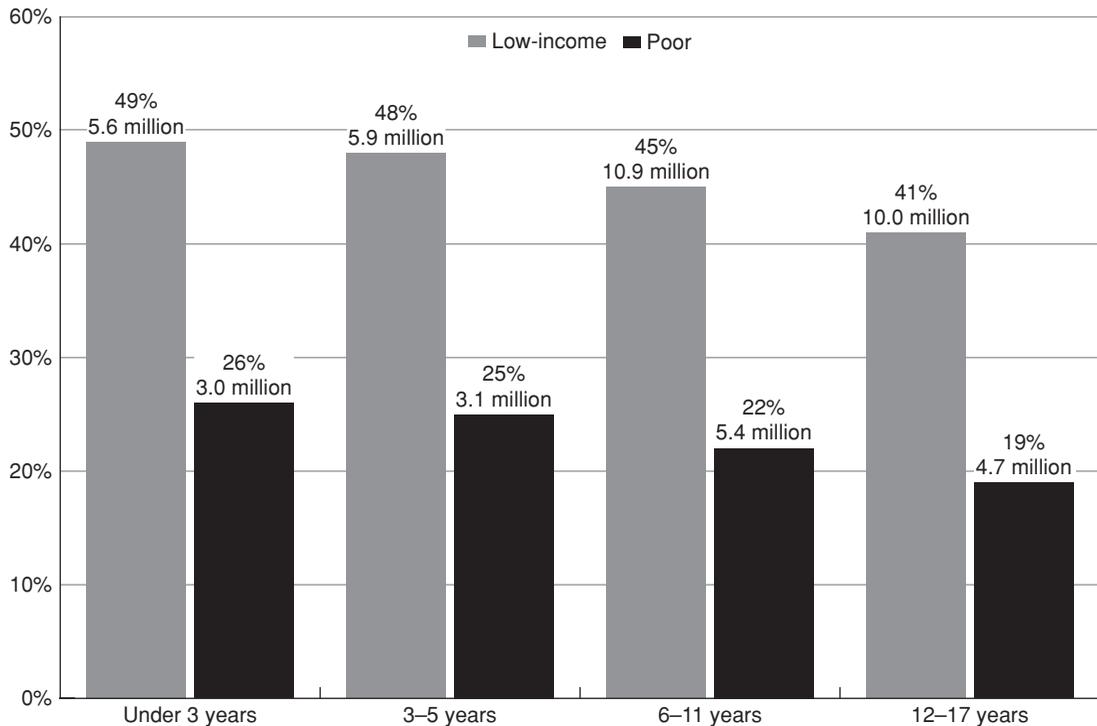


FIGURE 1.4 Percentage of Children in Low-Income and Poor Families by Age, 2011

(Source: National Center for Children in Poverty [nccp.org])

growing up in low-income families while 31% of White children live in low-income families (see Figure 1.5). Children growing up with at least one parent who is foreign born are also more likely to live in low-income families than children with native-born parents, 63% versus 41%. Almost 40% of children living in recent immigrant families are living below the poverty threshold, \$23,050 for a family of four, which represents more than a million children as well as more than 27% of children living in established immigrant families, or 2.4 million children. While immigrant families have high employment rates, they are more likely to be working in low-wage jobs and less likely to receive government income supports like food stamps than native-born workers. These immigrant families living in poverty are most heavily concentrated in the California, Texas, Florida, Illinois, with increasing populations in southeastern states such as Georgia and North Carolina.

Finally, poverty is not equally distributed among the different geographical regions in this country. It is more prevalent in southern states with Mississippi having the highest official rate of children living in low-income families, 56% compared with the national average of 45%, while Massachusetts has one of the lowest rates with 29% of all children living in low-income families. Across all states, research has suggested that families need an income of about twice the federal

