Many are the times we will teach.
Many are the times we will be taught.
. . . But only once, a child.

**PHILOSOPHY AND PURPOSE**

While preparing to teach, pre-service teachers become imbued with educational theories, but then often find themselves in the classroom as student teachers or professional teachers without practical knowledge of what and how to teach. They understand the theories of learning, but they often are unable to blend these theories with practical applications appropriate for young children.

In this textbook, we not only emphasize how to teach, but also we provide a solid foundation for the theoretical basis of the concepts being applied. We want students to understand what can be taught to young children, why it is important, and how it can be accomplished. We also emphasize the importance of a child-centered curriculum that encompasses the whole child—physical, social, emotional, creative, and cognitive. We take a developmental approach to teaching young children; that is, experiences are planned in accordance with the developmental needs of the children in the classroom or center. This book focuses on cognitive areas of the curriculum and effective methods of curriculum implementation. Its purpose is to explore how children learn; what children can learn; and the specific concepts, ideas, and strategies that are developmentally appropriate for young children.

**NEW TO THIS EDITION**

When writing new editions, it is both exciting and challenging to research and address current topics and ideas, while still maintaining our own basic philosophy and approach to early childhood education. In this revised edition, our goal has been to add available resources that will provide additional suggestions and supports to students and new and seasoned teachers of young children. Theories and historical perspectives are important and readily available in many textbooks, so we have condensed some information in this text in order to expand the practical approach. New to this edition are the following:

- The Pearson eText is presently the only eText platform that supports the various enhancements described in the following. Other e-book formats are available, but only the Pearson eText provides the noted assessments and videos.
- Each chapter is designed with **Learning Outcomes** or objectives.
- As the reader completes each outcome or objective, there is a digital integration titled **Check Your Understanding**. This quiz or formative assessment is for the reader to check understanding of each learning outcome.
- At the end of all chapters there are also summative assessments, **End of Chapter Quiz**, digitally integrated, that instructors will use to assure that the learning outcomes for the chapters are understood or mastered. All assessments are formatted as pop-ups from the Pearson eText.
- Three to six brief, digitally **integrated video clips** have been added to each chapter. These videos illustrate the concepts students are reading about and they can then see application of the ideas presented in real classrooms. Prompts or questions will encourage readers to view the videos.
- A digital **Glossary** to help student readers understand key terms or phrases and their definitions used throughout the text has been added as something new to this edition.
- A new chapter has been created (Chapter 9) titled Math and Science. This is an overview of teaching Math and Science and follows with four specific chapters on science and math (i.e., Physical Science, Earth and Space Science, Life Science, and Mathematics).
- New national standards have been included in the text. Students will find numerous ideas for incorporating these standards into the daily curriculum.
- New photographs visually support areas of study, with captions reminding readers of important concepts.
A Practical Guide to Early Childhood Curriculum evolved from the constant inquiry and search for meaningful teaching ideas by pre-service and professional teachers. It also evolved from our teaching experiences in the primary grades, in Head Start, and in college and university classrooms and laboratories. The concepts selected for inclusion are those that most often meet the needs, interests, and developmental levels of children ages 3 through 8 years. However, they should not limit your thinking, planning, and imagination, but rather should serve as a springboard for selecting projects and themes to explore, both in course work and in classrooms with young children.

CHAPTER PEDAGOGY
The unified pedagogy follows a specific format for most chapters: learning outcomes; introductory comments, including content information; approach to teaching; chapter summary; student learning activities; and suggested resources. The Introduction provides an overview of the chapter as well as specific background and guidelines on the concept or concepts; the Summary reviews the notions presented. The approach to teaching provides very specific content information, precise concepts, ideas that are developmentally appropriate for young children, and many explicit ideas for classroom activities and experiences. In addition, as appropriate, unit plans or project webs are shared or illustrated within the approach-to-teaching section.

Lesson Plans
Occasionally, lesson plans are included within the chapters to show students how one teacher might apply the concepts in the chapter. However, most lesson plan illustrations appear in Appendix A, and recipes are presented in Appendix B. The format for the lesson plans is very simple and may be modified or adapted. There are many instructional design formats, and the ideas presented in this text can be adapted to various designs. In Chapter 4, we suggest a comprehensive design format called Teacher Work Sample (TWS). We believe TWS is the most appropriate design format available today because it adopts all of the very best practices relating to curriculum planning. It begins with the teaching context and ends with reflection on the unit or lesson. The components of the TWS model are sound, and we encourage students to develop expertise in this format.

Other Applied Features
To make the text more readable, we have included some boxed content in every chapter. In addition, in the chapters that include “Concepts and Ideas for Teaching” sections, we have consistently boxed this section. The Student Learning Activities at the end of each chapter offer discussion questions and many suggestions for applying chapter concepts within the university or college classroom.

Also included in this edition are standards from various professional associations. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the present impact of standards on early childhood classrooms and curriculum planning. Content area chapters include standards from national organizations.

CONTENT COVERAGE AND ORGANIZATION
In this current edition, a number of major changes have been made, including some reorganization of the chapters. The text is divided into five parts, each presenting a solid theoretical discussion and rationale.

Part One includes four chapters and provides an introduction and framework for the text. Chapter 1 is an overview of early childhood education and addresses its past, present, and future. The importance of early childhood education is also considered in depth. Developmental appropriateness of early academics, assessment, curriculum, and the physical setting has been incorporated into Chapter 1, along with theories of learning and children’s excitement for learning. Chapter 2 provides direction for developing partnerships among families, schools, and communities. Chapter 3 addresses purposes and administration of various assessments appropriate for young children, and Chapter 4 presents a detailed discussion on curriculum planning.

Part Two presents skills and concepts related to understanding and dealing with the self and others. Helping children learn about people and appreciating their diversities, focusing more on similarities than differences, is presented in Chapter 5. Although multicultural and anti-bias education is integrated throughout the text, it is also considered in greater depth in this chapter. Helping children learn more about families and themselves, social and emotional health, character education, resiliency, physical and nutritional fitness, and general health issues are all included in Chapter 6.

Part Three includes six chapters that directly relate to literacy development in the early childhood years. All curriculum development rests on the child’s literacy ability, and Chapter 7 focuses on language development, including speaking and listening activities. Chapter 8 reflects our beliefs regarding the importance of comprehensive literacy development, including reading and writing.

Part Four emphasizes that young children should not only be taught to learn, memorize, and take in facts, but they must also learn to think deeply—to classify, explain, investigate, question, observe, sort, wonder, synthesize, communicate, analyze, compare, hypothesize,
and predict. Chapter 9, a new chapter, provides an overview of science and math. Science concepts and ideas for incorporation into the curriculum are discussed in Chapter 10, Chapter 11, and Chapter 12. Chapter 13 relates to math concepts and emphasizes problem-solving skills. Children should learn to solve problems initially by working with concrete ideas; then, equipped with some process skills, they become able to generalize and handle more abstract problems.

Finally, Part Five includes a chapter on music and movement (Chapter 14) and creativity, art, and dramatic activities (Chapter 15). These vital experiences should be incorporated frequently throughout the curriculum, and not planned as only occasional endeavors.

Occasionally, we suggest the use of foods as art media; but we consider it imperative that children learn early the value of using and preserving, rather than wasting, food. Sometimes a food item, such as macaroni, may be more economical than purchasing beads for stringing necklaces. Also, discarded items such as oranges and potatoes from the grocery store or from family kitchens often expand the possibilities for creative art activities.

Previously, we read a statement that delightfully supports our own feelings regarding working with children, and we include it here: “Young children keep us from stalling in neutral gear. They make us drive in the heart of the center lane of life” (Chenfeld, 1995, p. 71). We find that working with young children is refreshing and helps keep us focused on the importance of the early childhood years. Our desire is that this text, which supports the child-centered and constructivist points of view, will assist you in planning and implementing a fully integrated, developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum.

**INSTRUCTOR RESOURCES**

Many suggested resources for each chapter are provided in the Instructor’s Resource Manual. Literally hundreds of new books and audiovisual and technology works are published each month in early childhood alone. Based on the kind of computer you have and your budget, we suggest you periodically evaluate new software choices for your school, classroom, or center. The software you select should be developmentally appropriate, utilize a variety of approaches, emphasize a variety of concepts, and encourage problem solving.

Assessment items for this edition appear in various formats: a Test Bank in Word; the same items in a customizable TestGen.

PowerPoint slides are also available for each chapter. Key concepts are presented and the slides are editable.

All supplements are available online. To download the supplements, go to www.pearsonhighered.com and then click on “Educators.”

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The needs and values of early childhood education are multifaceted, and so caring, qualified early childhood teachers are paramount to the learning of the developing child. To implement developmentally appropriate teaching practices in the child’s early years, it is vital for teachers and caregivers to be aware of the developmental characteristics of the children with whom they are working. This will allow teachers to successfully support the children’s progress toward becoming well-adjusted, confident, and thoughtful learners. It is also important to understand the components of children’s learning.

To know where early childhood education is going, it is important to know where it has come from.

The field of childhood development and education began centuries ago and has recently experienced a resurgence in attention. It has been shaped by a range of influences, from philosophers to individual teachers (whose perspectives have the most significant influence on the actual educational experiences of children). Federal laws and programs have also focused on the value of early childhood education for young children, and the importance of standards for programs and curricula is currently receiving widespread attention.

A HISTORICAL LOOK AT EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

The field of childhood development and education began centuries ago and has recently experienced a resurgence in attention. It has been shaped by a range of influences, from philosophers to individual teachers (whose perspectives have the most significant influence on the actual educational experiences of children). Federal laws and programs have also focused on the value of early childhood education for young children, and the importance of standards for programs and curricula is currently receiving widespread attention.

A Brief Historical Overview of Contributors to Early Childhood Education

John Locke (1632–1704), English Philosopher
- Recognized individual differences.
- Stressed the importance of play and early years.
Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), French Philosopher
- Believed that children should be treated with sympathy and compassion.
- Recognized the value of early childhood education.
- Explained that children progress through developmental stages.
- Asserted that children learn through direct instruction.
- Wrote the classic, *Émile*.
- Stressed the importance of play.

Johann Pestalozzi (1746–1827), Swiss Educator
- Proposed that the purpose of education is to develop physical, moral, and intellectual skills and powers.
- Stressed the importance of positive teacher–child relationships.
- Asserted that all persons have the right to an education.
- Founded one of the first European schools to focus on children’s developmental characteristics.

Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), German Educator
- Originated the first kindergarten, based on play and materials.
- Recognized that children have innate gifts to be developed.
- Created the first curriculum designed to meet the specific needs of young children.
- Stressed the importance of teacher–child relationships.

Elizabeth Peabody (1804–1894), American Educator
- Established the first U.S. kindergarten in Boston in 1860.

John Dewey (1859–1952), American Educator
- Emphasized experimentation and discovery learning.
- Stressed the importance of exploration in active, free-play environments geared to the children’s own interests.
- Promoted problem solving based on real-life experiences.

Margaret McMillan (1860–1931), English Educator
- Established the first nursery school in London in 1911.

Patty Smith Hill (1868–1946), American Educator
- Was an early pioneer in kindergarten education in the United States.

Maria Montessori (1870–1952), Italian Educator
- Developed the Montessori method, which focuses on development of the intellect through the exploration of materials.
- Opened Casa dei Bambini (Children’s Home) in Italy in 1907.
- Believed senses were the source of all intellectual development.
- Developed a set of materials (autotelic, or self-correcting in nature) for teachers to use in a prescribed manner.
- Emphasized the importance of the school and family working together.

Arnold Gesell (1880–1961), American Psychologist and Pediatrician
- Developed norms of children’s growth.
- Developed the concept of individual differences.

Jean Piaget (1896–1980), French Psychologist
- Proposed a theory of children’s cognitive development.
- Believed that children learn through experimentation.
- Described periods of cognitive development.
- Explained that time and experience are needed for maturation.

Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934), Russian Psychologist
- Proposed a theory of development describing the social process of learning and the impact of the development of language.
- Developed the concept of scaffolding.
- Developed ZPD (zone of proximal development).

Erik Erikson (1902–1994), Danish-German-American Developmental Psychologist
- Emphasized social and emotional aspects of growth.
- Developed a theory of personality development.

Other Contributions to Early Childhood Education
- Project Head Start, 1960s. A composite of federally funded preschool programs for children from impoverished backgrounds.
- Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (renamed the
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] in 1990. Required that all children be given the opportunity to reach their fullest potential and that children with special needs be included in regular public school programs when possible. As a result, much more emphasis was placed on understanding children with special needs or disabilities.

- The Ypsilanti, Michigan, Early Training Project, 1980s. An ongoing research study supporting early intervention programs.
- A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, a report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983. Resulted in educational program reforms throughout the country.
- Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), 1997. A policy statement issued by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, defining its position with regard to appropriate practices in early childhood education. This approach considers the whole child, while taking into account the individual child’s needs.
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). (Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA] of 1965.) Bipartisan education reform effort that was signed into law on January 8, 2002. It addresses four main principles: stronger accountability, greater local and state flexibility and control, more choices for parents, and emphasis on using methods based on scientific research. Because of this law, states developed plans to improve schools and raise student achievement.
- A federal initiative in 2002, Good Start, Grow Smart provided increased training for Head Start teachers in best practices and assurance that preschool programs are more closely aligned with K–12 education.
- Reauthorization of IDEA that became effective on July 1, 2005. Designed to improve results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. It aligns closely with the NCLB Act to ensure equity, accountability, and excellence in education for all children with disabilities. It emphasizes both access to education and improved results, based on data and public accountability, for students with disabilities.

By 2007, increasing emphasis on early childhood programs’ use of early learning standards (documents that describe what children should know and be able to do before entering kindergarten) that align to child assessments.

- By 2010, state prekindergarten programs or state-funded programs increase, with many states providing programs that serve the needs of young children prior to kindergarten. In 2010, 53 percent of prekindergarten age children (ages 3 and 4) were enrolled in public and private schools. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics [2012]. Digest of Education Statistics, 2011 [NCES 2012-001], Chapter 1).
- Common Core State Standards (2010) developed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, and the Council of Chief State School Officers, for implementation by 2013 and currently adopted by 45 states. They provide standards in mathematics and English language arts for grades K–12.
- Increasing role of technology at home and in schools by young children. In spring of 2012, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Fred Rogers Center for early Learning and Children’s Media issued a joint position statement on the use of technology in early childhood. In this statement there was a shift from supporting a ban on screen time with young children to calling for appropriate and intentional use of technology and interactive media for learning.

The historical perception of childhood has evolved from considering it of little value, to seeing it as a “mini-adulthood,” to the present day view where childhood is valued as a foundation for learning and development. Various aspects of educational focus over the years have included religious development, character and moral development, self-esteem, physical development, social development, emotional well-being, and cognitive and academic achievement. Most recently, professionals have emphasized total development, or the development of the whole child. Focusing on the child’s development guides curricula, instruction, and assessment. Early childhood professionals have benefited from Rousseau, Froebel, Montessori, Gesell, and Erikson, but it is from Piaget that the current philosophy of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) has emerged. From Piaget, early educators have learned the importance of development and the limits it sets on learning. They have
learned that from rich, developmentally appropriate experiences, children can construct their own knowledge and understanding. The aim is to provide the kind of environment and stimuli that will stir children to be curious, active, and thoughtful learners.

✓ Check Your Understanding 1.1
Click here to gauge your understanding of the content in this section.

THE NEED FOR QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Political, social, and economic changes in our society have made families increasingly dependent on outside social institutions to aid not only in educating young children, but also in providing for all their needs. Three major trends that have increased public attention on the care and education of young children include: a) the demand for childcare as more mothers enter the labor force; b) agreement among parents and professionals that young children should have educational opportunities; and c) research evidence that young children are capable learners and that early educational experiences have a positive effect on later school learning (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2002).

As the use of early education programs continues to expand, many acknowledge the need to focus on the critical role that high-quality early education experiences play in helping prepare children for later schooling (NAESP, 2013; Mathews, 2013). Some evidence even suggests that the benefits of early educational experiences extend into adulthood (Campbell et al., 2012; Schweinhart et al., 2005). High-quality programs should not only emphasize formal, structured, academic experiences, children can construct their own knowledge and understanding. The aim is to provide the kind of environment and stimuli that will stir children to be curious, active, and thoughtful learners.

Quality in early childhood programs is often difficult to assess because program goals are by necessity less specific. Standardized achievement tests are not developmentally appropriate for children, so it is difficult to define effective ways to evaluate quality early childhood programs. According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 1990), quality programs enhance the child’s self-image, strengthen social and emotional development, expand communication skills, and stimulate an interest in the world’s surroundings. In addition, they expand concepts and notions, encourage independent thinking, and develop problem-solving skills. Quality programs advance motor skills, identify special needs, reinforce respect for others and the rights of others, promote creativity and aesthetic appreciation and expression, and increase the child’s capacity for self-control and self-discipline. Providing quality early childhood education is not an easy task. It requires a well-trained and committed staff, a rich curriculum, and adequate resources.

School readiness is not determined by children’s innate characteristics. Rather, their development and skills are greatly influenced by their families, interactions with other people, and environments during the younger years (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). Early education experiences that promote readiness for kindergarten include a child-centered, age-appropriate, and engaging environment; a curriculum and assessment approach that supports individual differences; and responsive, knowledgeable teachers who facilitate learning (Cassidy, Mims, Rucker, & Boone, 2003). As much as possible, children who are getting ready for school should be developing a number of skills and attributes, such as physical well-being, muscle control, coordination, language, cognition and general knowledge, social and emotional skills, and curiosity and motivation toward learning (Biggar & Pizzolongo, 2004). Experts generally agree that school readiness involves not only the child’s readiness for school, but also the school’s

Features of Quality Early Childhood Programs

• Employ teachers who are actively engaged, provide high-quality supervision, and have excellent preparation.
• Require the ongoing professional development of all teachers.
• Support cognitive and social-emotional development.
• Provide positive and responsive interpersonal interactions with teachers.
• Have small class sizes and low adult-child ratios.

• Integrate curriculum goals across areas and domains of learning.
• Make curricula challenging and appropriate to young children’s ages, needs, and culture.
• Make programs accessible to all families.

readiness for the child, and the developmental opportunities provided by both the child’s family and the community (National Governors Association, 2002).

Factors Influencing the Need for Early Childhood Education

All children deserve high-quality early childhood education. This is especially true for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Effective preschool experiences help children overcome the influences of poverty (Children’s Defense Fund, 2005). We can and must provide high-quality childcare and enriching preschool experiences for all children.

Children from homes where both parents work or from single-parent homes need childcare. There is a need not only for more childcare programs, but also for upgrading the quality of the care given (O’Brien, Weaver, Burchinal, Clarke-Stewart, & Vandell, 2014). Because many young children are still cared for by untrained caregivers, our efforts should not be in just providing quality training to those caregivers, but in reaching the large number of other people who are caring for our nation’s young children in community agencies, churches, clubs, and other groups, who also need training.

Children with special needs also benefit from early childhood education. Early education can be viewed as the time to mitigate problems by providing special programs: programs focusing on children who are economically disadvantaged and on the problems often associated with poverty; programs treating learning disabilities at an early age; programs in special education; or programs reaching children with emotional difficulties at a time when negative behaviors have had little time to become ingrained. All children need the opportunity to learn at their highest potential in an inclusive environment.

The Developmental Need for Early Childhood Education

Several aspects of young children’s growth point to the need for early childhood education. To foster a balanced human being, it is important to pay attention to social, emotional, physical, moral, and academic development. Socialization takes place in the early years, with the family being the first and most important group to which the child belongs. The early childhood group, in which children relate to other children of their own age, is an ideal situation for furthering social skills and development. Through their play, children learn to develop friendships that enable them to refine their social behavior. Sharing, listening to others, developing leadership skills, learning to follow others, gaining confidence in dealing with others, and learning to conform to the rules of the group are all examples of by-products of early childhood socialization.

The emotional development of the child has long been of paramount concern; children need schools that foster warm, supportive relationships (Baker & Manfredi/Petitt, 2004). This relates closely to the development of either a positive or a negative self-image. Children must like themselves. The feelings of being “okay” and important, and of having strengths and direction, make up the positive self-image. Although these feelings are generated from within, they are influenced from outside the child. Teachers and parents can encourage these positive feelings in children. Positive feelings provide motivation and encourage growth, whereas negative feelings stimulate failure and engender bitterness and resentment.

The significant people in children’s early environments reflect back to the children how they are viewed, and the children, in turn, decide how to see themselves. These views will form their self-concepts, which will determine their behaviors, attitudes, values, feelings, experiences, and success. The early childhood years are the most effective time to nurture a loving and caring approach to life (Swick & Freeman, 2004). Children who are loved, encouraged, and affirmed at an early age will develop love, confidence, and self-esteem in future years (Bakley, 1997). Generally, children who feel good about themselves also feel good about their world; their emotions are characterized by spontaneity, enthusiasm, joy, interest, and happiness. Children who do not feel good about themselves view the world with disappointment, anger, resentment, prejudice, and fear. Children cannot be protected from negative emotions and situations, but to be emotionally healthy, they should be equipped to cope with these feelings. Early childhood programs offer experiences that help to develop this coping ability,
which is necessary for emotional health. Much depends on the classroom atmosphere. A supportive classroom increases students’ ability to learn how to solve problems in stressful situations, as well as to learn academics (Pohan, 2003).

A basic ingredient in the development of a healthy self-concept and emotional foundation is love. The power of love in the very early years of life is strong enough to make sick children well; the lack of it can make well children sick. Love has such a positive force that it can decrease the child’s inevitable moments of pain, frustration, and anger. Love can change, modify, and channel negative feelings into constructive actions and lead toward success later in life. Children’s earliest memories are usually associated with people and the relationships the children had with them. It is the early relationships that children have with adults that teach them how to view themselves and how to behave with others (Swick & Freeman, 2004).

Because of liability concerns amid allegations of child abuse in childcare settings, some programs have instituted policies that do not allow physical displays of affection toward young children. These policies fail to recognize the importance of touch to the healthy development of children, especially to infants and toddlers. Young children need positive, nurturing touch to feel secure and loved. As teachers, we must understand that a lack of touch and physical affection can be just as harmful to a child as inappropriate touch (e.g., sexual and physical abuse) (Carlson, 2006). If children are denied touch, or experience touch only through punishment or aggression, they do not learn to tell the difference between appropriate and loving touch from inappropriate or dangerous touch (Carlson, 2006). Warm responses such as pats on the back, hugs, face touches, or ruffling a child’s hair show care, concern, and love. However, these responses should always be developmentally appropriate, acceptable to the child, and consistent with each individual child’s needs and cultural expectations.

Children have a right to learn and develop skills that will enable them to work, achieve, contribute, and enjoy a fulfilling life (Washington & Andrews, 2010). It is particularly important that teachers assist young children to become contributing members of society by supporting their moral development, providing opportunities for their success, and helping them become involved in their communities (Robinson & Curry, 2005/2006). The relationships we have with children today help form them into the adults of tomorrow (Baker & Manfredi/Petitt, 2005). Early childhood experiences also aid in the development of physical and motor functions. Materials and apparatus should be provided that enable the child to use and exercise both large and small muscles. Large-muscle equipment and activities include climbing equipment, tricycles, wagons, rocking boats, tumble tubs, and locomotor and rhythmic activities. There are also many appropriate physical–motor games for children in the early childhood years. They should be simple to play and noncompetitive. Small-muscle apparatus include puzzles, lacing games and toys, scissors, and crayons, while fingerplays and other activities encourage the use of hands and fingers.

The term early childhood education implies teaching the child. Thus, intellectual or cognitive aspects become an ingredient in the growth and development of the young child. It is well documented that the early years are of crucial importance to the child’s intellectual growth. Early childhood education opens up the world to young children through experiences with people, events, animals, places, and other things. A child cannot have an understanding of what a strawberry is, for example, without some experience with it—either a real experience or a vicarious one through a picture or an explanation, in specific detail. The richest and most meaningful experiences for children are firsthand, concrete, or sensory. These experiences may be in school or on field trips.

Although young children need opportunities for learning, mastering skills, and thinking, the process must be slow and organized. Young children must be given time to experience who they are on their road to becoming responsible adults. Pressures for early achievement and academic learning have intensified, but the way that young children grow and learn has not changed.

Some cognitively oriented programs focus simply on accelerating development of the child’s IQ. However, the individual child should be the focus, and the curriculum should be planned to help each child reach his or her fullest potential. Basic concepts presented in an exciting way are stimulating, fun, interesting, and involving, and they provide the foundations for both learning and initial attitudes toward learning. Teachers of young children thus have the challenge of providing a curriculum that meets their needs and is relevant for them.

Early childhood educators seek to educate children not only to think, but also to feel and act. When planning lessons and writing objectives, teachers should ask, “What is it that I want these students to know, do, and feel as a result of this lesson?” Teachers should not separate the cognitive from the affective; rather, they should see these domains as integrated parts of the whole and try to gear their instruction to build on this interdependence.

Early childhood education can thus be one of the primary means for meeting and satisfying some of the basic needs of young children: social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and linguistic. The early years are times for the development of language, creativity, thinking, and self-concept. Therefore, the importance of high-quality education during this period cannot be overemphasized.
In a quality early childhood program, early childhood educators play a key role in ensuring that the needs of all children are being met.

**Goals for Early Childhood Education**

Educators and other concerned people need to determine how to best provide for the needs of young children and enable *all* children to reach their full potential.

**Goals for Early Childhood Professionals**

1. Understand the nature of development and learning as well as the individual nature and characteristics of each child.
2. Know what to teach, how to teach, and how to assess what children have learned, as well as how to adapt the curriculum to the needs and interests of individual children.
3. Create a caring and responsive learning environment that is inclusive of the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of all children.
4. Establish positive, mutual relationships of trust and respect with families, recognizing that shared goals benefit children and their education.
5. Pursue perpetual professional training and knowledge.
6. Treat every child with respect, dignity, and positive regard. Recognize that every child has great potential.

 still another priority is to improve our professional image by educating the public about the importance of high-quality early childhood programs and seeking to protect and strengthen licensing in states and local communities. Ideally, program standards, regulations, and expectations should be uniform among states, and need to be followed.

Because so many demands and expectations are placed on the early childhood classroom—standardized assessments and curriculum standards—it sometimes seems impossible to achieve DAP (Geist & Baum, 2005). As teachers, we understand there must be expectations and standards for our early childhood programs. Teachers must carefully plan how academics can be effectively and appropriately incorporated in order to maintain quality and successful programs (Gronlund, 2001). Ultimately, early childhood educators must focus on planning and implementing quality instruction that is both explicit (e.g., teachers specifically identify and teach objectives) and engaging (e.g., instruction is relevant, interesting, and playful; Bingham Hall-Kenyon & Culatta, 2010), while also attending to all areas of development.

Piaget (1970b) believed that a teacher of young children should be highly intelligent and highly trained. Teachers who have quality training and education are more likely to make a significant impact on children’s development and learning. Programs can be play-based, but the play must be purposeful (Gronlund, 2001). After following the children’s interests, the teacher defines this purpose and intent by setting up the environment and organizing the materials to help children explore, solve problems, practice skills, and learn concepts through hands-on experiences (Gronlund, 2001). The teacher is also the decision maker and most often determines whether a day is successful or unsuccessful. Teachers make numerous decisions each day in the classroom, and in doing so should remember to continually ask themselves if they are providing opportunities and teaching in a way that will enable their students to develop the skills they need to become successful in life and to become contributing members of society (Shidler, 2009). Because the attitudes of the teacher and the teaching staff influence every aspect of the program, including the children’s behavior, their attitudes should reflect interest, enthusiasm, creativity, empathy, hope, tolerance, understanding, and care (Shidler, 2009). Research on teaching effectiveness indicates that some of these qualities, in addition to flexibility, communication skills, a secure self-image, and the ability to involve children actively in learning activities, are the most desirable assets in early childhood education teachers. Teachers need to be able to instill a feeling of competence and self-confidence in the children they teach (Shidler, 2009).

Teachers’ attitudes should reflect interest, patience, enthusiasm, empathy, hope, understanding, and care.
Thinking teachers are people who reflect and think deeply while helping and inviting others to think well. The term thoughtful teaching is prevalent in the literature today, and it has a double meaning. Thoughtful teachers are those who are caring and sensitive to the needs of young children, and who also demand deep thinking, problem solving, study, and decision making of themselves and those whom they teach. Such teachers do everything in their power to cultivate thoughtful teaching, and thus raise their own standards and expectations to the highest level.

Teachers who are successful in working with young children are likely to have a strong service ethic, feel called to teach, and have warm, nurturing personalities (Bullough, Hall-Kenyon, & MacKay, 2012; Hall-Kenyon, Bullough, MacKay, & Marshall, 2013). Children do not tune in or develop a rapport with cold, uncaring teachers. Children flourish in a classroom where they sense that the teacher deeply cares about them as people, about what they are learning, and about the skills they are developing (Bosworth, 1995).

Another vital quality for effective early childhood teachers is patience, because children make mistakes as they learn. Energy and enthusiasm are also important characteristics. The excellent early childhood teacher must be on the move frequently, and often very quickly, for most of the day. Enthusiasm must highlight the teacher’s personality and illuminate every activity, for enthusiasm is caught, not taught. The more excited and enthusiastic the teacher is, the more eager, enthusiastic, and positive the children will be.

To encourage high-quality teaching and competent teachers, the following criteria are important (Darling-Hammond, 1997; DeVault, 2003):

- The curriculum needs to be flexible.
- Teachers should have a voice in making curriculum changes.
- Teachers must understand how children learn and manage, and they must monitor student learning.
- Teachers must have early childhood subject-matter or content knowledge.
- Administrators and policy makers should trust teachers.
- Beginning teachers need a mentoring program.
- Teachers should understand and incorporate national, state, and district standards.
- Teachers should be regularly evaluated on their teaching strengths, areas for improvement, and skills.
- Teachers should be recognized for their knowledge, skills, and quality teaching.
- Schools should be organized for both student and teacher learning.
- Professional development needs to be a part of a teacher’s daily work.
- Teachers need a realistic workload.

In the right kind of environment, one that is planned to include materials and firsthand experiences, coupled with an atmosphere of teacher competency, warmth, and concern, children are likely to flourish and have the groundwork laid for positive educational attitudes. Their needs will be met in such a way that they can proceed successfully to the next level of development.

**Professional Standards in Early Childhood Education**

Teacher education and early childhood preparation programs at universities across the country use standards as a guide. For example, if a university is accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) or the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), the program will need to show evidence of desired educational outcomes based on standards such as those of the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support
The Learner and Learning

Standard #1: Learner Development
The teacher understands how learners grow and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and so designs and implements developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences.

Standard #2: Learning Differences
The teacher uses an understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards.

Standard #3: Learning Environments
The teacher works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self motivation.

Content

Standard #4: Content Knowledge
The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and so creates learning experiences that make the discipline accessible and meaningful for learners in order to assure mastery of the content.

Standard #5: Application of Content
The teacher understands how to connect concepts and use differing perspectives to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues.

Instructional Practice

Standard #6: Assessment
The teacher understands and uses multiple methods of assessment to engage learners in their own growth, to monitor learner progress, and to guide the teacher’s and learner’s decision making.

Standard #7: Planning for Instruction
The teacher plans instruction that supports every student in meeting rigorous learning goals by drawing upon knowledge of content areas, curriculum, cross-disciplinary skills, and pedagogy, as well as knowledge of learners and the community context.

Standard #8: Instructional Strategies
The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage learners to develop a deep understanding of content areas and their connections, and to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways.

Professional Responsibility

Standard #9: Professional Learning and Ethical Practice
The teacher engages in ongoing professional learning and uses evidence to continually evaluate his/her practice, particularly the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (learners, families, other professionals, and the community), and adapts practices to meet the needs of each learner.

Standard #10: Leadership and Collaboration
The teacher seeks appropriate leadership roles and opportunities to take responsibility for student learning, to collaborate with learners, families, colleagues, other school professionals, and community members to ensure learner growth, and to advance the profession.

Source: The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) standards were developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers and member states. Copies may be downloaded from the Council’s website at: http://www.ccsso.org/


INTASC STANDARDS

These standards are also for professional practice as teachers begin their careers.

Currently, American schools and early childhood programs focus on standards-based education. The passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, along with additional state and federal legislation, has led to greater accountability and a need for teachers to become familiar with standards set for students at each level and grade and to refer to them when planning lessons. For example, standards in literacy have been developed by organizations such as the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of
English (NCTE). Standards in math have been developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and standards for social studies have been developed by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS).

The standards in a variety of the content areas for early childhood as well as the standards for professional teachers and programs in early childhood education (ECE) have been established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which has often collaborated on position statements and standards with the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE). Most states have developed their own standards, which most often emerge or have been developed from the standards of the variety of professional associations such as those previously listed. Most recently (June 2010), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) have developed the Common Core State Standards to help ensure all students are college and career ready by the end of high school. Teachers use the various standards as resources from which to frame their objectives and desired outcomes for programs as well as units and lessons. NAEYC has standards for various purposes. They have 10 Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria (2008) for the purpose of providing program standards with specific performance criteria for each standard that must be met for NAEYC accreditation. Performance criteria support teachers in planning program goals.