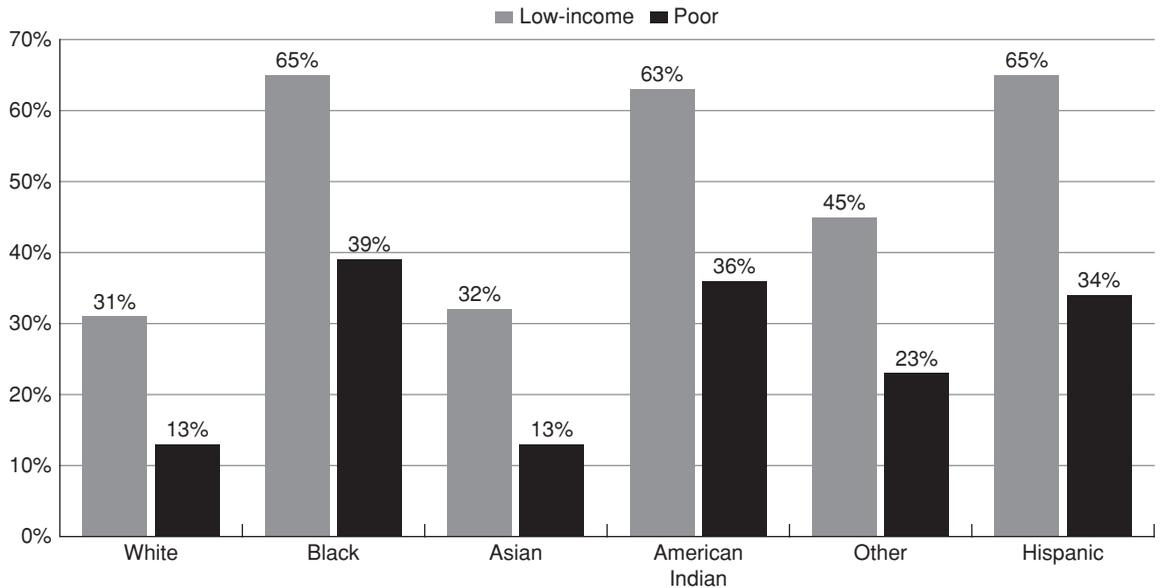


FIGURE 1.5 Percentage of Children in Low-Income and Poor Families by Race/Ethnicity, 2011

(Source: National Center for Children in Poverty [nccp.org])

poverty level to meet their basic needs. A decent standard of living in the United States in the 21st century includes such material resources as adequate food, housing, clothing, medical care, electricity, clean water, and telephone service.

Children in low-income families face many economic hardships that often impede their ability to develop fully and reach their intellectual and physical potentials. Many are unable to provide adequate diets for their children, lack health insurance, live in inadequate housing in dangerous neighborhoods, and experience job instability (Douglas-Hall, Koball, & Chau, 2006). Families with near-poor incomes often experience missed rent payments, utility shut-offs, limited access to health care, unstable child-care arrangements, and inadequate food supplies. Poverty places many stressors on families that reduce their ability to provide the continuous nurturing, enhanced learning opportunities, and material resources necessary to promote optimal growth and development of their children.

HOW DOES POVERTY AFFECT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND ACHIEVEMENT? These unequal learning opportunities during the earliest years of life show up on achievement testing at kindergarten entry. All studies of children's skills have found marked disparities in the cognitive abilities and academic knowledge of children based on their socioeconomic status (SES) (Lee & Burkam, 2002; Phillips et al., 2007). The average cognitive scores of preschool aged children in the lowest socioeconomic group are 60% lower than the average scores of children in the highest socioeconomic group (Lee & Burkam, 2002). These achievement gaps in academic achievement and school performance are significant at

school entry—sometimes more than a year’s difference—and persistent throughout K–12 schooling and even into the post-secondary years. Growing up in poverty has been linked to higher school dropout rates, poorer adult health, and reduced employment opportunities. One of the primary goals of the 2002 NCLB federal legislation is to reduce this achievement gap so that all children will succeed academically and become skilled, productive citizens. In this **video clip**, S. Bredekamp discusses how developmentally appropriate practice in preschool can help to reduce this early achievement gap.