The focus of the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria is to ensure the

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<th>NAEYC EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM STANDARDS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program Standard 1: Relationships</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The program promotes positive relationships among all children and adults to encourage each child’s sense of individual worth and belonging as part of a community and to foster each child’s ability to contribute as a responsible community member.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program Standard 2: Curriculum</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The program implements a curriculum that is consistent with its goals for children and promotes learning and development in each of the following areas: social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Standard 3: Teaching</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The program uses developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate and effective teaching approaches that enhance each child’s learning and development in the context of the program’s curriculum goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Standard 4: Assessment of Child Progress</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The program is informed by ongoing systematic, formal, and informal assessment approaches to provide information on children’s learning and development. These assessments occur within the context of reciprocal communications with families and with sensitivity to the cultural contexts in which children develop. Assessment results are used to benefit children by informing sound decisions about children, teaching, and program improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Standard 5: Health</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The program promotes the nutrition and health of children and protects children and staff from illness and injury.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Standard 6: Teachers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program employs and supports a teaching staff that has the educational qualifications, knowledge, and professional commitment necessary to promote children’s learning and development and to support families’ diverse needs and interests.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program Standard 7: Families</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The program establishes and maintains collaborative relationships with each child’s family to foster children’s development in all settings. These relationships are sensitive to family composition, language, and culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program Standard 8: Community Relationships</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The program establishes relationships with and uses the resources of the children’s communities to support the achievement of program goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program Standard 9: Physical Environment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The program has a safe and healthful environment that provides appropriate and well-maintained indoor and outdoor physical environments. The environment includes facilities, equipment, and materials to facilitate child and staff learning and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Standard 10: Leadership and Management</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The program effectively implements policies, procedures, and systems that support stable staff and strong personnel, fiscal, and program management so all children, families, and staff have high-quality experiences.</td>
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# Check Your Understanding 1.3
Click here to gauge your understanding of the content in this section.

## HOW YOUNG CHILDREN LEARN

Children need active, engaged, relevant, experiential learning that provides them with both **structured learning** and **incidental** or **spontaneous learning**. Much of the learning taking place in today's classrooms and early childhood centers results from planned curriculum experiences and activities based on children's needs. However, opportunities for learning abound in the child's environment beyond structured learning activities. Incidental or spontaneous learning occurs in multiple contexts as children engage in the process of discovery.

Early Childhood Programs Should Provide Safe and Healthy Environments.

Quality of experiences in the early childhood programs and to encourage positive outcomes for the children (NAEYC, 2008). It is important to emphasize that incorporating subject-matter content standards will improve early childhood education and result in long-term benefits for children's development and learning.

NAEYC has another set of standards for the purpose of preparing preservice teachers in early childhood education. This set of standards includes six standards for preparation programs in guiding early childhood teacher candidates. These standards, NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs (NAEYC, 2009b), will be the focus of this text. Each of the six standards has key elements that guide teacher candidates as they prepare to be professional teachers.

### Classroom Connection

As you watch this video on Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs, think about a specific application for you for each of the professional standards.

<table>
<thead>
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live. As bits of knowledge collected through these experiences are combined, meaning results. These become the pieces that make up children’s schema, “maps,” or understanding of their world and dictate to them their thinking and how to behave. The larger the stock of experiences, the more meaning they develop, the more elaborate is their schema and, ultimately, the clearer their thinking.

Real experiences provide concrete knowledge from which clear understanding evolves.

Learning and information must be congruous with what has already been understood. When the child understands a notion, it is stored in the mind with the related schema of other concepts. In further experiences, the child calls on the prior knowledge already compiled to understand the new ideas. Teachers need to make the information they teach compatible with what each child knows from previous experiences: the prior understanding. Teachers do this through pre-assessments prior to units of study.

Children make generalizations as they build relationships among concepts by relying on information previously accumulated. Without a broad base of direct encounters from which to generalize, children cannot move toward abstract reasoning. Before certain conceptual strategies can be learned, specific levels of cognitive development must be achieved. Children can understand only those things that past knowledge has prepared them to grasp.

Curiosity, questioning, and inquiry motivate children to learn about and explore their world. Curiosity impels a child to reach out to the environment to learn, explore, and understand (Cartwright, 2004). An adult can help foster children’s curiosity by encouraging them to explore, and creating surroundings that allow them to satisfy their inquisitiveness. To touch, observe, listen, think about, and evaluate the things around them; to take apart and put together, explore and look for alternatives; to try and fail and try again and again until they succeed—these are all ways that a child learns through curiosity. To ask “why” and “how” questions is a means for coming to know and learn. Early childhood educators should be especially interested in the questions that young children generate, because they are tenacious questioners even before they enter formal schooling. However, something happens when they begin their formal schooling that inhibits their natural questioning, and they learn to answer the teacher’s questions, but not to ask. Perhaps they are conditioned early in their education to know information, rather than to question ideas. If we desire child-centered early childhood classrooms, we need to discipline our teaching behavior to expect and support inquiry from children and to use their questions as a springboard for planning projects, activities, and learning episodes.

Questioning is significant to learning, and it should be encouraged as a part of communication. The child asks a question, and the teacher listens to determine whether the information has been correctly interpreted. Then, the teacher either reinforces and praises the child for the right information or corrects the misconception. A child’s questions may lead the discussion in a direction unplanned by the teacher and provide feedback for concepts not understood. Following a story and discussion about watermelons, the children observed a real watermelon that was quite small. Joanna asked, “Why don’t you water that thing?” and then pointed out that the teacher should “dump it in water.” The teacher wisely sustained the inquiry and through feedback from the children learned that many of them thought that if they put the watermelon in water it would grow bigger. After a lengthy unplanned discussion, the children learned the valuable notion that because the watermelon had already been picked from the vine, it could not grow any more.

Through communication from the child, many misconceptions are identified, which must be clarified and corrected. Only then is a child able to obtain further knowledge of concepts in the continuing search for meaningful relationships in the environment. Thus, student questions become a means of early childhood assessment. An example of a child’s misconception follows.

The children had spent a week exploring the theme of the dairy cow. A number of concepts and a variety of activities were included. On the last day of the theme study, the children visited a dairy farm, observed some cows being machine-milked, and watched the milk flowing through clear plastic tubing. A child asked the teacher, “How can they tell when the cow is full?”

This child’s questions provided the necessary communication feedback to the teacher about that child’s
understanding. Additional experiences may need to be planned and concepts retaught, perhaps in different ways, to correct misconceptions or to extend meaning.

Modeling is another component of learning that is important in early childhood education. The teacher models both concepts that are to be understood and correct language usage. In addition, teachers model attitudes; enthusiasm for learning is caught, not taught. Prosocial behaviors are often best learned when they are modeled or when children can observe them in others. Other behaviors and attitudes that influence learning are also modeled for the young child. Teachers who are caring, questioning, and thoughtful learners, for example, are more likely to have students with these same academic qualities. Skills and behaviors, in particular, are learned through imitation or modeling. To tie a bow based on a word description of that skill would be very difficult, but when the skill is modeled for a child who is developmentally ready, with practice it can be learned. If a child is praised for work, efforts, or a particular behavior, the praise serves as reinforcement for that child. In addition, other children will desire to receive the praise, so they too will try to accomplish the work or skill. This is observational learning: Children observe others and then model or imitate that person’s efforts, skills, or work.

Scaffolding is adult assistance or support to young children as they build a firm understanding. Scaffolding consists of giving clues, reminders, encouragement, support; breaking problems or challenges into steps; or anything else that allows the child to grow in independence as a learner. It is always built on the child’s previous knowledge.

Another component in how children learn is the sociocultural base or heritage—the context—of their experiences and lives. Their knowledge is not just individually constructed, but is also influenced by their particular families and the culture from which they come. Cultural habits and traditions in homes and communities serve as contexts for children’s development. Learning takes place through children’s active participation in the traditions, routines, and rituals of their culture, lives, and contexts. As a child interacts with the significant people in his or her environment, the shared understandings between the child and others will eventually become internalized knowledge, skills, and dispositions. The broad range of various experiences and perspectives that diverse students bring to school is a powerful way for all children to learn more.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) requires both meeting children where they are and enabling them to reach goals that are both challenging and achievable. All teaching practices should be appropriate to the children’s age and developmental status, attuned to them as unique individuals, and responsive to the social and cultural contexts in which they live (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. xii). At the foundation of all developmentally appropriate practice is the teacher’s knowledge of child development and learning (Bredekamp, 2011).

According to NAEYC (2009a, pp. 11–15), the following principles of child development and learning are research-based and theory-based and should be considered by early childhood educators when making decisions:

1. All domains of development and learning—physical, social and emotional, and cognitive—are important, and they are closely interrelated. Children’s development and learning in one domain influence and are influenced by what takes place in other domains.
2. Many aspects of children’s learning and development follow well-documented sequences, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired.
3. Development and learning proceed at varying rates from child to child, as well as at uneven rates across different areas of a child’s individual functioning.
4. Development and learning result from a dynamic and continuous interaction of biological maturation and experience.
5. Early experiences have profound effects, both cumulative and delayed, on a child’s development and learning, and optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning to occur.
6. Development proceeds toward greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities.
7. Children develop best when they have secure, consistent relationships with responsive adults and opportunities for positive relationships with peers.
8. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.
9. Always mentally active in seeking to understand the world around them, children learn in a variety of ways; a wide range of teaching strategies and interactions are effective in supporting all these kinds of learning.
10. Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation, as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence.
Developmentally appropriate teaching means that we approach children from where they are and not from where we think they ought to be.

The NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs includes Standard 4, which is Using Developmentally Effective Approaches to Connect with Children and Families. Central to DAP is the knowledge teachers have in three areas: child development and learning, what is known relating to each individual child, and what is known with regard to the individual social and cultural contexts of children (NAEYC, 2009a). Thus, teachers begin by considering age and developmental norms, and then consider the individual circumstances of each child. This includes an understanding of the child’s family, community, and cultural background, past experiences, and current situation. As teachers come to know their students, their ability to provide developmentally appropriate learning opportunities for each child increases (NAEYC, 2009a). Everything teachers plan and do should focus on the individual child. They tailor, adjust, and adapt the curriculum to fit each child in the program, rather than expecting children to fit the program (Elkind, 1987). In a DAP classroom, children are allowed to progress at their own rate, and both the curriculum and teaching strategies are relevant for all the children in the classroom. Thus, a great deal of flexibility is required, but this does not mean a total lack of structure and academics. Rather, it means that the structure and academics of the program are based on individual and group needs and the current understanding of child development (Raines, 1997).

NAEYC (2009a, pp. 16–23) proposes five guidelines for early childhood professionals to use in making decisions in practice to support DAP. These guidelines are addressed in several chapters of this text and should serve as the foundation of all decisions in early childhood practice. These dimensions incorporated into classroom teaching cultivate successful, high-quality, developmentally appropriate classrooms and programs. The guidelines are:

1. Creating a caring community of learners
2. Teaching to enhance development and learning
3. Planning curriculum to achieve important goals
4. Assessing children’s development and learning
5. Establishing reciprocal relationships with families*

DAP suggests recognizing the importance of positive, supportive, and caring relationships (Galagher, 2005). It is creating an inclusive and caring community that extends from the classroom to the community, and fostering respectful and collaborative relationships among peers. Teachers must understand the developmental needs and characteristics of each age group as well as of each individual child. DAP focuses on the child while taking into account gender, culture, disabilities, and other factors. DAP includes some intentional or explicit teaching according to the needs of the children, but it also suggests that children are playful while interacting with teachers and other students. Opportunities for singing, stories, creative art, and self-initiated play activities are not only fun and motivating, but increase learning and language development. In DAP, there is a balance between play and direct, thematic, and spontaneous instruction (Morrow, 2004).

The curriculum is adjusted to meet the child’s needs in DAP. This includes cognitive, linguistic, physical, and social-emotional development and needs. Learning activities and objectives match children’s development, and adequate time is provided for exploring during the various stages of learning. Teaching is not simply a matter of collecting materials and toys and selecting projects and activities for children; rather, it requires a sensitivity and understanding of the children, their parents, and DAP. As teachers plan appropriate activities, they should ask three questions: Is this activity right for a child of this age? Is this activity right for this child? Does this activity match the social and cultural contexts in which the children in this class live (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009)?

Children should be encouraged to engage fully in each stage of development. Their learning should be a

Even though many educators understand and support DAP, research tells us that as little as one-third to one-fifth of the early childhood programs studied actually exemplified the philosophy (Elkind, 2005; Neuman & Roskos, 2005).

Some common misconceptions relating to DAP include the following:

- The teacher is not in charge.
- There is no structure in the curriculum or the classroom.
- Few skills and concepts are taught.
- DAP is a set curriculum (Raines, 1997).

Although the teacher is in charge in a DAP classroom, children do have choices and many hands-on learning activities. There are teacher-directed experiences, but the many opportunities for choice build independence and responsibility in the young learners. The classroom has structure in terms of the curriculum, the space, the time, and the schedule, but this organization is sometimes hard to detect to an observer who sees children playing and choosing various activities. Children learn skills in authentic play experiences and activities, rather than with drills and worksheets. Children can and should develop as knowledgeable, skillful, and active problem solvers—not passive, inactive, fill-the-vessel learners.

### Classroom Connection

As you watch this video on developmentally appropriate practices, list the components of this important framework. Include at least five ideas.

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**Characteristics of Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

- Activities are age-based and developmentally appropriate.
- Plans and materials are individually appropriate.
- Students are provided with culturally and linguistically appropriate materials.
- Authentic instruction and assessment are used consistently.

---

**Children construct knowledge based on what they already know as well as what they want to know.**

**Hands-on learning experiences are provided as a primary means of learning.**

**Students have choices, although there are teacher-directed experiences.**

**Students are encouraged to develop autonomy as learners and also socially.**

**Play is a central ingredient in the curriculum.**

**Adequate time is provided for exploring, questioning, and problem solving.**

**The curriculum and school experiences are adjusted to meet the needs of the children in the classroom.**

**Children progress at their own rate.**

**The curriculum is dynamic and ever-changing.**

**Families are important.**

**A caring community is relevant to learning and development.**

---

Children Need to Be Actively Engaged to Build Reliable Intellectual Concepts.
DAP is reflected not in one particular curriculum, but in the way the curriculum is carried out (Raines, 1997). Teachers are influenced by the constructivist approach in encouraging students’ points of view and supporting learners working in an authentic environment, making choices, and solving problems (Torp & Sage, 1998).

Check Your Understanding 1.4
Click here to gauge your understanding of the content in this section.

BALANCING DIRECT TEACHING AND CHILD-GUIDED PLAY

Generally, how we teach influences success or failure more than what we teach. Curriculum content, strategies, or teaching methods that put too much emphasis on intellectual achievement can misuse these early years (Elkind, 1987). There is pervasive acceptance of the proposition that young children are not smaller versions of older children (NAESP, 1990). However, there is a dangerous trend toward teaching skills earlier and earlier in educational settings, increasing the stresses and failures felt by our youth. The college curriculum is being taught in senior high school, the senior high school curriculum in junior high, the junior high in later elementary grades, the later elementary in early elementary classes, the early elementary in kindergarten, and the kindergarten in preschool. The current focus on starting and finishing education earlier and earlier has resulted in an overemphasis on academics and testing in early childhood education (Elkind, 2005).

Elkind (1996, 2005, 2007a) believes that the national trend toward pushing young children to achieve has led to using inappropriate teaching methods and developing unreasonable expectations, particularly for kindergarten and prekindergarten children. The end result has been that many of these children are pressured with too much, too soon, too fast, and they face stress and burnout early in their lives. In our sometimes faulty evaluations of where children are at a specific stage of development and what they seem capable of handling, we often believe that they can “carry it.” We need to consider seriously: Can they? And if they can carry it right now, how long will they be able to carry it? Is it necessary for them to carry is at this point in time?

The kindergarten scene of years gone by—children building with blocks, painting at the easel, and dressing up—has been replaced with one of formal education practices, including workbooks, worksheets, paper-and-pencil work, and basal-based instruction. Children who are pushed too fast, too far, too soon lose interest in learning, experience failure, are unable to think for themselves, cannot deal with stress, and often find it difficult to relate to peers. Some critics of national mandates such as the 2001 NCLB Act, and the 2010 Common Core Standards believe there have been and will continue to be negative consequences for young children such as stress, inappropriate curriculum, and assessment (NAEYC, 2009a; Strauss, 2013). In early childhood programs where children participate in developmentally appropriate academic experiences, the difference is in how number, literacy, and other content concepts are taught. When teachers use activities, centers, a variety of literacy modes, music, choral reading, work with puppets, reader’s theater, manipulatives, and other appropriate materials, the learning environment is much different from one that focuses on scripted programs along with workbooks and worksheets. Children in this kind of learning environment do learn to read and do develop beginning number concepts.

The philosophy in this book is that children from 3 to 8 years of age benefit from a direct, explicit, or intentional teaching approach, but that such an approach should be individually appropriate, used for short periods of time, and integrated with self-initiated play (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Teachers need to be wise as they plan and develop appropriate curriculum experiences for these children and consider the value of play and child-guided activity.