In December 2011, nine states were awarded the first Race to the Top–Early Learning Challenge Grants (RT-ELC): California, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, and Washington. In 2013, an additional \$370 million was made available to states to increase high-quality early learning opportunities and close the achievement gap. When announcing these funding opportunities, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said, “Expanding access to high-quality early learning opportunities is simply one of the best investments we can make in our country. . . . Getting our children off to a strong start not only increases their individual chances for life-long success, it helps create the conditions for a thriving middle class that will forge the path into a bright future for our entire country.”

The research on how to reduce this achievement gap at kindergarten entry has consistently identified early education as one of the most cost-effective methods for improving the school and life outcomes for children from low-income backgrounds. There is a large body of research that is compelling and convincing that high-quality early interventions can significantly help to reverse these patterns of low achievement and reduced educational attainment (Barnett, 2002; Brooks-Gunn, Rouse, & McLanahan, 2007; Reynolds, 2004). Several well-designed, longitudinal, scientifically rigorous studies have all confirmed the cost effectiveness of reaching out to families during the preschool years and providing systematic, intentional curricula that engages children with challenging content, social support, and frequent rich language interactions (Reynolds, 2007; Schweinhart et al., 2006; Zimmerman, 2007). More recent research in Oklahoma and Boston, Massachusetts, has shown that high-quality early education significantly contributes to improved language, literacy, and mathematics skills of both low- and middle-income children, but has the largest impacts on children living in or near poverty (Gormley, Phillips, & Gayer, 2008; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013).

The features of high-quality early childhood programs that have been linked to improved outcomes for children, especially children from low-income and minority families, include the following: positive and emotionally responsive teacher–child relationships, intentional teaching of a well-defined curriculum that is tightly aligned to important goals, age appropriate materials available for exploration, frequent extended interactions between children and adults that allow children to discuss and elaborate on a given topic (serve and return interactions) (Goldenberg, 2013; SRCD/FCD, 2013). Classrooms that have been identified as high quality also have higher levels of emotional and instructional support as well as classroom organization (Pianta et al., 2005).

Parent and family support has also been identified as important to program effectiveness. These studies have emphasized the importance of employing highly qualified teachers who are able to individualize and adapt specific instructional strategies based on the strengths and needs of each child in classrooms that are not overly structured or regimented (Castro, Espinosa, & Paez, 2011; Espinosa, 2003; Klein & Knitzer, 2006; Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007).

The research is clear—high-quality early childhood education is an effective approach to improving the school readiness and the academic achievement of children growing up in low-income families. Recent studies of the impacts of higher-quality preschool and child care have found that when children from low-income families attend more than one year of high-quality ECE, their school achievement was nearly identical to the achievement of affluent children (Dearing, Taylor & McCartney, 2009). Effective early care and education compensates for the otherwise deprived developmental contexts in which many low-income children live.

Specifically, higher-quality child care was associated with more advanced school readiness skills for low-income children, and, in turn, more advanced school readiness skills predicted better middle-childhood achievement. Our results extend this finding by demonstrating that these early skills provide a crucial link between higher quality care and low-income children’s later learning (Dearing, Taylor, & McCartney, 2009, p. 1345).

DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Children whose home language is not English and children learning more than one language in the home and ECE settings during the early childhood years (ages birth through five) are considered *dual language learners* (DLLs). Some states and local districts refer to these children in the K–12 system as English language learners (ELLs) or English learners (ELs).

Both within the federal Head Start program and across the publicly funded state preschool programs, Hispanic/Latino children who speak Spanish in the home are the largest and fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. There are now more Latinos (over 50 million) than African Americans (almost 39 million) or any other ethnic group, and they represent about 17% of the total population in the nation. The Hispanic/Latino population grew by 43% from 2000 to 2011, fueled largely by rising birth rates for Hispanic women. By 2050, it has been estimated that the number of Latino children under five will increase by 146%, and the number of Hispanic and Black children under age five will outnumber non-Hispanic White children resulting in a country where children who have traditionally been classified as racial/ethnic minorities will become the majority group.