Child-Guided Play

In a developmentally appropriate program, both the curriculum and the environment should reflect the teacher’s knowledge and acceptance of the value and importance of child-guided play in early childhood. Play is an important way in which children learn—it is active and engaging and connects the child’s physical, mental, and emotional capabilities (NAEYC, 1998b). It is the most important activity in the day for young children (Auxter, Pyfer, & Huettig, 2009). Play shapes and guides the child’s world and is an organizing force in the child’s life (Hillman, 1995). It is, in fact, the way children explore their world. To help direct our thinking toward the importance of the playful environment, Rivkin (1995) suggests we remember the places where we liked to play when we were young. Did they allow privacy, independence, or materials to arrange? Could we revisit those places now? Are they still accessible to children, or do they no longer exist? What can we do about providing “memory” places for children today? Play should be the very heart of the early childhood curriculum (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Elkind, 2003, 2005a; Fromberg, 1999, 2001; Isenberg & Jalongo, 2009; NAESP, 1990; NAEYC, 1998b, 2009a). Play provides a way for young children to reinforce worthwhile, meaningful learning and cooperation with others, rather than just acquiring facts and information alone (Fromberg, 1999, 2001). Meaningful
play provides the support and components for academic learning, including using imagination, tapping curiosity, sustaining attention, finding application for newfound understanding, and solving problems. Play is not only desirable, it is essential in the healthy development of the whole child (Christakis & Christakis, 2010; Elkind, 2007b).

Theoretically, there is widespread acceptance of the idea that play is important—that it is serious business for the young child. Elkind (2003) has reviewed a variety of theories that support the role of children’s play, including Montessori, Freud, Piaget, and Vygotsky, and points out that theorists, and many adults in general, support the healthy functions and value of play, but the real value is in the personal experience and joy that play brings to children. Unfortunately, we live in a time when the push for academics in early childhood is pressing, and at the practical level, play is too often being replaced with highly structured learning experiences. Early childhood educators must emphasize play in their curricula while also being highly intentional and explicit as they strive to meet the curricular standards in developmentally appropriate ways (Bredekamp, 2011).

**Features of Early Childhood Play**

- Integrative
- Meaningful
- Worthwhile
- Engaging
- Valued by the player
- Solitary, parallel, associative, or cooperative
- Self-motivated
- Active
- Imaginative
- Symbolic (it represents reality)
- Rule governed


**Purposes and Benefits of Play**

Much has been written about the purposes and benefits of play. Here we discuss various purposes for play to help you to recognize its inherent values. This information will aid you in responding clearly and wisely to such queries as “Is that all my child does? Just play?” Some parents may believe that play is an important part of the home environment but question its value in school. They often feel that the school curriculum should be more involved in academics (Brewer & Kieff, 1996/1997). We need to be sensitive to these parental concerns and help parents understand the benefits of play in a curriculum that fosters the learning and development of children.

*Play promotes significant mental or cognitive skills* (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Cooper & Dever, 2001; Stegelin, 2005). Research on brain growth and development supports the need for active and stimulating play for all children (Stegelin, 2005). Play gives the child opportunities to express thoughts and ideas. It provides occasions to organize, plan, solve problems, reason, try out solutions and skills, and create and explore and deepens understanding of concepts. It gives children opportunities to explore, experiment, create, and imagine (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2002). As educators, we must recognize our responsibility to educate parents in the values and purposes of play for young children. This can be done through workshops, orientation meetings, newsletter articles, and by providing resource materials that teach the values of play.
Part 1 • Introduction to Early Childhood Education

(Hatcher & Petty, 2004; Jones & Cooper, 2006). According to the work of Piaget (1952), play allows children to construct knowledge through assimilation, acquiring information through experiences, as well as through accommodation or modification of an existing point of view because information cannot be integrated into a particular scheme of understanding. Play contributes to the child’s development of imaginative thinking (Fromberg, 1999, 2001). Play enables children to formulate ideas and then to test them, to problem solve (Miles, 2009). Much skill development occurs through play, and there is an integration of cognitive skills such as literacy and math (Miles, 2009). During play, children have the opportunity to develop their senses of touch, taste, smell, sound, and sight—to assimilate new stimuli (Isenberg & Jalongo, 2009). In addition, their attention spans are expanded as they stay on task and remain attentive to activities in which they are involved.

**Play facilitates both divergent thinking and convergent thinking.** Convergent tasks have a single answer, whereas divergent tasks have multiple solutions or approaches. Both kinds of thinking are important, and play provides the opportunity to practice both. Even though it is a vigorous intellectual exercise, play does not create the pressure or tension that is often associated with more structured learning approaches.

**Play assists communication, language, and literacy development.** Many researchers think that communication skills are developed in part through peer play and the need for children to communicate with each other in their play (Chenfeld, 1991; Morrow, 2008). Play stretches the vocabulary and expands language development by providing opportunities to use new words, converse with playmates, listen to another's language and point of view, learn new semantics (meanings of words), and hear and subsequently use new syntax (parts of speech). Play synthesizes previous experiences and thoughts, allowing children to piece them together. Because children plan, communicate, listen, read, and write in their play, it offers the right conditions for learning language and literacy skills (Cooper & Dever, 2001; Stegelin, 2005). Play also fosters creativity and aesthetic appreciation, which can influence the way children think and solve problems.

**Play promotes physical–motor development.** Play is active; children are never passive recipients (Jones, Evans, & Rencken, 2001). Children use their bodies and increase large-muscle dexterity as they run, climb, skip, hop, jump, throw, and catch. Play, therefore, provides the exercise and physical activity needed to strengthen and coordinate children’s muscles and bodies. Children need play for health reasons. According to the American Heart Association (2010), the U.S. obesity epidemic is currently affecting even young children, with more than 12% of 2- to 5-year-olds being overweight. The physical activity of play facilitates release of stress and helps children manage feelings in a positive way (Stegelin, 2005). Through physical play, children can learn appropriate ways to display aggression and other assertive behaviors without hurting themselves or others. When a group of kindergarten children was quizzed about their favorite part of school, a large majority stated that they liked recess best of all. During recess, the spontaneous, self-directed activities involve mostly physical–motor play.

**Play encourages positive emotional development.** Play affects the child’s motivation (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). It is the means for fostering a healthy personality, and it provides the opportunity for each child to discover the self. Play lets children express thoughts and ideas and try out ways of behaving and feeling. Play experiences provide safe avenues for expressing both positive and negative emotions. As they express thoughts and ideas, children can learn and be directed to the most positive ways of handling their emotions through support and reinforcement by both peers and teachers.

Play is pleasurable and enjoyable (Elkind, 2003, 2007). Children use play to make up for unkindness, defects, and disappointments, as well as to play out frustrations, sufferings, fears, anxieties, and anger. In addition, play allows children to be powerful, in control, and assertive, depending on the decisions made in particular play situations. Play enables children to translate feelings, thoughts, fantasies, and inclinations into action, to literally be in control and in charge of their world and feelings. Perhaps the greatest asset of self-directed, self-discovery, or spontaneous play is the satisfaction it gives children of making choices based on their own interests, of attaining some control over their own learning.

Freedom to experiment with materials, feelings, words, and ideas gives impetus to the development of creativity. Through carefree, unpressured play, children’s imaginations invent new solutions, different approaches, and unique ideas. Even though ideas are “pretend,” it is important that the ideas are created; one day, children will realize that their ideas must be compatible with reality.

**Play allows children to develop into social human beings.** Piaget (1970a) considered the theoretical relationship between play and socialization. He believed that children are naturally motivated to interact with other children and, as they do so, they become less egocentric and more aware of others. Solitary play is valuable; however, in early childhood, play usually means people. In play experiences, children learn to be both leaders (telling others what to do) and followers (being told what to do). They learn to try different roles and think of other possibilities (Chenfeld, 1991). They
learn to give and take, to put themselves in another’s position, to negotiate, to sense another’s feelings, to hear another’s point of view. They learn to share, cope with disappointment, play by the rules, and resolve differences (Brewer & Kieff, 1996/1997; Stegelin, 2005). Play provides practice in the social skills that society demands for success. It also provides practice in being less bossy, less selfish, less meek, or less shy. Play encourages a child to be a friend and a contributor, to cooperate, and to be flexible.

As teachers plan the time that children spend in their classrooms, they must remember the inherent value of play for its own sake and for the behaviors it directly affects. They must not structure and arrange so much of the school time that inadequate time is left for spontaneous, self-directed free-play periods. In terms of benefits, these periods may well be the most important times of the day, and children should not be robbed of them. Every day should have one or more blocks of time for spontaneous play.

The lesson plans suggested in this book are activity oriented, and many of the activities listed are to be included in the free-play or self-directed spontaneous play period, in addition to the centers that are a regular part of the room environment.

### The Teacher’s Role in Fostering Positive and Meaningful Play Experiences

Contact with others, both adults and children, is more important in fostering positive play experiences than materials and toys. Children develop empathy, understanding, and sensitivity to each other by relating to each other. Human relationship skills come from firsthand experiences of learning to give and take, to sense another’s feelings and needs, to share kindesses in words and deeds (Glasser, 1997).

Teachers have an important role during children’s play since they provide models of human qualities and encourage their development during play situations.

The teacher’s positive attitude, interest in individual children and groups, and enthusiasm for play experiences will influence children’s attitudes toward play and the meaning that they draw from their play experiences. The teacher’s role is to value, provide for, encourage, guide, and supervise the play of young children. However, the teacher does not become the object of the play or the center of attraction or dictate what the child can or should do in the play activity. Teachers should be available to support, assist, observe, scaffold, interact when appropriate to do so, and indirectly channel misbehavior, as well as direct and encourage positive behaviors. Teachers encourage play by modeling, planning with children, and playing with language (Fromberg, 1999, 2001). For play to be sustained or extended, children often need adult suggestion, intervention, or stimulation, but once limits have been established and children are comfortable with their environment, adults should intervene as little as possible.

Teachers can make suggestions for play activity and, through play, expand the children’s language development, increase conceptual understanding, answer questions, and encourage new social interactions and friendships. Perhaps the most important contribution they can make to foster children’s play is to provide ample time for play and create adequate protected space for playing (Balke, 1997).

During their play, children need opportunities for making choices—this is **student-centered** or **self-regulated learning**. Self-regulation is predictive of later functioning in areas such as problem solving, attention, and metacognition (NAEYC, 2009a). One of the best means for creating student engagement in learning is to allow children the opportunity to make decisions (Kohn, 1993). As they make choices, they feel in control, which results in their being able to

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### Play Facilitates:

- Learning
- Development
- Motivation
- Thinking and problem solving
- Social development and social awareness
- Flexibility
- Skill development
- Sensory awareness
- Attention span and listening
- Language acquisition and communication
- Physical and motor development
- Healthy emotional development
- Autonomy
- Imagination
- Metacognition (thinking about one’s own thinking)

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**Classroom Connection**

As you watch the video describe what kinds of play you see children participating in, and for each kind of play, write down the values of that type of play activity.
accept responsibility (Kelman, 1990). However, children’s interest will dwindle, and they may even stop playing, if teachers interfere too much or try to structure their play for them. Play is more valuable when children plan, define, shape, and carry out their own play activities (Kohn, 1993). Yet, the teacher’s role must not be diminished. Play should not be used as a reward for children who finish their work. Rather, it has to be planned for by the teacher, expected of all children, and encouraged and understood by parents. Well-planned play during early childhood is more important than adult instruction or formal, structured learning activities.

Although the teacher is important, other children provide the greatest source of complex play. Toys and materials do not sustain play as well as other children. Peers are thus an important part of the play environment. No matter how elaborate the physical facilities are with regard to play, the quality of the environment is determined by teachers and caregivers. They are the ones who evaluate the function of materials, space, time, and people and determine how to appropriately meet children’s needs.

Providing Developmentally Appropriate Materials to Support Play

Children need carefully selected, developmentally appropriate materials that meet the age range of children in the classroom (NAEYC, 2009). The materials, toys, and manipulatives are just objects until children use them to support ideas and understanding. To do this, they will need the guidance of thoughtful adults and caregivers to channel and support meaning making.

A particular piece of equipment can be enjoyed by children ages 3 to 8, but the older the child, the more advanced and complex it must be. The structure, as well as the style, of children’s play and play materials become more diverse as children mature. For example, children in a broad age range enjoy puzzles and matching materials; however, younger children need fewer pieces to prevent frustration and foster success. Age is not the determining factor here, but rather the developmental abilities of the child. For younger children, simple concepts such as shape and color should be presented, rather than concepts such as time, money, and more complex shapes. Children gain most from materials matched to their stage of development.

COMMERCIAL TOYS AND EQUIPMENT. The market is saturated with toys and early childhood equipment. It is imperative that in a developmentally appropriate classroom, educators make wise and careful selections.

General Criteria for Selecting Commercial Equipment, Toys, and Other Materials

1. The equipment should be appropriate for the children’s ages, levels of development, abilities, needs, and interests.
2. A good piece of equipment encourages participation and involvement, not just observation and entertainment. It should stimulate independent activity.
3. The equipment should be versatile or open-ended, allowing for additional creative and inventive potential.
4. The equipment should be simple and as free of detail as possible. This encourages versatility, imagination, variety, and appeal.
5. The equipment should be durable, safe, and sanitary and be repaired immediately when broken. When purchasing equipment, find out whether extra pieces or parts are available to replace those that may be lost or broken.

TEACHER-MADE LEARNING MATERIALS. In many instances, limited budgets determine the quantity and quality of the equipment and materials that can be purchased. In addition, many commercial toys are restricted in terms of their learning potential. Equipment, materials, and games can easily be made from accessible and inexpensive supplies. This section focuses on materials that contribute to conceptual, perceptual, and language development, in addition to supporting the concepts presented throughout this book.

Equipment and materials are tools for the teacher to use in teaching and reinforcing learning, as well as for the child to enjoy through play. They provide the child with the opportunity to develop concepts such as color, shape, and number, as well as visual perception and eye-hand coordination. Children also use skills that provide the foundation for developing abilities and understanding in reading, writing, and mathematical operations.

Wisely selected equipment and materials can be used in a variety of ways, including child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities. Frequently, when children initiate the play, it may simply (but importantly) involve exploration. Teachers can suggest, model, or prod, but ultimately the children should determine how they want to use equipment and materials (Kohn, 1993).

To sustain and extend play, a teacher could suggest additional ways of working with a material or...
even establish rules for games, such as dominoes. The teacher could ask, for example, "Have you ever thought about how the beads would look on the string if they were strung in a pattern such as two reds and then one blue, two reds and then one yellow, and so on?" Both kinds of play, child initiated and teacher initiated, are valuable. The selection depends on the individual situation and children.

Although many materials themselves stimulate children's imaginations for use, guided help and teacher assistance are needed to focus on the concept being emphasized. A set of shape dominoes may be used as blocks, for example, or for building corrals and fences. This is important and of great value. However, as play progresses, the children should be shown how to play shape dominoes with the blocks. Teachers do not always need to play with and be near children, but there are both intellectual and emotional advantages in doing so. Positive teacher–child relationships can be strengthened when teachers enjoy focusing on the use of materials and discussing basic concepts with the children. This provides a valuable opportunity for learning about each child's conceptual development. It is also an excellent time for visiting personally with children and becoming better acquainted with their needs, emotions, desires, and interests.

In deciding which materials, equipment, and games to make for enhancing classroom learning, remember that teacher-made materials should be prepared using basically the same criteria for selecting commercial materials and equipment. Be flexible in considering the various ways each material can be used. Many materials adapt to play by one child, many children, child and teacher, or children and teacher. Figure 1.1 shows some examples of teacher-made materials. Teacher-made materials are used in the same ways that commercial learning materials are used in classrooms. They provide hands-on learning, particularly during independent or small-group learning time.

Properly chosen toys and materials facilitate the children's play, as well as foster a developmentally appropriate program. Wisely selected teacher-made learning materials contribute to conceptual, perceptual, and language development. The effectiveness of the equipment depends on its arrangement, display, and organization; periodic rotation; and care and maintenance. Consider the goals of the materials and games you choose and remember that children can learn cooperation and other

![FIGURE 1.1 Examples of Teacher-Made Materials](image)
prosocial behaviors as well as more negative behaviors such as rejection, failure, and humiliation (Staley & Portman, 2000). Play is valuable, whether it is child initiated or teacher initiated, when the materials have been selected wisely, with care and understanding of young children’s developmental needs.

**Check Your Understanding 1.5**

Click here to gauge your understanding of the content in this section.

## PREPARING A DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE AND CURRICULUM-SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

A key element of Standard 1, Promoting Child Development and Learning, is to create a learning environment that is healthy, respectful, supportive, and challenging using developmental knowledge (NAEYC, 2009b). When teachers recognize and understand the developmental needs of young children, they are able to plan and organize appropriate play experiences and a suitable curriculum. This knowledge also positively influences the environment, which includes both the outdoor play area and the indoor classroom. The outdoor play yard offers children the sense of power, initiative, and opportunity for different kinds of activity and noise (Perry, 2003), but it does not happen by chance (Sutterby & Thornton, 2005). The outdoor environment is often neglected, or seen as time for the teacher to prepare for the next learning activity. However, outdoor play can be a valuable part of the early childhood curriculum as children engage in play, cooperation through organized games and activities, physical exercise, and so on (Bredekamp, 2011). This means that thoughtful preparation of the outdoor environment is as important as careful planning of the indoor environment (DeBord, Hestenes, Moore, Cosco, & McGinnis, 2002). Outdoor play benefits children in many ways, including health, fitness, and physical performance (Sutterby & Thornton, 2005). The neurological benefits of outdoor play affect children’s healthy brain development (Sutterby & Thornton, 2005).