The U.S. census shows that young children with home languages other than English make up the fastest growing segment of the population nationwide. This number has increased 150% in the last 20 years while the student

population has increased by only 20% (Goldenberg & Coleman, 2010). The number of young children whose home language is not English has been steadily increasing over the past three decades. Immigration combined with higher birth rates for Latina women have contributed to increasing numbers of young DLL children entering our early education settings. Approximately 22% of the school age population speaks a language other than English at home, up from 20% in 2007 (Current Population Survey, 2011); between 15% to 16% of all children speak Spanish as their home language (Reyes & Moll, 2004), and another 5% to 7% speak a language other than Spanish. Looking just within the younger K–5 population of DLLs, the majority—76%—speak Spanish and are considered Latino/Hispanic (Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, & Passel, 2004). Within the preschool population, this percentage is even higher because of the high fertility and immigration rates of Spanish-speaking families (Lopez, Barrueco, & Miles, 2006).

However, increasingly, ECE programs across the nation are serving children from multiple language backgrounds, with 36 states serving more than eight language groups. Nationwide, DLL children enrolled in Head Start speak the following languages at home in order of frequency: Spanish (84%), East Asian languages, Middle Eastern/South Asian languages, European/Slavic languages, Native Central/South American and Native Mexican languages, Pacific Island languages, African languages, Caribbean languages, and Native North American/Alaska Native languages (Head Start Bureau, 2007). Almost all Head Start grantees (85%) serve children and families whose primary language is not English, while a significant number of programs serve families with eight or more different languages (Head Start Bureau, 2007).

While it is still true that Hispanic/Latino children have the lowest preschool participation rates of any ethnic group (see Figure 1.1), we now know much more about the factors that explain these different attendance patterns. Differences among ethnic groups in ECE attendance are not due to cultural differences in attitudes toward out-of-home child care or center-based preschool education programs. Ethnic and cultural groups differ from each other in many other ways that can influence pre-K participation, including immigration history, average income, family size and structure, parental education levels, and home location. Recent reports indicate that parental education, income, employment, family structure, and geographical region explain much of the difference in ECE participation rates between Hispanics and other ethnic groups. A survey of 1,000 Hispanic families across the country found that 75% considered it “very important” that children attend pre-kindergarten, and 95% believed that attending pre-kindergarten was an advantage for school success. These statistics suggest that lack of access is the biggest explanation for low rates of Hispanic pre-K participation.

A group of colleagues and I recently completed a secondary analysis of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study—Birth Cohort (Espinosa et al., under review), a large nationally representative dataset of more than 20,000 children who were born in 2001. We analyzed the data to determine if young DLLs participate in early care and education programs at the same rates as monolingual children as well as which types of settings they attended, the average quality of

sociocultural researchers—offers new insights about program elements (such as class size and instructional approaches) and strategies (such as how to address the components of language learning and what instructional supports to use) that may be effective in promoting improved outcomes for DLLs. We are gaining an appreciation for both of the challenges and complexities inherent in learning basic concepts through two separate linguistic systems as well as the enormous capacity of young children to actively master more than one language during a critical period of cognitive development. Given the specific challenges and opportunities faced in school by DLLs and the growing number of such students in the United States, it is important to know how high-quality ECE programs impact them in particular, as well as the features of quality that are important to their development.

Generally, the same features of quality that are important to the academic outcomes of monolingual English-speaking children appear to be important to the development of DLLs. However, a feature of early childhood settings that may be important specifically to the development of DLLs is language of instruction. There is emerging research that preschool programs that systematically integrate both the children's home language and English-language development promote achievement in the home language as well as English-language development. While there are no large meta-analytic studies of bilingual education in preschool, meta-analyses of bilingual education in elementary school and several experimental preschool studies have reached this conclusion. Home language development does not appear to come at the cost of developing English-language skills, but rather strengthens them. Thus, programs that intentionally use both languages can promote emergent bilingualism, an ability that carries many cognitive, linguistic, economic, and social advantages (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of the developmental characteristics of DLLs and Chapter 4 of this book for expanded discussion and recommendations on instructional strategies).