The physical setting or environment has a great impact on the child in both an affective and a cognitive way. Feelings engendered in the child by the environment should include a sense of order, enthusiasm, interest, curiosity, cleanliness, and safety. The environment contributes to setting the tone of the school day for both the children and the teacher. An organized, attractive, clean, and cheerful or “warm” setting results in more positive behaviors and attitudes. When things in the environment are beautifully presented, young children have more respect for them and interact with them in a very different way (Wien, Coates, Keating, & Bigelow, 2005). In addition, the environment should offer opportunities for learning and increasing skill in all developmental areas: physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and language. Children need and deserve an environment conducive to learning, growing, positive behavior, and good play.

**Guidelines for Arranging the Early Childhood Classroom**

The materials and equipment should be appropriate for the developmental level of the children in the class (NAESP, 1990). Indoor and outdoor environments should be arranged to avoid situations that naturally frustrate or anger children. For example, a mixture of toys or materials should not be stored in the same box. If a child desires to play with a soldier that happens to be at the bottom of the box and dumps out the whole box of toys to get to it, the child may become angry or frustrated when told to pick up all the other toys. The child may honestly say, “But I didn’t play with all the toys, only the soldier.” Toys and equipment should be complete and in good repair. It is frustrating to put a puzzle together only to find that a piece is missing. Some incomplete or unrepaired materials are unsafe. For example, worn, rough wooden blocks can have splinters; vehicles missing wheels or broken parts can be dangerously sharp.

### Guidelines for a Developmentally Appropriate Environment

1. Equipment and materials must be the correct size and height for children. This means that pictures and bulletin boards should be placed at the child’s eye level, not the teacher’s. Coat hooks, cupboards, shelves, and other materials or items should be where the children can reach them. For comfort and availability, chairs and other furniture pieces should be the appropriate size.

2. The room should be organized and uncluttered. A disorderly environment frequently ignites similar behavior in children. Classrooms are more orderly and interesting when teachers avoid putting everything out at once. For example, if your classroom has six puzzles, put only one or two out at a time. However, there must be enough toys for all the children to have something to play with. Material for specific areas or learning centers in the room should be kept separate. As part of cleanup, encourage children to put away toys and materials where they belong.
3. Reflect the local culture in the classroom. Make certain the room is free of stereotypes. Pictures, toys, materials, dress-up clothes, and other objects should reflect the diversity of people and genders.

4. Consider the traffic flow when planning the room arrangement. Eliminate long corridors or “running spaces” that encourage children to run. Break up long spaces, for example, with a trough filled with sensory media. Arrange art areas near a sink for easy access to cleanup. By wisely planning the environment, teachers can indirectly manage behavior. This is referred to as behavior prevention.

5. Provide large-motor equipment both indoors and outdoors. Inside, large-motor equipment presents an opportunity for active play (Curtis & Carter, 2005). Where possible, keep noisy areas close together and apart from quiet areas (Curtis & Carter, 2005). For example, it would not be wise to put a music area with a rhythm band right next to the story area. There should also be a place where children can get away and be alone. This is especially essential in full-day programs (Curtis & Carter, 2005).

6. The classroom and outdoor areas must be clean, neat, and cheerful. The physical environment must be clean for health and sanitary reasons alone. The classroom walls should be considered as part of the educational environment and not just something to be decorated (Tarr, 2004). Cheerful, bright touches, combined with carefully selected bulletin board pictures, can support the unit theme being studied. Photographs of the children at work on projects and activities should be placed at a level for them to enjoy. Their pictures and work should also be displayed in the room, and a comment or question a child makes during an activity can be placed alongside the child’s work (Katz, 1990; Tarr, 2004). But be careful not to add too many displays. Simplicity should be the guideline for the entire environment.

7. The organization and setup of the room should encourage children to keep the room orderly while developing classifying, categorizing, or matching skills. In the block area, for example, trace a pattern for each size and shape of the small unit blocks on solid-colored, adhesive-backed paper. Then, organize and sequence these patterns on the block shelf so the children can match the blocks to the pattern and, at the same time, organize the block area. Another possibility is to put hooks in the housekeeping area and then place a picture of a hat, dress, or slacks above specific hooks. This encourages children to sense that objects have a place to be put and facilitates matching and classifying. Pictures of fruits, vegetables, and dairy products can be glued in specific locations of the refrigerator. A similar method can be used in the stove and cupboard by gluing pictures that will help children classify and match items to be placed in these areas. Tools can be hung on a pegboard and matched to their shape.

8. Teachers should be able to see and supervise all areas of the room. Place tall cabinets and shelves against the wall and use shorter cabinets and shelves as area dividers. In addition, create play places at different angles and levels to create interest (Curtis & Carter, 2005).

9. Consider the care and storage of equipment and materials. For example, to facilitate the cleanup of paint or glue brushes, have some cans or containers of water to put brushes into immediately after use so that the paint or glue will not harden. Ideally, there will be clean, orderly, organized storage areas outside the classroom, or higher than the children’s reach, where some materials can be stored. Other materials and supplies such as paints, paper, pencils, and paint shirts should be accessible to children so they can take responsibility for getting them and putting them away (Casey & Lippman, 1991).

10. Rotate areas and materials to create interest. You may ask, “Will children feel secure in an environment that is frequently changed?” The answer is yes. The teacher provides the security, while the changing environment encourages interest, learning, fun, and interaction among children. Children need variety and become bored with toys that are not rotated.

11. Each area, piece of equipment, and material should have purpose and meaning. In evaluating areas and equipment, ask such questions as “Why am I using this?” and “What am I trying to accomplish?” Remember that the physical setting should serve the needs and interests of the children in the classroom.

12. Choose versatile materials and equipment that lend themselves to a variety of uses and activities. Materials should be open-ended (Curtis & Carter, 2005).

Play should be the very heart of the early childhood curriculum.
Arranging the Environment with Areas to Meet Developmental Needs

Classrooms should be divided into areas, with each area providing opportunities to satisfy children’s developmental needs. If a child avoids a particular area over a period of time, encourage the child to use this area. Avoidance may be an indication of insecurity or uncertainty with the area.

Kindergarten and first- and second-grade children may find a contract helpful to promote on-task behavior. A contract is an individualized activity plan that incorporates both teacher guidance and student interests. Contracts can also effectively guide children to learning areas. Figures 1.2 and 1.3 include examples of sample contracts for use with young children. As a child participates in each activity or area, he or she colors in the square or makes a check mark or an “X” in the box. The study of individual contracts for several days alerts teachers to areas or activities that the children are not participating in, as well as those in which they are interested. Contracts also serve as a means of assessment and as a springboard for parent–teacher discussions and conferences. Figure 1.2 would be used for children 3, 4, and 5 years of age, and Figure 1.3 would be used for 6-, 7-, and 8-year-olds.

Block Building Provides Opportunities for Children to Develop Strength, Balance, and Coordination.

Allow children to choose areas or centers by placing pictures or names of the centers on a board along with hooks under each that determine how many children can be in this center. When children want to go to a particular center, they put their name or picture on the hook under the name or picture of the center. Even preschool children can be effective planners, and approaches such as this help them focus on their choices (Casey & Lippman, 1991).

Classroom Connection

View the video and specify ways the early childhood teacher might foster a print-rich environment in the classroom.

Because these areas of the room satisfy various needs, they should be organized, orderly, inviting, and on the child’s level. Areas can be changed or modified occasionally to maintain motivation and interest. For example, weekly rotation of toys in the manipulative area will stimulate new exploration. Sensory and creative areas can be changed more frequently, depending on the space, the theme or project, and the balance of planned activities.

The environment should support the curriculum, with the room setup and outdoor playground supporting the unit theme being presented whenever possible. For example, if the current theme is “fish,” the block area could be converted into a large fishing pond, with the large hollow blocks set up as the banks of the pond. Fish cutouts with attached paper clips could be caught in the pond, using fishing pole magnets. An aquarium or trough containing live fish could be used as a learning area. Bulletin boards could feature fish and fishing. Another example of adapting a room area to a theme, in this case “mail and the mail carrier,” is to convert the jungle gym into a mail truck by using colored butcher paper and a little imagination.

Classroom Connection

Watch the video on preschool room arrangement and note various areas of the classroom and guidelines a teacher should be aware of in each area.

The following areas are suggested for early childhood classrooms. The size of the room may limit the use of all areas at one time, and the more areas in a classroom, the more complex the environment.

Outside play area. These will be determined by the facility and what is available, but there is evidence from current research that increasing the quality of the playground environment encourages children’s overall health (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2007). The play yard should be mapped out and carefully planned to meet outcomes and objectives, remembering that complex learning happens...
outdoors (Perry, 2003). The play yard for primary-grade children is used for structured play experiences as well as recess. Recess is unstructured playtime when children have choices as well as the opportunity to release energy and stress (Council for Physical Education for Children, 2006). Recess is developmentally appropriate and contributes to the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of the child (National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education, 2002).

The playground should have appropriate permanent pieces of equipment such as domes, slides, various climbing apparatus, nesting climbers with boards and bridges, and an adjustable basketball standard and backboard. Items such as barrels, inner tubes, and other salvage pieces can often be purchased inexpensively. Versatile

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**FIGURE 1.2 Sample Contract for Preschoolers**
modular gym systems can be set up in a variety of ways for use both indoors and outdoors. Specific and purposeful playground equipment can help children develop skill in climbing, swinging, and balancing (Sutterby & Thornton, 2005).

**Large-muscle area.** Include equipment for large-muscle development. Dome climbers or jungle gyms are ideal for large rooms because they can be moved to different areas. Some types of smaller jungle gyms fold flat for easy storage and are more appropriate in smaller areas. Other large-muscle development equipment includes balance beams, slides, indoor jumping trampolines, and nesting climbers set up in a variety of ways. It is important to plan how the equipment will be set up each day and to plan in a way that facilitates the physical and motor needs of both the group and individual children (Poest, Williams, Witt, & Atwood, 1990).
Dramatic play area. These areas provide opportunities for role playing, trying out, pretending, and acting out familiar and imaginary experiences. Playing house seems to be the most preferred theme for young children; grocery stores and doctor’s offices also spark interest. Teachers or other adults can function in a variety of roles, including onlooker, stage manager, supporter, or play leader (Cooper & Dever, 2001). Additional possibilities are suggested later in the chapter.

Drama center. In this center, include activities such as puppet plays, readers’ theater, or choral reading activities.

Sensory play area. May include a trough, tubs, or other methods of setting up media for sensory exploration. Such media might include water, sand, clay, wheat, Styrofoam packing pieces, sawdust, or other available material. Such tools as funnels, bottles, shovels, scoops, cups, beaters, or other items also add occasional interest.

Creative arts area. Provide media such as paints, collage materials, chalk, charcoal, crayons, felt-tipped markers, colored pencils, and other sources to be used with paper on easels, tables, floors, or walls.

Block area. These are often near or part of the large-muscle area. Many classrooms are large enough to accommodate both large and small unit blocks. The block area (especially when it includes large, hollow blocks), the large-muscle area, and sometimes the outdoor play area give children opportunities to develop strength, coordination, and balance. Manipulative and creative toys such as small cars, farm animals, zoo animals, or human figures used together with blocks can stimulate block play and provide variety. If you use human figures, make sure they reflect diverse people.

Science area or interest centers. These are often part of the early childhood classroom, especially for supporting science unit themes. For example, during a theme on “color,” provide different activities such as color mixing. The science area could be a table with items, displays, or simple experiments that focus on helping children explore their environment. Magnifying glasses or microscopes encourage additional exploration and study. Also include items involving math and measuring.

A “book nook” or library area. This area provides a place to explore the world through books. Select books to meet the children’s developmental needs and to support the theme or concepts being taught. The entire book supply should not be displayed at one time; occasional book rotation stimulates renewed interest. There should always be a rug, chair, or table nearby for reading or being read to. Some of the children’s favorite books will be those that they author. These may be individual or class projects and may or may not relate to the theme or project being explored. Also include magazines, newspapers, puppets, flannel board stories, paper, and writing implements.

Music area. These are places where children listen to music, sing, play musical instruments, or perform creative dances. Additional equipment should include appropriate tapes or CDs and/or rhythm band instruments.

Manipulative play area. This area includes small blocks, pegboards, puzzles, number games, bead-stringing activities, magnetic games, and similar equipment. Puzzles and other toys should show diversity and should not have any stereotypic images (Derman-Sparks & A.B.C. Task Force, 1989). Display shelves, tables, and chairs help extend interest spans.

Computer or technology area. This area includes computers with developmentally appropriate software. Carefully selected hardware and software require teachers with technology training. Young children are becoming very savvy and confident users of technology. They have watched the many facets of computer use in their homes and in the world around them. Teachers need to take advantage of their interest and skill in using computers.

Lockers or cubbies. These may be inside or outside the classroom. Each child should each have a place labeled with his or her name for storing belongings and hanging outerwear. If these spaces are inside the classroom, they could also serve as

Carefully Select Developmentally Appropriate Hardware and Software.
Learning centers. These are designed to promote concepts and competencies to be explored independently and are planned according to the developmental needs and abilities of the children in the group. Some early childhood teachers use learning centers to structure direct teaching of particular concepts. For example, assign small groups of children to different learning centers. With the assistance of parents, teaching aides, and others, the groups work at a different center each day, so by the end of the week they have participated in all five centers. Other examples of learning centers include the Making Words Center, where children participate in a variety of developmentally appropriate activities to work with and construct words (McLaughlin, 2010).

Interest centers. These are based on the interests of the children in the classroom. For example, if a child brings in a rock, this may be the stimulus for an interest center on rocks that could include rock collections, books, and other rocks brought by the children.

Although we have not attempted to list the room areas in the daily plans and lesson plans, we assume they will be well thought out. Remember to vary using these areas and change them often to ensure continued interest and variety. In the plans suggested in this book, we have included individual activities that could be used on specific days and for theme reinforcement.

**Check Your Understanding 1.6**
Click here to gauge your understanding of the content in this section.

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**Summary**

We have looked at early childhood education historically and have found that its roots go back for centuries. We have examined early childhood education today and recognize that great strides have been made, and that we need to continue making progress. All children should be provided with high-quality childcare, regardless of their gender, race, religion, or economic situation. There needs to be increased support for the strengthening of family traditions, experiences, and expectations. Early childhood teachers should be highly trained, thoughtful, enthusiastic, creative, empathetic, hopeful, tolerant, understanding, warm, and nurturing.

In addition, our concern is for the quality of kindergarten and primary-grade education, which too often have an academic focus. We have cautioned against inappropriate, pressurized early learning. We propose that children want to learn, and successful DAP begins with, and builds on, concepts that are relevant during the early years. Early childhood education should be different from other kinds of education. We need to provide experiences that contribute to the development of the whole child, and these experiences should be available for all children to help them reach their full potential.

Developmentally appropriate early childhood education means providing a curriculum and environment that are right for the developmental needs of children. The developmental needs and characteristics of age groups and individual children need to be understood, and learning activities and goals should be based on the knowledge that children in early childhood are ready for learning through their senses, utilizing experiences, materials, and concrete activities.

Play is an integral part of the early childhood environment and curriculum. Play does not stifle or prevent learning; rather, it enables children to learn (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). It is imperative that teachers recognize the inherent values in play, organize an environment
that reflects these values, and plan a curriculum based on play. Play is developmentally right for children 3 to 8 years of age. It is what they need, based on our understanding of their developmental characteristics.

The physical environment is an important ingredient in determining the feeling or tone of the classroom or center and should focus on DAP. Early childhood educators must recognize their responsibility in creating a physical environment that has positive influences on the learning and growth of the children who use the environment. Toys and materials must be properly selected, used, stored, and cared for. Time spent creating an appropriate and inviting environment offering many opportunities for play will benefit learning.

We all recognize that the formative years are birth through eight years of age. As teachers of young children, we can shape the world that the children and their parents will live in (Hernandez, 2010). Currently, many of the public efforts and budgets address fixing problems in young children after they occur. We need to change the focus of the public efforts and budgets to preventing problems in the first place. This will involve parents and professionals who recognize, understand, and support such ideas as the learning potential of young children; the value of play and outdoor activities; the importance of family culture and racial identity; and the value of social-emotional development. Are we, as educators, spending too much time debating play or academics, child initiated or teacher directed, cognitive or social? It should be both play and academics, both child initiated and teacher directed, both cognitive and socio-emotional (Bredekamp, 2010). Goldilocks searched for the best solutions that were neither too hard nor too soft, but were “just right.” As early childhood teachers, we must also find the middle ground as we encourage and support children’s development and learning (Bredekamp, 2010). We need to make sure that the focus on early academics and early learning does not prevent our children from experiencing the joys of childhood (Hernandez, 2010).