Underlying the information and recommendations presented throughout this text and the specific recommendations in Chapter 4 are 10 Guiding Principles about the learning and development of young DLLs. These are intended as a framework through which the research findings are interpreted and as a rationale for specific practices. These Guiding Principles have been updated from the *Preschool English Learners: Principles and Practices to Promote Language, Literacy, and Learning Second Edition* (California Department of Education, 2009) and are based on the current relevant research. The scientific evidence behind each of these principles is presented in Chapter 3 and the principles are applied to specific instructional practices in Chapter 4.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR SUPPORTING DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

1. All young DLLs have the capacity to learn two languages and benefit cognitively, linguistically, economically, and socially when they receive support for continued development of their home language as well as English-language development (ELD).

2. High-quality ECE programs are the foundation for all young children, but must be enhanced with specific adaptations in order for young DLLs to achieve equitable outcomes.
3. Strong and meaningful partnerships with families of young DLLs enhance the learning and development of these children.
4. Respect for the culture, values, and language preferences of families with young DLLs will benefit their adjustment to preschool.
5. DLLs' knowledge and strengths in their home language need to be recognized and built upon in the preschool curriculum.
6. There are unique developmental features of growing up with more than one language that need to be understood by all program staff.
7. Young dual language learners may take longer to respond to instructional prompts given in English.
8. Young DLLs will typically progress through several stages of second language acquisition at different rates depending on their early exposure and usage (see Chapter 3 for more complete discussion of stages of second language acquisition during the preschool years).
9. Young DLLs will likely employ **code-switching** (i.e., combining English and home language words in the same utterance), which is a typical feature of dual language development and should be considered a linguistic strength.
10. Some features of language development may appear delayed to the untrained eye during the early stages of bilingualism for young DLLs (e.g., vocabulary in each language, grammatical knowledge in second language, expressive abilities in second language), but when provided a linguistically enriched and balanced program, young DLLs will become proficient in both languages.

EARLY EDUCATION STANDARDS MOVEMENT AND DIVERSITY

Across the country, state departments of education are designing early learning standards that identify the expectations for what a young child should know and be able to do prior to kindergarten entry. Many of these learning expectations are based on current research focused on the early skills learned in preschool that predict later literacy, mathematical knowledge, and academic achievement and are aligned to the kindergarten content and the Common Core standards. With the current emphasis on educational accountability, outcomes for children, and research-based classroom practices, these standards help to provide a focus to the curriculum and guidance to teachers about *what* to teach and *when* to teach it (Kagan, Kauerz, & Tarrant, 2007). They also identify the important teaching and learning objectives that need to be included in an assessment system.

For example, most states have identified a set of language standards that include vocabulary, syntax (grammar), speaking, and specific early reading skills that relate to later reading fluency such as alphabet knowledge, phonological awareness, and print awareness. All of these skills that are typically learned during the early childhood years have been found to be important for later reading ability and achievement, the cornerstone of academic achievement (Dickinson

& Tabors, 2001; Lonigan, 2006; National Early Literacy Panel, 2007). Examples of language standards include the following:

- Follows two- and three-step directions (Florida)
- Recognizes key ideas and details in stories (Illinois)
- Develops an understanding of words and word meanings through the use of appropriate vocabulary (Virginia)
- Uses age-appropriate grammar in conversations and increasingly complex phrases and sentences (Florida)
- Develops age-appropriate phonological awareness (California)

These standards or expectations are based on the extensive research that has been conducted on English-speaking monolingual children that addresses both what typically developing children *can* learn during the preschool years and specifically which of these skills are most important to later more complex literacy abilities (National Early Literacy Panel Report, 2008).

Although the development of learning standards for very young children has many critics (Meisels, 2007; Parini, 2005), and carries with it the dangers of inappropriate testing and narrowing of the curriculum to reflect only measurable outcomes (Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007), it is an undeniable aspect of the early childhood and K–12 education in this country. Whether we like it or not, educational policy-makers, legislators, and the public want to know if our early interventions are teaching our youngest students what they need to know to successfully master the rigors of formal education. It is now a question of *getting it right*. To best serve the needs of the children and families who enter our programs with so much hope and potential as well as the needs of our great society, we must design curriculum, assessment, and accountability systems that accurately and fairly represent the capabilities and educational needs of *all* our children (Espinosa & Lopez, 2007).

It is now a question of *getting it right* . . . we must design curriculum, assessment, and accountability systems that accurately and fairly represent the capabilities and educational needs of *all* our children (Espinosa & Lopez, 2007).

A pressing question for early childhood policy makers, program administrators, and teachers is how to apply these standards to children who are learning English as a second language and are being raised in homes where the cultural norms and practices are quite diverse. To what extent do the learning expectations for monolingual, native English-speaking children reflect the developmental progression of DLLs? Unfortunately, the comparable research for young DLLs is just emerging (August & Shanahan, 2006; Castro et al., 2011; Conboy, 2013). We have a sizeable amount of information about the process and stages of first and second language acquisition that extends back to the early 20th century (Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004). However, we have very few credible studies that have empirically documented the impact of preschool on DLL children; the relative effectiveness of different curricular approaches; the rates of English acquisition for children from low-income, non-English-speaking

homes; or how best to capitalize on the native language strengths of young DLLs (August & Shanahan, 2006; Goldenberg, 2013; Para Nuestros Niños, 2006).

Although high-quality preschools may benefit DLLs, they are unlikely to be *sufficient* for achieving equitable outcomes. Young children who are learning vocabulary and concepts in a language they are simultaneously learning to speak and understand probably need additional supports to make the content comprehensible to them. Early childhood teachers must, therefore, consider using modifications such as interactive approaches targeting both content and language; graphics, illustrations, and other visuals; providing direct teaching to help students learn skills and concepts; using material with familiar content (in addition, of course, to teaching new content); and using the home language to support concept and language development (Goldenberg, 2013).

Fortunately, much of the emerging information is consistent and overwhelmingly leads to similar conclusions. The same themes run throughout the preschool, K–3, and K–12 literature on how to best educate DLLs to high achievement levels in English:

1. High-quality instruction with adaptations (e.g., special attention to English vocabulary and English oral language development, a lot of opportunities for practice, organized peer interactions with English-speaking children) seems to have the most impact on young DLLs (August & Shanahan, 2006; Espinosa, Castro, Crawford, & Gillanders, 2007; Goldenberg, 2013; Para Nuestros Niños Report, 2006);
2. Schools need to build systematic connections to families in order to design curricular approaches that are culturally consistent and build on the strengths of DLLs and families;
3. Support for the home language is critical—language interactions, literacy activities, and to the maximum extent possible, some instruction in the child’s dominant language;
4. Qualified teachers and support staff who are fluent in the child’s home language as well as knowledgeable about the cultural practices of the families should be recruited and hired;
5. Special attention needs to be given to the maintenance of the child’s home language, which often means working with families so that children do not lose them.

Subsequent chapters will address these conclusions in more depth and with detailed suggestions for translating these research findings into practical classroom strategies. The scientific evidence reviewed here and in future chapters provides a compelling rationale as to *why* we need to intervene early in the lives of young DLLs and children from low-income households. Chapter 4 describes in more detail *how* we can best use this knowledge to design effective programs, classrooms, and curriculum as well as policies that support ALL children from diverse backgrounds.

Conclusions

Recent developments have converged to elevate early childhood education to the forefront of our educational agenda. With more U.S. children living in low-income families, single-parent homes, non-English-speaking families, and unstable social conditions, along with a higher premium for educational success, the stakes for success and failure have become higher for individual children as well as social institutions. Our schools and social service agencies are under enormous pressure to show concrete outcomes and benefits for those they serve. The increasing diversity of our population of young children combined with compelling new research about the critical role of the early childhood years for all future learning and achievement call for a renewed and sustained public effort to ensure that *all* young children have access to high-quality early education.

Creating the right conditions for learning and positive development during the early childhood years is much more likely to be effective and less costly than waiting to address learning problems that occur later in a child's life. Many researchers, educators, and policy makers view early education as an opportunity to equalize educational opportunities and decrease the achievement gap between low- and high-income children (Barnett, 2002; Schweinhart et al., 2005). Therefore, until the impact of the Great Recession on state and local budgets, we witnessed a steady increase in state and locally funded early childhood programs with a few states such as Florida, Oklahoma, Georgia, and New York legislating voluntary preschool for all four-year-old children.