**Chapter Quiz 1.1**

Click here to assess how well you’ve learned the content in this chapter.

**Student Learning Activities**

1. Make a time line depicting the history of early childhood education. What people and/or events do you personally feel have made the most significant contributions to early childhood education?
2. From your reading and observation, make a summary chart of the characteristics of children ages 3 to 8 years. Why is it important that early childhood teachers be aware of these characteristics in the children that they teach? What precautions should be taken in applying developmental characteristics?
3. Visit an early childhood classroom or center and write a brief report of your visit. Answer as many of the following questions as possible: In what activities were the children involved? What is the nature of the facilities, both indoors and outdoors? What kinds of resources did you observe? What kind of program is offered? How many children and teachers were there? Based on your visit, what are your feelings about early childhood education? In terms of your visit, evaluate the program with regard to its advantages and/or disadvantages for the young children it serves.
4. Describe characteristics of DAP. Visit at least three different early childhood classrooms or centers and evaluate them on the basis of DAP. What did you learn?
5. Why do you think child-guided play is important? Visit an early childhood classroom and evaluate the kinds of opportunities for play.
6. Using the criteria for room arrangement suggested in this chapter, draw a sample room arrangement. Describe the intended age group. Explain why you included the specific areas. Does the arrangement support a particular curriculum theme?

7. After reading the chapter, observing in early childhood classrooms, and reflecting on and creating your own philosophy of how young children learn, write a one-page paper on your thoughts on DAP.

**Suggested Resources**


Online Resources

There are thousands of websites that will give you further understanding on the importance of early childhood education, developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), the importance of play, and early childhood standards. We suggest you explore the websites of the following organizations and bookmark those that will be most helpful to you.

United States Census Bureau—Children. A variety of census data relating to many aspects of childhood are available on this site.

Children’s Defense Fund. This site promotes advocacy for American children, particularly poor and minority children. See the interesting piece titled “Moments in the Lives of American Children.”

The National Association for the Education of Young Children is a professional association. They have an information-rich site including standards, position statements, articles, and information on program guidelines for young children.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has a variety of resources on selecting safe, appropriate toys; search for toys.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission advises about toy selection and provides safety alerts about products on the market.

The National Lekotek Center makes play accessible to children with disabilities. Play and learning centers for children and families are located throughout the country.

The Lion and Lamb Project works to stop the marketing of violence to children through guides, training, and advocacy. The dangers of marketing media violence (television, video games, movies, music, toys, etc.) to children’s health and well-being are addressed.

The International Association for the Child’s Right to Play (IPA) publishes a quarterly newsletter and offers its Declaration of Child’s Right to Play.

National Network for Child Care. Information on many facets of developmentally appropriate practice is provided.
The term partnerships, by its very definition, denotes a relationship of equality among the partners (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2010). It also assumes that each partner has unique and valuable knowledge and contributions to make to this relationship. The importance of partnerships is easy to recognize, but actually practicing as equal partners requires willingness, acceptance, determination, understanding, and communication (Moorman Kim et al., 2012). We know that early childhood programs benefit from partnerships with families. How much more benefit is realized when we include the community in the relationship (Starbuck & Olthof, 2008). After all, children are social beings growing up within families and communities (Dockett & Perry, 2008). Research continually shows long-lasting benefits for children when families are involved in education programs (Souto-Manning, 2010).

**FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

Increasing attention has recently been given to the importance of parent involvement in young children’s learning (Baker & Manfred/Petitt, 2004; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2004; Daniel, 2009; Epstein, 2009). All families want to help their children be successful—academically, socially, and in their careers (Ball, 2006; Koralek, 2007). As teachers of young children, we must understand that parents are essential partners in their children’s education.

Most of us, as teachers, have chosen the early childhood education profession because of our love for children and a desire to work with them; however, a major part of our job involves working with children’s families (Keyser, 2006). Although teachers and administrators recognize the need for developing partnerships with families in the early childhood programs, there is still a significant lack of actual family involvement in the schools. Evidence suggests that most parents also want to be involved in their children’s education, but are unsure of what to do (Narvaez, Feldman, & Theriot, 2006).

In addition, families are under ever-increasing pressure to meet the challenges of today’s rapidly changing society and to avoid potential ill effects. Parents should provide learning opportunities for children in the home, become more involved in their children’s schooling, form partnerships with their children’s teachers, and participate in parent education (Harvard Family Research Project, 2006; Raikes & Edwards, 2009). When we (as teachers) are responsive to parents’ and families’ needs, we are able to work with them and provide support. When they feel supported, we can work together for the success of their children (Arndt & McGuire-Schwartz, 2008). This chapter will explore many of the benefits of parent/family involvement, as well as some
of the barriers that prevent effective partnerships, and discuss strategies for promoting strong family partnerships in early childhood classrooms.

Even though the importance of school–family partnerships is generally accepted, there is often little or no training for helping teachers implement this valuable relationship. Often, the relationships that do exist are ineffective and even “dysfunctional” (Baker & Manfredi/Pettit, 2004, p. ix). Frequently, parental involvement is limited to back-to-school events at the beginning of the year, occasional help with scheduled parties and field trips, or periodic parent–teacher conferences, usually formal in nature and with a set time limit. Parents and teachers may not feel secure working with each other; attitudes, ideas, values, previous experiences, cultures, and other influences all may make communication with one another difficult. Not only are we not always confident in knowing how to work with parents, but they are often uncertain about how they can become involved in their children's education. Parents may not even be aware that they can, and should, be an important part of their children's lives during early school years. Still, teachers are expected to involve parents, and parents are expected to become involved, and so the partnership needs to begin by building a trusting relationship. Teachers and parents must search for common ground for children to achieve optimum academic, emotional, speech–language, social, moral, and physical development. We need to recognize and accept that both teachers and parents have the experience, knowledge, expertise, and resources that are needed for the best care, support, and education of their child (Gonzalez-Mena & Eyer, 2004).

Families and schools share a mutual responsibility in helping children to learn (Myers & Myers, 2005; J. Thompson, 2004). This resulting relationship should be “reciprocal,” or based on mutual respect, appreciation, and the exchange of ideas (NAEYC, 2008). Every effort must therefore be made to strengthen this important link. These desired relationships must reflect a basic concept of equality and shared responsibility. Neither teachers nor parents can effectively teach young children by themselves (Myers & Myers, 2005). Powell (1998) refers to an imagined woven fabric typically made when the threads of the children and staff of an early childhood program are woven together, and the threads of the parents are woven into a separate parent involvement section. He suggests that a much better design results when the parents’ threads are interwoven with those of the children and staff throughout the fabric pattern.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct helps teachers to clarify their professional responsibilities. Mutual trust, respect for the family’s values and culture, and involvement of the family when important decisions are being made are essential components. It is imperative that teachers be familiar with and base their program practices on current knowledge in the fields relating to child development, recognize and respect the uniqueness and potential of each child, and recognize the special vulnerability of children (NAEYC, 2005). Failing to incorporate these personal ethical responsibilities often results in breakdowns to the partnerships between families and schools.

Parents make the difference between a mediocre school and a great school. Everyone benefits when parents are involved in their child's education, and all parents have competencies that will help their child succeed in school. The school and the home must be partners, because they are both vital parts of the child's life and education. Family involvement in school rewards children in terms of attitudes and achievement; and the earlier the family becomes involved, the greater the benefits! A two-way flow of support and information between home and school strengthens the child's experiences in both.

Because of differences in their experiences and backgrounds, families and teachers can each contribute to the relationship as their knowledge and understanding of each other and the young child increases (Myers & Myers, 2005). Families know the values and goals they desire for their children, and the kind of person they want their child to grow up to be. Families can become better acquainted with the school's programs, and teachers can become more aware of children’s home situations. As they learn each other's values and goals, they are able to be more supportive of each other.

Some teachers believe that planning for families' involvement takes too much time. However, despite the difficulties, research has accumulated on the positive effects of family participation in educational programs (Keyser, 2006; Koralek, 2007; Myers & Myers, 2005; NAEYC, 2004; Souto-Manning, 2010). Although many parents want to become involved in the classroom, some prefer not to become involved, so we must make both kinds of parents feel comfortable in their preferences. Often those who do not want to be in the classroom will change their perspective as they become more familiar with the curriculum and environment. Teachers can begin by developing positive attitudes toward family involvement, helping parents and staff to understand the benefits that will come. There is a clear relationship between the teacher's attitude toward parent involvement and the actual level of involvement: the more positive a teacher feels about involving parents, the higher the level of parent involvement.
Classroom Connection
Watch the video on effective parent involvement and note suggestions for successfully involving parents in the classroom.

Many strategies and techniques will assist schools and homes in developing partnerships that benefit everyone involved and help parents realize that their participation makes a difference. Developing a positive attitude toward working with families is a major step in developing good relationships with parents.

For clarity, we use the term parents in this chapter to include parents, single parents, grandparents, guardians, and foster parents. Keep this in mind as you adapt the activities and suggestions to the needs of your students’ families.

Check Your Understanding 2.1
Click here to gauge your understanding of the content in this section.

ACTIVE FAMILY INVOLVEMENT: BENEFITS AND BARRIERS

Both the home and early childhood program environments are vitally important in the development of a child (Halgunseth, 2009). The family is the young child’s earliest educator, and parents have a lasting influence on their child’s attitudes, values, learning, concepts, emotions, and ideas. Even though many parents are not aware of how important they are in their child’s education, there is extensive and convincing evidence regarding the benefits of parent involvement for children, parents and their teachers. When families are involved, children tend to have fewer problem behaviors and stronger social skills (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010); improved interpersonal competence (Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird, & Kupzyk, 2010); improved attendance, better homework habits, more positive attitudes toward school (Olsen and Fuller, 2008); and greater gains in reading and math (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education [NCPIE], 2006).

Parents who are involved in their children’s school are more knowledgeable about child development, have increased self-confidence in parenting, and are aware of the importance of the home as a learning environment (Epstein et al., 2009; Olsen & Fuller, 2008). Teachers also reap benefits from parental involvement in the classroom. Teachers generally report a greater understanding of families’ cultures, increased appreciation for parents’ interests and desires to help their children, and more respect for parents’ abilities and time (Epstein et al, 2009; Olsen & Fuller, 2008).

Benefits of Parent Involvement for Children

- Make greater gains in reading, vocabulary, and language comprehension
- Have a more positive attitude about school
- Have higher self-esteem
- Have higher attendance
- Have better homework habits
- Make better home–school connections
- See parents as important part of education

Benefits of Parent Involvement for Parents

- More willing to help children at home with their homework
- More likely to communicate with teachers and support their efforts
- Greater familiarity with what children are being taught in school
- Better understanding of the functioning of the school and the role they play in their children’s education
- Greater confidence in their parenting skills
- More understanding of child growth and development
- More likely to expect their children to go to college

Benefits of Parent Involvement for Teachers

- Higher morale and increased job satisfaction
- Improved communication and relationships with parents


Because of early childhood education’s focus on parents and families, we assume that fathers are automatically included. However, early childhood educators tend to become more involved with mothers than with fathers. Yet, the benefits of father involvement in the life and care of the child seem obvious (Parlakian & Rovaris, 2009). Some professionals still consider the father in the family as the disciplinarian and the mother as the nurturer. But the child and family both benefit when parenting is a partnership. This, in turn, enhances the partnership that develops between schools and families.

Most fathers want to be, and should be, involved in the decisions affecting their children. Fathers and mothers should both be included and valued as volunteers in the classroom. Research suggests that fathers want to participate in their children’s programs and that this involvement results in more positive outcomes for the children and the rest of the family (Gadsden & Ray, 2002; Nelson, 2002; Nelson, Carlson, & West, Sr., 2006; Parlakian & Rovaris, 2009; Rump, 2002). Sanders (2002) suggests ways to support the involvement of male family members in the early childhood education classroom:

- Invite men to take part in school activities involving families.
- Address communications to fathers/grandfathers.
- Find out what activities fathers would be interested in at the school.
- Involve males in parenting education classes.
- Schedule meetings/volunteer times, while considering available hours for fathers.

Both parents are so important in the nurturing of the child. In particular, the role and importance of fathers needs to be emphasized (Gadsden & Ray, 2002). Effective parenting programs plan activities and experiences in which both parents can become involved (Gadsden & Ray, 2002). When children see both men and women as caring, nurturing, skilled, and involved adults in the classroom, they learn that women and men do not have to be limited or confined by gender (Sanders, 2002). More books and articles about men who teach have been written in the last 15 years than ever before. Also, more movies are focusing on men as being involved in teaching children.

More schools, universities, organizations, and programs are welcoming more men as teachers (Nelson, Carlson, & West, Sr., 2006). Men care about children as much as women do and have the ability to create a warm, caring environment in which children can flourish, we just need to give them opportunities to do so (Sanders, 2002).

### When Fathers Are Involved in School

**Children are more likely to:**

- Enjoy school (U.S. Department of Education, 1997)
- Achieve higher grades (U.S. Department of Education, 1997)
- Participate in extracurricular activities (U.S. Department of Education, 1997)
- Develop positive social competence and emotional regulation (Harris, 2010)

**Children are less likely to:**

- Repeat a grade (U.S. Department of Education, 1997)
- Be suspended or expelled from school (U.S. Department of Education, 1997)
- Behave violently in school (Smith, 1995)
- Be involved in acts of juvenile delinquency (Elias, 1996)

In addition to the many benefits associated with active family involvement, there are also often barriers to overcome. In any job involving human relationships, forming positive and constructive associations is often the most challenging aspect. Because some parents’ contacts with schools and teachers have not been positive, teachers often have to work diligently to combat negative attitudes. Some teachers view parents as threats, and some parents develop the same view of teachers. Keep in mind the challenge to serve families and not just children. Remember that children come from families and spend much time within those families.

Be careful not to appear too strong or too authoritarian. You are a professional, and you do have much...
skill and expertise. However, some teachers give parents the feeling that they "know it all" and that they consider their ways and values to be the best. This attitude almost immediately breaks down relationships with parents.

Social, linguistic, cultural barriers, or separations may interfere with effective communication and work with parents. These barriers may involve differences in values, approved child-rearing methods, behavior standards, accepted foods, and many other areas. Complete agreement on everything is unrealistic, but through communication and daily contact, effective parent–teacher partnerships can be formed. Recognize that although a child may have two parents, both parents might not be living in the home together all the time. Separations can be the result of employment where a parent is gone for periods of time, divorce, death, illness, or military deployments. Children respond to separations in individual ways, but anxiety, depression, withdrawal, hyper-vigilance, regression to prior developmental levels (thumb sucking, toileting accidents, dependency and clinging behaviors), aggression, and anger may be exhibited (Kim & Yeary, 2008).

In working to overcome some of the barriers to effective relationships with families, show interest and respect for cultural differences in family values (Hutchins, Greenfeld, Epstein, Sanders, & Galindo, 2012). Cultural differences include ethnic, racial, and linguistic diversity; region or geographic location; religion; and socioeconomic status (Bradley & Kibera, 2006). The various practices and beliefs of these cultural differences can affect how we interact with families. Be aware of these variations when considering the following issues: eye contact, touch, silence, smiling, personal space, time concepts, gender roles, adult authority, and autonomy (Epstein, 2009). Spend time listening to parents and learning about their feelings, values, and culture. Becoming effective at cross-cultural communication will minimize misinterpretations and biases.

The importance of listening as a means of building effective teacher–parent relationships cannot be stressed enough. Because parents are especially knowledgeable about a child’s past development, current attributes, and abilities, it is imperative that teachers listen to and learn from them. As teachers, we see only one side of children, and it is important to find out from parents what kind of person their child is at home and at other places. We need to know children individually if we are to make developmentally appropriate decisions for them. This is accomplished through becoming more acquainted with the child and family (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). When teachers ask families about their children, it lets the parents know that their insights and knowledge are valued. This two-way partnership encourages communication and respect from both partners (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Frequently, parents will have insights into their child’s behavior that the teacher could not possibly know from associating with the child only in the school setting. The parents may have developed methods for handling the child’s behavior challenges at home that would work equally well for the teacher in the classroom. Perhaps the parents have deep concerns, complaints, or irritations that can be resolved through listening and effective communication. Sometimes simply airing concerns to sensitive and understanding teachers helps parents feel more comfortable in the relationship. Provide parents with a constant opportunity to share these feelings—there are many ways to do this.
An open communication line regarding very young children can be established through daily contact as parents pick up their children from preschool. Remind parents that their feelings and suggestions are welcomed by making such comments as, “How are you feeling about (child’s name’s) school experience? Is there any way I can be more supportive?” At the initial meeting or conference, indicate the time of day when you can be contacted. Encourage parents with concerns to call you. Parents will sense the sincerity and honesty of the suggestion. Begin developing a strong, positive relationship from the very start. This will build trust and will also make it easier to deal with problems or sensitive issues that may need to be addressed in the future (Kersey & Masterson, 2009). Trusting relationships are developed over a period of time through shared understandings, communication, and empathy (Bennett, 2007). Empathizing with parents—imagining what they might be feeling or thinking—helps parents feel valued, understood, and cared for (Gillespie, 2006). When a parent makes a comment, demand, or request that seems unusual or inappropriate, we should try to think why the comment might have been made (Keyser, 2006). This will help us understand more about the family and its beliefs or practices. Unless we have developed a positive relationship with families, they will not be receptive to our suggestions addressing parenting, education, or interventions (Hyson, 2008).