We now have scientific research from multiple disciplines that presents a compelling case for both the long-term benefits of effective early educational services as well as the features of these programs that make them effective. This book represents my synthesis of the research on best practices and my reflections

on more than 30 years of professional experiences as to how we can meet the needs of young, vulnerable children who deserve to be well educated, nurtured, and respected.

Preschool enrollment rates in the United States vary by both race/ethnicity and family income levels. Nationally, preschool children from families who earn less than \$50,000 and Latino children are the least likely to be enrolled in any kind of a nursery or preschool program. Unfortunately, many of our most vulnerable children, those from low-income homes, those who do not speak English in the home, and those who have recently immigrated to the United States, are disproportionately not enrolled in any type of early education program.

The United States census shows that young children with home languages other than English, DLLs, make up the fastest growing segment of the population nationwide. We also know that children from these backgrounds have historically been at-risk for academic delays and reduced educational outcomes. Recent research from multiple disciplines offers new insights about program elements and instructional strategies that may be effective in promoting improved outcomes for DLLs. Based on this evidence, we now have solid principles that should guide the development of program practices that support the learning and development of DLLs.

The federal government in cooperation with state education agencies has recently instituted rigorous achievement standards that all schools must meet for all children, including preschool and primary aged children. All states have developed early learning standards that identify the expectations for what a young child should know and be able to do prior to kindergarten entry. Most of these learning expectations are based on current research focused on the early skills learned in preschool that predict later literacy, mathematical

knowledge, and academic achievement and are aligned to the kindergarten content and the Common Core standards.

A pressing question for the early childhood field is how to apply these standards to children who are learning English as a second

language and who are being raised in homes where the cultural norms and practices are quite diverse. To what extent do the learning expectations for monolingual, native English-speaking children reflect the developmental progression of DLLs?

Summary

At this juncture in educational growth, it is critical that we *get it right*. These public investments in expanded early education programs targeted to children from low-income and non-English-speaking families need to be well spent. It will do no good to have many thousands of young children spend their days in well-intended, but poorly designed early learning settings where their learning needs and capacities are not well understood.

With the increased focus on expanding access to high-quality early educational services, we need to clearly articulate the specific

teaching strategies, curriculum models, and assessment approaches that have been shown to be effective with diverse groups of children. We need to apply what we know so that children from impoverished homes, children who are learning English as a second language, and children who are growing up in culturally diverse families will thrive and benefit from the expanded early educational programs that are becoming available throughout this country. This book focuses on how to *get it right* and ensure that *all* our children benefit from these expanded educational opportunities.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. What developments in your local community or nationally have you personally observed that indicate a heightened interest in early childhood education?
2. Describe why there has been an increased interest in and focus on high-quality early childhood education in the past 15 years.
3. What types of programs and supports are available in your community for young children and families? What kinds of programs are available in your local school district and your state that provide educational services to children ages zero to five? What are the eligibility requirements for these programs?
4. What changes or trends have you observed in your community that might confirm the growing diversity of young children who attend early childhood programs? How have educators and social service providers in your community typically responded to these changes?
5. What are the percentages of children who live in poverty or low-income households in your local programs? (You might need to call your local school district or look up these statistics online.) Are there programs that target low-income or “at-risk” children in your community, for example, Head Start or Title I pre-K programs? What are the components of these programs? How do they handle family outreach, eligibility, curriculum design, and child assessment?
6. Discuss the importance of early education for children from low-income and non-English-speaking families.
7. How many children in your local community do not speak English at home? Do you know how many of them are attending some type of early education program? (These statistics may be hard to find—you can start by calling either your local district office or state Department of Education.)
8. Have you ever had an experience with a person or family that did not speak English that was confusing for you? If so, please describe.
9. Describe basic principles for effective education of young DLLs.
10. Discuss your state’s early learning standards and how they address the language and learning needs of young DLLs.