Check Your Understanding 2.2
Click here to gauge your understanding of the content in this section.

GUIDELINES FOR BUILDING STRONG FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Programs vary in the kind and amount of family involvement, but we do know that schools cannot work in isolation. If programs in early childhood education are to succeed, parental support and participation are significant factors, and children need to continue to receive stimulation from parents. The early, formative partnerships between families and teachers affect the connections between families and schools later in the child’s schooling. When parents are supported in their initial attempts to offer suggestions and participate in decision making, they will likely continue their efforts in their child’s later school years (Dabkowski, 2004). Remember that all parents care about their children and most understand the value of partnerships. Also, all parents have strengths and knowledge to contribute. Be careful and do not assume that a parent’s absence implies a lack of caring!

Traditionally, teachers have met with parents twice yearly for parent–teacher conferences and report sessions. Today, however, teachers realize that more interactions between parents and teachers are necessary, with much more communication between the two. Parents should feel welcome not only at school and program activities, but also in the classroom. They must realize that they have a direct influence on their child’s education. Children should be made to feel safe and secure as they move back and forth each day between their two worlds of home and school. Teachers should follow a number of general guidelines as they strive to build strong family relationships (e.g., providing multiple opportunities for parents to get involved in their child’s education both at school and at home, offering support to parents and families, and respecting differences).

Asking parents to volunteer their time and talents in a variety of school and classroom activities/functions is a natural way to get parents more involved. We can involve parents when schools are developing standards and implementing new teaching methods and strategies. We can appeal to parents’ interests, strengths, experience, and knowledge; parents need to know that they are needed. This is achieved by recruiting volunteers, making them feel welcome, planning ways to involve them, and supervising them. They can be involved in such areas as art, woodworking, blocks, dramatic play, manipulative play, music, library, writing, science, and outdoor play. If parents are unable to be in the classroom, there are many other ways to involve them—they can create a web page or newsletter for the classroom, make homemade learning toys and games, read and record stories or music, sew clothes for dramatic play, and so on (DiNatale, 2002).

Parents can provide resources for the classroom and be resources for particular units of study. Parents can be assistant teachers or teacher’s aides working in the classroom with the children. One teacher found that a successful way to involve parents is to invite them into the classroom to talk one-on-one about the books that the children are reading.

Teachers also need to help parents understand that involvement in their child’s education doesn’t only happen at school, much of this important contribution happens at home. Parents’ involvement may be as simple as letting their child know that they value education, reading to their child at home, encouraging their child with homework, and supporting at-home projects. Remember that teachers instruct both the children and their parents. The concepts being taught at school will be supported at home when parents also understand the concepts. Provide frequent avenues for parents to learn about the information being experienced by their children. Not only does it increase their own understanding, but it also provides numerous opportunities for them to reinforce concepts learned at school.

Because children learn through playing, the home environment should include games, toys, and activities
that support playing. It is also valuable for parents to become actively involved with children in play. Playing with children provides opportunities for parents to bond socially, physically, intellectually, and emotionally with them. Such involvement includes talking about the toy/game, physically interacting with the child while playing with a toy/game, and singing/saying nursery rhymes and songs. Traditional games such as The Farmer in the Dell; London Bridge; Duck, Duck, Goose; I Have a Little Doggie and He Won’t Bite You; Peek-a-Boo; Pat-a-Cake; Jump Rope; Ring Around the Rosie; Drop the Handkerchief; and other familiar activities provide opportunities for enjoyable interaction with children. These types of activities are also valuable in helping children learn crucial social skills as they explore peer relationships (R. B. Jones, 2004).

Another current trend is to extend the curriculum into the home through the support of parents. School hours pass quickly, and children have an added advantage if their parents can support what is being taught at school by teaching, reinforcing, and extending these same ideas and concepts at home. They can help children with homework, talk with them about their school days and activities, and listen to them read. Remember: Not only is it important that parents support children’s learning to read, but that children never get too old to be read to!

Teachers need to support parents as they make efforts to teach their children at home. Often, when parents ask their children what they did in school, the response is “Nothing.” Teachers know that the child’s response may be because the child is tired or not really interested in talking about the day. Parents could be left wondering what actually did take place during the school day or how to reinforce or extend what their child is learning at school. It is helpful if teachers take advantage of using individual child portfolios, photographs, videotapes, handmade classroom books, calendars, newsletters, bulletin boards, and other activities to keep parents informed and aware of the many activities that children are involved in during the school day. Teachers might also give parents ideas to help them become more involved in their child’s play and learning. For example, here are some “tips” a teacher might share to help a parent make reading a part of every day (Ulmen, 2005, pp. 96–97):

• Read and reread your child’s favorite books.
• Read comics to your children.
• Let your child read to you.
• Let your child be the storyteller.
• Subscribe to a child’s magazine.
• Save and recycle junk mail.
• Leave closed captioning on while watching television.
• Play different versions of tic-tac-toe.
• Find some giant sunglasses and play “I spy.”
• Talk to your child.

Perhaps one of the most important benefits of family involvement is to help parents learn developmentally appropriate methods and strategies that will enable them to become effective teachers of their own children.

Schools and teachers can also serve as an important support system for the family. Recognizing that parenting is a difficult task and one in which many persons have had limited training, schools frequently offer parenting classes. These classes allow parents to participate in discussions, lectures, and demonstrations that focus on parenting skills, guidance and discipline, child-rearing practices, home-based learning activities, and family relationships. Teachers can also suggest sources of assistance to parents who are coping with crises. Sometimes, teachers can be of great help by listening and demonstrating concern. It is also imperative that teachers remember the diversified nature of the family today and find ways of encompassing and communicating with parents from diverse cultures, working parents, grandparents, single parents, guardians, and foster parents. Just as each child is unique, so is each child’s family situation.
Recognizing the diversity of parents, teachers should realize that their own patterns of child rearing and attitudes regarding education might differ from those of the parents with whom they work. This is especially apparent when children of various cultural backgrounds are in the classrooms. "Intercultural communication" lets teachers become familiar with each child's values and traditions. Children need to know that their parents are valued and respected by the teacher, which leads to acceptance and unity in the partnership. When parents feel that they are part of an equal partnership, they are more likely to become involved in their child's school life (Lundgren & Morrison, 2003). To increase the likelihood of parental involvement in schools, we need to continually develop and show respect toward parents, provide parent training and show appreciation for their contributions (DiNatale, 2002). Offer encouragement rather than praise. Give specific examples of when and how a parent or child has participated in a positive experience in the classroom. Parent involvement in the classroom allows them to feel a sense of ownership in their child’s educational experience.

Classroom Connection

In the following video, which ideas are suggested for creating a welcoming school environment for all parents?

To summarize, here are some general guidelines for early childhood educators to follow as they seek to build strong family partnerships.

1. Listen. Set up a specific open time when parents know that you will be available for listening and communicating. Sense their needs to share and discuss, and find some time—lunchtime, after school, a home visit, an evening telephone conversation—for meeting these needs by being an effective listener. If parents know that as teachers we are available and approachable, parent–teacher relationships are more cooperative and productive (Kersey & Masterson, 2009). When working with parents, it is important to avoid making assumptions about them. Instead, we need to listen carefully, respecting their perceptions and opinions (Ardt & McGuire-Schwarz, 2008). Daniel (2009) suggests that our open communication with parents involves listening carefully as well as speaking.

2. Treat all children and their families with respect and caring concern. Take advantage of the little opportunities that occur daily to show concern and interest in children and their families. For example, send home a short note apprising the parents of a particular skill that the child mastered that day or telling them something the child said or did that you enjoyed. A quick phone call on the day a child is absent lets the parents and the child know that they are important and cared for. Treat the parents with the kind of respect that conveys the belief, "I see you as an equal partner, having more and superior understanding of the child in some areas than I, the child’s teacher."

3. Be sure to know the child well enough to relate specific information about him or her to the parents. Record keeping is important, and a list or chart of the items that you wish to discuss will be helpful for both you and the parents. Anecdotes or other kinds of dated observation notes can also be supportive. In addition, it is helpful for the parents to see samples of the child’s work; over a period of time, they can observe progress in specific areas. For the preschool child, even progress in art stages is easily apparent from selected samples of the child’s artwork.

4. Convey to the parents positive, warm feelings regarding their child. Make sure they know how much you like the child and how interested you are in the child’s growth and development.

5. Be objective and realistic about goals for working with the child. Involve parents in determining appropriate goals for their child. Where necessary, make appropriate referrals for assistance from such professionals as speech therapists, psychologists, and medical doctors.

6. Be a source of help in many parenting areas and help to extend what you are teaching into the home. Parents may need suggestions for age-appropriate good books, meaningful learning activities that can be done at home, toy selection, and where to find helpful materials on guidance. Remember, too, that the school and family alone may not be able to handle the range of children’s needs. Schools should seek to help families access community services that they need, and teachers should draw on the full range of community resources to strengthen the child. What does your local library offer for parents who indicate a particular need? If there is a nearby college or university, what particular services could be recommended to parents? You may want to keep a current file of resources appropriate for the parents of the children you teach.

7. Remember that it will take numerous encounters and meetings to build positive and supportive relationships with parents.

To work effectively with parents, apply the same attitudes used in working with children: Be positive, supportive, interested, caring, objective, friendly, and warm. Work hard, using a variety of techniques to motivate, teach, build, and strengthen. Following is a list of practical suggestions for involving families.
Now that we have some guidelines for working with families, we need to focus on strategies for developing the desired partnerships between schools and homes. Family involvement works best when parents are invited to play a variety of roles—their involvement will take different forms depending on their needs and interests. Children learn much more effectively if parents and teachers are partners in the teaching process. Because learning occurs through repetition and many experiences, children learn more easily if what is being taught in the classroom is extended into the home. The following sections discuss ways for the teacher to support the development of partnerships between home and school.

Written Communication

Written communication transmits as much information as any other form of communication (Keyser, 2006), and it allows people time to read and understand information. Also, some people (teachers and families) feel more comfortable with written communication than with telephone calls or talking in person. It is a two-way process for sharing information, knowledge, and expertise. Information should be relevant, inviting, friendly, interesting, understandable, and manageable, not too lengthy or overwhelming or filled with professional jargon and phrases.

Written communications can take many forms and are a vital link between home and school. It may take repeated invitations to motivate parents to become involved. Upcoming events and activities, as well as snack assignments or main-course lunch menu items, can be included in a monthly or weekly newsletter calendar. A few specific guidance or management hints might be shared, too. Child quotes or anecdotes from recent activities might also be included.

Teachers can list simple activities that parents can do in their homes to be actively involved in their child’s learning. For example, activities listed in any chapter in this text could be shared with parents. Or, for each general curriculum area (that is, math, science, language and literacy, music, art), choose several activities that could easily be done at home and share them with parents. For example, for math, children can:

- Sort laundry and match socks. When finished, they can count pairs of socks for each family member and then add them together.
- Make a number lotto game and play it with parents.
- Circle numerals in the newspaper beginning with 1 and going to 10, or as far as the child can recognize.
• Estimate the weight of several household objects such as a ball, a gallon of milk, and so on. Once the items are weighed, the child can order them from lightest to heaviest.
• Do matching, sorting, and categorizing activities using beans, buttons, groceries, cards, and newspaper pictures or photographs.
• Use calendars for matching or for counting days until a specific event, days in the week, days in the month, weeks in the month, months in the year, and so on.

Find time each week to send a note or newsletter home with the children to tell parents what concepts or ideas are being focused on that week, as well as to provide an overview of planned activities. In addition, write down any individual notes that may be helpful or enjoyed by the parents regarding their child. Parents will be interested in knowing when field trips are being taken. Include words to new fingerplays they can teach their child. Children will also enjoy having their parents tell them of the activities planned for the next week or the next day in school; it creates interest, enthusiasm, and eagerness. For example, if parents are aware of the upcoming unit on color, they can add support by reinforcing color concepts at home, even during spontaneous experiences such as eating dinner or going to the grocery store. Parents frequently ask children what they did at school, and it is often difficult for young children to remember or to single out the concept being studied. It is helpful to the child for the parent to ask something like “What did you learn about color today?” or “What did the police officer tell you when he visited your classroom today?” An excellent practice to encourage inquiry is for parents to ask children what questions the children asked at school that day.

Notes from the teacher are also appropriate when the children have enjoyed a particular food, music, or science experience: “Today the children were amazed with the ‘growth’ of the chemical gardens we made in class yesterday. You may wish to make them at home. The recipe is . . .” or “Today the children enjoyed the playdough we used. The recipe is . . .” Parents appreciate these ideas, and knowing that their children enjoy the activities, they will often do them at home.

Send notes of appreciation to parents. When parents participate in a field trip, they have donated several hours of valuable home or work time and should know that their efforts are appreciated. These short notes help to build warm parent–teacher relationships. Also, send a note if a parent sends a snack or assists in the classroom in any way. It is helpful to keep thank-you notes and cards readily available so they can be sent soon after the parent has participated.

A bulletin board is a source of information for parents that might include general school information, lesson or activity schedules, parenting classes, upcoming events, meeting new people, and messages for children and teachers. Another effective avenue for two-way dialogue is to write journal entries. Teachers and/or children write in journals that are then taken home to the parents. Parents can also be encouraged to send return notes or messages with their children to the teacher. For preschool and kindergarten children, their journal “writing” may actually be pictures or picture stories, and they might also dictate to a teacher or assistant words for their entries.

It is good to remember that a child might have two parents who are not living together in the home. In such cases, it is important that, when possible, both parents be involved and kept informed of the progress of their children (Kim & Yeary, 2008). Suggestions include using the telephone, postal service, email, webcams when sending information; having the child make two projects instead of one; as teachers, making two copies of information, reports, notes, and photographs to be distributed to both parents. The more parents are informed, the more successful are the partnerships among families, school, and community.

Parent Conferences or Conversations

Conferences with parents are traditionally called parent conferences. As we address developing strong partnerships with families, it would also be very appropriate to refer to these meetings as family conferences (Carter, 2008). Both terms will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter. When a family realizes that each member is an accepted and valued participant, bridges are more easily spanned, and bonds are more readily formed. Family conferences are an incredibly important responsibility in helping establish, strengthen, and maintain supportive relationships with families (Seplocha, 2004). Family conferences allow opportunities for building trust and partnership by meeting face-to-face. They provide a more private time to share information back and forth without interruption. Information about the child, the program, and community resources can be discussed, and mutual goals can be developed for the child (Keyser, 2006). Parent–teacher conferences require trust and goodwill, even though the backgrounds and personalities of the teachers and parents are not always compatible.

Face-to-face encounters with parents contribute to student success and should be planned frequently. Generally, the more contact there is between home and school, the more the child benefits (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). For some parents, the most convenient direct encounter is at the parent’s
4. Parents’ concerns can be useful in developmental or behavioral screening when necessary.
5. By careful interpreting parents’ concerns, professionals can make evidence-based decisions about any services families may need.

One way of gaining information from parents is to have them complete a preconference worksheet designed to get feedback from them about concerns they would like to discuss and also what primary successes they believe their child is experiencing. Parents should feel supported, relaxed, comfortable, and wanted. They should be made aware of the child’s strengths and needs and of specific ways they can help their child at home. A post-conference worksheet can be filled out, collaboratively, by the teacher and parent. Desired actions and steps to reach goals can be specifically delineated.

Teachers should be sensitive to the strong emotional investment parents have in their child, which may manifest itself as defensiveness, anger, denial, or anxiety. Tension during conferences and interfacing with parents can be reduced as teachers use “I” messages, seek parents’ suggestions, and stress positive aspects. What is best for the child should always be paramount. Be cautious with criticism, and instead of giving advice, give suggestions or guidelines. Never betray a confidence; this applies to children as well as to parents.

A suggestion regarding the physical setting for the conference: Sometimes chairs set side by side or at right angles to each other are more conducive to successful parent conferences than chairs set facing each other. Focusing on something physical frequently diminishes defensiveness or discomfort by diverting direct eye-to-eye contact.

The initial conference of the year may consist primarily of questions. Many schools distribute questionnaires with which the parents can become familiar before the first conference: How does your child feel about himself or herself? What expectations do you have for your child during the coming school experience? What kinds of learning experiences or activities does your child enjoy most? Is the child developing a particular talent or interest? How does your child relate to and get along with siblings and/or neighborhood friends? These questions allow parents to become familiar with some areas of discussion that are often difficult to think about without prior preparation. They generally provide the teacher with much more feedback and also open the lines of communication, because the parents have had time beforehand to think about something that they want to discuss.

Once the child is in school and conferences are scheduled, the teacher should be well prepared with
ideas and materials to share with the parents. Portfolios with a sampling of the child's work can show progress being made in specific curriculum areas. The teacher should be able to discuss the child's progress in a number of areas: socially, emotionally, physically (both large- and small-motor areas), and intellectually. Parents are anxious to know of their child's progress in each of these areas and need to see materials that validate the teacher's appraisals. Anecdotal records can strengthen the teacher's evaluations and help parents appreciate individual attention. Parents are usually anxious to hear about any ideas and activities they can implement at home to help their child improve. Especially when a child is having difficulties in one or more areas, the teacher can give the parents concrete suggestions for helping the child to progress.

The essential ingredients for effective school–family relationships are frequent, informal contact and warm, respectful, candid conversation. Omitting relevant information is not being honest with parents. Again, it is important for the teacher to listen to the parents—to their suggestions for working with the child or about strategies and activities that work in the home. The skills found to be important in family–teacher relationships are valuing, accepting, listening, perceiving, guiding, understanding, helping, responding, and empowering.

In addition to formal scheduled conferences, teachers should take advantage of informal daily or weekly opportunities for brief but friendly conversations. These may occur when the parent picks the child up from school or when the teacher and parent meet casually in the grocery store. Regardless of how the situation develops, the teacher should make good use of any opportunity for free discussions and for answering any questions that the parent may have. These informal conversations are often the building blocks to effective home–school relationships. School administrators could also schedule lunch meetings with parents to address concerns and suggestions.


### Tips for Parents Relating to Parent–Teacher Conferences

1. Get to know your child's teacher when school begins.
2. Talk to your child about the upcoming conference and write down any questions.
3. Be familiar with the child's schoolbooks and homework.
4. Try to have both parents at the conference.
5. Remember the appointment and be on time.
6. Find out what the teacher expects and ask questions about various aspects of the curriculum.
7. Find out if there are any scheduled tests. If there are, what can you do to help your child?
8. Ask about your child's relationship with both adults and peers.
9. Share any information about your child and family that might help the teacher.
10. Find out ways you can help your child at home to be successful in school.
11. Stay focused on your child.
12. Be aware that children can hear and remember what is said.

Numerous benefits result from effective parent conferences and conversations: School programs and climate
improve; parents' knowledge and leadership skills increase; family support is maintained; family, school, and community connections are built; and there is more family support of teachers. However, the most important benefit is the impact that the partnerships have on students.

**Parent Meetings or Parent Education Programs**

Parenting classes and workshops have been found to ease parents' tensions and anxieties, improve skills, and teach child development concepts. Parent education programs that actively involve parents and require several sessions have been found to be more effective than single sessions. These meetings, workshops, or programs are planned by the teachers, by the parents, or by the two in collaboration. Because the focus is on parent education, take a poll of the parents' interests and then strive to meet these needs as meetings are planned. The number of meetings per year will depend on parental support and interest. Topics for these meetings could include guidance, facilitating antibias development, making home-learning materials, and curriculum topics such as art activities, science at home, or nutritious food activities. Parent meetings could include such activities as an icebreaker for opening, demonstrations and discussions, interactive projects, networking opportunities, family culture activities, and interactive presentations (Keyser, 2006). Successful parent meetings also provide opportunities for parents to share their knowledge, expertise, and experience with others.

A variation in parental meetings could involve children in both the planning and presentation. An open house could be planned, with the children acting as hosts and hostesses. A display of some of their work and activities would be shown, with the children acting as chefs for the refreshments. Parent evenings or afternoons could focus on a single topic, such as “Foods We Like to Make and Eat” or a science fair. The children enjoy the preparation and planning involved in these events, but they especially look forward to sharing their school and activities with their parents.

Parent meetings, workshops, and programs can be very beneficial in enhancing parents’ skills, knowledge, attitudes toward their children, and ways to increase their parenting skills. Parent education opportunities are of paramount importance in helping develop effective partnerships between families and school.

**Technology and Telephone Calls**

Computer and telephone technology affords opportunities for quick and open communication. Parents should feel free to contact teachers, and teachers to contact parents. Telephoning need not be only a means of conveying emergencies or reporting negative behavior and problem situations. It also provides a valuable opportunity to let parents know the positive things that occur in the classroom. Using email and answering machines enables parents to leave messages for teachers, and lets teachers transmit general class or curriculum information and homework assignments to parents.

If a child has had particular success with a concept or curriculum activity, convey this information to the parents by telephone and/or email. For example, if a telephone or email message from the teacher might be: “Today we mixed the three primary colors together to make secondary colors. We used water colored with food coloring, a white Styrofoam egg carton, and an eyedropper. You should have seen how much Christopher enjoyed this activity! For 30 minutes, he continued to experiment with mixing the colors. I am sure he would enjoy doing this activity in your home.”

Or, if a child is having particular difficulty with a concept presented at school, do not wait until the formal conference to alert the parents. A phone call can suggest, in a warm and positive way, what the difficulty is and how the parents can help. For example, in a first-grade classroom, the children have had their first activity involving concepts related to money. Rachel has difficulty understanding the values of coins and becomes very frustrated with the activity. In a call that day to the home, the teacher might say: “Today we began work with the values of money and coins. Rachel seemed unusually concerned, and I plan to give her individual help at school, but you may wish to work with her at home, too. You may want to role-play store situations in giving change or develop simple games to match equal values. For example, if you lay down 10 cents, from the change Rachel has at hand, she needs to come up with another combination representing 10 cents. You may also want to encourage her in making actual purchases at stores, such as allowing her to purchase an item, giving the grocer a dollar bill, and receiving the change.”

The parents usually eagerly welcome these kinds of suggestions. It is not as helpful simply to state the learning difficulty, offering no suggestions for action. So, be sure your tone is constructive and positive so the parent has something to work on and not just a concern to worry about.

Teachers can also use a classroom website or blog to communicate with parents about what is going on in the classroom, generally. Teachers can post information about class projects and offer ideas for extending the curriculum at home. They can also use the website to ask for volunteers or request supplies such as household materials needed for an upcoming project (e.g., egg cartons, cereal boxes, milk jugs). When used
effectively, technology can serve as a bridge between home and school, and it can strengthen the partnership between them.

**Home Visits**

A visit to the family’s home provides an opportunity for the teacher to see the family in their most comfortable and personal surroundings (Bouhebent, 2008; Keyser, 2006), and for the child to meet the teacher in the safety of the family’s home environment. This also sends the message to the family that they and their culture are valued. In this more familiar, comfortable setting, two-way conversations are more likely to include additional information that will help in determining goals for the child (Keyser, 2006).

Through child-centered home visits, a teacher can gain insights about the child that can be obtained in no other way. These visits provide the opportunity to relate to families in their own familiar surroundings and to gain valuable information about the child’s needs and his or her interaction in the home environment. Home visits can be especially beneficial for families who might otherwise be economically, socially, and/or geographically isolated (Bouhebent, 2008). These visits build closer ties between parents and teacher, strengthen the child’s self-esteem, and communicate to the family that the child is important to the teacher. To be successful at home visits, the teacher must be able to accept different homes, the diversity of families, and the variations in values, beliefs, and attitudes. Some particularly enlightening information relating to curriculum planning can occur naturally and spontaneously in a home visit. For those who visit the child and family at home, confidentiality, flexibility, and being able to respond to critical situations must be maintained (Bouhebent, 2008).

A Head Start teacher visited a home where the mother was just preparing dinner. She was preparing peas and happened to mention that she never made Rebecca eat them—as a family, they had learned that the texture of peas made Rebecca sick. The Head Start teacher recalled one lunchtime when peas were being served, and Rebecca had been rather persistently made to taste some of them. Reserved, Rebecca had sat at the lunch table longer than the other children, and the teacher thought Rebecca was just testing to see if she really must taste at least some of the peas!

A kindergarten teacher was making a home visit and discovered that Stephen, with the help of his geologist father, had assembled a collection of rocks and knew many interesting facts and concepts relating to them. This suggested a unit on rocks. Stephen proudly brought his specimens and shared his information with the other children.

When arranging for home visits, teachers need to request a visit to the home. Parents should be informed that the teacher is visiting to learn more about the child, to have an opportunity to spend some time with the child, to meet the family, and to allow the family to become better acquainted with the teacher. Pressure should not be put on the parents to have the teacher in their home. There may be special problems in the home at that time, and the parents may view a teacher’s visit as one more problem or pressure to be handled. Teachers usually can sense whether the time is appropriate for a home visit and if they are welcome. If home visits for a particular child do not seem to be appropriate, the teacher may consider visiting a parent at work.

When making a home visit, the teacher must be relaxed, friendly, and alert to the needs and responses of the family. The length of the visit should be determined by the needs of both the family and the teacher. Generally, home visits should not be lengthy unless the teacher has been invited for a special occasion, such as a family meal or a birthday party.

Home visits also provide an opportunity for the teacher to introduce into the home a game, activity, or book that the child has enjoyed in the classroom, to be shared with the child and perhaps other family members. Depending on the receptiveness of the parents, the visit may be a good time for giving suggestions about learning activities, materials, or equipment appropriate for home use by the child. At the end of the visit, some teachers leave the parents a newsletter or handout relating to learning ideas for home use.

**Family Involvement and Observation in the Classroom**

There are many ways of involving families in the classroom and a great advantage in doing so. Other activities involving parents could include family social events (opportunities for parents and children to play together) and family workdays (parents, program staff, and community work together to take care of maintaining or building facilities) (Keyser, 2006). Gains made by children in early childhood education programs are maintained to a greater extent when families are involved in the program. When parents take the time to be involved in the classroom, this acts as a teaching experience for them, giving new ideas for home activities and guidance principles and helping them observe and learn about the child in the school situation. It is also valuable for the child to know that he or she is important enough for the parent to spend time in the classroom. Parent–teacher rapport is strengthened as the “team” works together in the classroom. Parents become more understanding of the teacher’s role as they view the teaching situation from the inside. This results in more positive attitudes toward the school and the staff.
is necessary or when assistance in dressing or undressing is needed, they will do it. In primary-grade classes, teachers should give parents the opportunity of working with their own children, hearing them read, helping them write a story, completing an assignment, or working on a project. Parent volunteers in the primary grades are especially valuable when working with children who have emotional, social, physical, or academic problems.

To interact with parents more, one teacher did a unit titled “What Do Grown-ups Do All Day? The World of Work.” The unit lasted all year and integrated many curriculum areas. The unit included parent questionnaires; field trips to some parents’ workplaces; and activities such as mapping where parents ate lunch, having parent visitors who described what they did, and having children draw their parents at work.

Parent visits to the classroom may also be for the purpose of observation. Make sure the parents feel welcome to visit the classroom anytime they want—appointments should not be necessary (Raikes & Edwards, 2009). Many early childhood programs in colleges and universities have observation booths with one-way viewing mirrors for student and parent observation. In other classrooms, the teachers encourage the parents to visit and observe their child in action.

Another occasion for parent involvement in the classroom is when extra help is needed. For example, food activities and field trips may require additional help or supervision. Perhaps a parent has a particular skill that lends itself to a unit of study. During a unit on fish, a father who was an avid fisherman visited the class and brought his fishing gear to demonstrate. He showed the children how to prepare the fishing pole, how to use the many different kinds of flies and other gear in his tackle box, and then how to cast. He brought slides of a fishing trip that he and his son had taken, and slides of his young son catching a fish. The children watched as he demonstrated how to fillet a fish. Then, he cooked the fish in a skillet and served it to the children. Teachers should find out parents’ hobbies and professions to learn of special skills or talents that can be shared with the children.

Sensitive teachers and staff should recognize that the needs, schedules, backgrounds, time, skills, and values of parents are all unique, so the participation of parents should also be geared to their individual capabilities.

Classroom Connection
Watch this video and determine how this teacher involved parent volunteers in the classroom.

Policy Planning, Decision Making, and Evaluation
Positive effects will be felt when parents are included as members of policy-planning committees or boards
involved in decision making and/or evaluations related to the children and the school. However, parents must have information to participate in a meaningful and rational way in policy-making decisions. When parents are invited to be involved, their thinking and suggestions must be taken seriously and be a meaningful part of the decisions made.

**Family Resource Centers**

Facilities should be set up to allow parents to visit the classroom and benefit from school resources offering parenting help and methods for extending what is being taught into the home. A parent room or parents’ area can be organized to include books on child development; materials, books, and toys that can be checked out for home use; videos; and other resources such as free pamphlets and brochures. Let parents know what is available so they can make use of the program. In one community, the school puts together age-appropriate materials into packets that are given out by the hospital when a child is born and then sent to the family on each child’s birthday until the child enters school. This project ties the family to the school before the child even enters school.

Many school districts are now providing parent resource centers, which supply these same kinds of services. Even a small private preschool or a single kindergarten can make available materials and equipment to support parents in teaching their children at home. Parent bulletin boards or displays can be set up where parents can check for information.

- **Check Your Understanding 2.4**
  Click here to gauge your understanding of the content in this section.

**Summary**

All families, regardless of backgrounds, characteristics, and circumstances, are generally interested and active in their children’s lives, and positive family–teacher partnerships are vital in high-quality early childhood environments. Teachers can begin by developing positive attitudes toward parent involvement and helping parents understand the benefits that will come from their participation and involvement.

Effective work and communication with parents are necessary in any good early childhood program, and we must look to parents as friends and helpers. It is vital to establish a positive partnership between the home and the school to make sure parents and teachers see each other as playing an important role in the children’s education. We should validate families without judging, assist families in finding needed resources and services in the school and community, utilize a variety of communication strategies, and model patience and empathy. Parents should get the message that their values, ideas, and decisions are respected.

The purpose of any parent–teacher or parent–school activity is to develop school–home relationships, to promote school–community activities, and most of all, to strengthen the child. We must understand family priorities, needs, and resources if we are to effectively develop school–home partnerships. Parent involvement can be the catalyst for lasting beneficial effects.

Although planning for parent partnerships takes time and can be challenging, the positive effects and outcomes are well worth it. Parents and teachers need to nurture and build one another in partnerships that draw on one another’s strengths. Without parent involvement, programs or schools cannot achieve the ultimate objective of excellence for which both strive. Partnerships with parents must be built on positive approaches, with patience and confidence that the efforts will result in strong and supportive relationships among children, parents, and teachers.

- **Chapter Quiz 2.1**
  Click here to assess how well you’ve learned the content in this chapter.
**Student Learning Activities**

1. To encourage the development of a partnership between the family and the teacher, arrange to observe the student during a professional teacher’s home visit.
2. Interview an early childhood teacher and find out what methods are being incorporated for developing a partnership with the family and extending the curriculum into the home. Ask which methods the teacher feels are most valuable for helping parents carry out learning activities in the home.
3. Visit the home of a child between the ages of 3 and 8 years. It may be a child in your neighborhood, or your instructor may provide a list of parents who would enjoy having you in their home to teach a home-learning activity. Plan a learning activity that would be appropriate for the child’s age; there are many suggestions throughout this book. Call the home and arrange for the visit, and then evaluate the visit and the experience. What went well? Were the parents and the child interested in the learning activity you presented? Did the child become involved? What would you do differently on your next visit?
4. Visit your local library and make a list of some of the services it offers parents. Summarize the good parenting material available and also some of the materials you would suggest to parents for providing meaningful learning activities in the home.
5. Attend a parent–school meeting in a school district or center and evaluate it in terms of the ideas you read about in this chapter.

**Suggested Resources**


**Online Resources**

There are thousands of websites that have effective ideas for building strong partnerships and relationships with families, strategies for working with families, and ideas for family involvement. We suggest you explore the websites of the following organizations and bookmark those that will be most helpful to you.

**About Dads Blog**: A website for parents, with programs, courses, story time, opinions, and humor.

**The National Fatherhood Initiative** provides support networks, research, resources, and multimedia products to help fathers.

**Parents as Teachers**: This association provides parents with child development knowledge and parenting support.

**Teachers and Families**: Resources to help parents work with schools and with their children are available here.

**Parenting**: This organization offers resources for helping parents deal with the day-to-day teaching, guidance, and development of children.

**Positive Parenting**: Resources and information to help make parenting more rewarding, effective, and fun can be found on this site.

**The National Parent Center** provides tips, information, and links to other excellent parenting sources.


**The Harvard Family Research Project** offers information and resources related to family involvement.

**The National Coalition for Parent Involvement (NCPIE)** provides information for developing meaningful partnerships that meet the needs of family, school, and community. Also, on the home page, search for the article titled “What’s happening. A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement.”

**The National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS)** offers information to help schools organize and sustain family and community involvement.