PREFACE

Over the past few years, many books and articles have been written about the importance of social and emotional development in children. To succeed at school and function well in life, a child must be motivated to learn and able to pay attention, manage impulses, cope with emotions, and get along with people. A child needs these fundamental skills to grow and thrive, yet they do not come naturally to many children. The important adults in a child's life must intentionally and strategically guide the development of these competencies. So who should do that and how?

This increasing interest in social and emotional development comes at a time when families contend with unprecedented challenges to self-sufficiency. Although parents will always be children’s first and most important teachers, greater stress on the family can hamper parents’ ability to provide the time and emotional support their children need to develop in this area. Many families struggle with parental unemployment or, conversely, parents working multiple jobs. In difficult economic times, less assistance may be available from extended family and the community.

At the same time, businesses complain that young people entering the workforce lack basic “employability skills,” such as communication, adaptability, problem solving, motivation, and teamwork (Cumming & Lesniak, 2000; Hansen & Hansen, 2011). All of these capacities are in the social–emotional domain and their direct guidance should be a prominent component of the educational experience.

Yet tremendous demands are placed on school systems and they often lack the resources to focus directly on building these skills. By the time students are in high school, it is assumed that they have already learned to regulate their attention, impulses, and emotions and are able to work independently and with others. When they display weaknesses in this area, their behavior is generally handled in a disciplinary, rather than a skill-building manner. This reactive approach presupposes that the skills are taught in elementary and middle school.

As early as third grade, however, elementary schools are required to engage in achievement testing in math, language, and other academic skills. The stakes are high because schools are commonly penalized for students’ poor performance on these tests. As a result, the emphasis on academic skills often begins at or before kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers report that school readiness skills, the essential competencies children need to succeed in kindergarten and beyond, include more skills in the social–emotional domain than in the physical or cognitive domains (Conn-Powers, 2010). Thus in kindergarten, underdeveloped social and emotional skills are already addressed as problems needing remediation or discipline.
This set of circumstances puts the responsibility on early childhood professionals to intentionally focus on building these fundamental skills in children (Conn-Powers, Cross, & Dixon, 2011). Families rely on our support in this area, especially when their time, energy, and other resources are spread so thin. Elementary schools have increasing academic achievement demands and fewer resources available. You, the early childhood professional, are in a critically important position to promote these competencies. In fact, it may be your most important role. How are you supposed to meet this challenge?

First, recognize the need for lifelong learning in this ever-growing field. It is essential to participate in continuing education workshops and read professional publications. You may want to establish a professional learning community with colleagues focusing on social–emotional development or participate in reflective supervision.

If resources are available, your program may have access to a mental health consultant who can guide and support you as you promote these skills in children. A mental health consultant is a specially trained professional who works collaboratively with the adults in a child’s life (e.g., teachers and families) to increase their competence so that those adults may, in turn, promote desired skills in the child (Perry & Kaufmann, 2009). Mental health consultants tend to think about behavior in complex ways that may seem unfamiliar to others. Their strategies emerge from a process of inquiry that incorporates self-reflection, careful observation, and analysis of many variables related to the educator, the child, and the family. Although relatively few programs currently have access to mental health consultants, in this book, you will learn some of the basic concepts and principles consultants use that can help you develop effective strategies for your children. Fortunately, you have readily available the most effective teaching resource possible: yourself.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS BOOK

As you read this book, you will have the opportunity to understand social and emotional competence “from the inside out” (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). By better understanding yourself, your strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and more, you will be better equipped to guide the children in your program. By revisiting the process by which you came to be socially and emotionally competent, you will be more prepared to promote these skills in children.

Guiding Children’s Social and Emotional Development: A Reflective Approach offers a unique perspective on the promotion of fundamental life skills. It is not a how-to manual with instructions for fixing challenging behavior. Nor is it a cookbook laying out recipes for creating competent young people. Rather, this book offers a process for understanding why children do the things they do and challenges us to explore what inspires us to make the choices we make as professionals. This process is called reflection.
THEMES AND FEATURES OF THIS BOOK

Written in an accessible style, this book includes themes and features that support an intentional, reflective approach to guiding children’s social and emotional development.

**Learning Outcomes.** Each chapter begins with a list of learning outcomes to help you focus on the essential concepts of the chapter. As you read the material in the chapter, you are invited to apply those concepts to your daily experiences and interactions.

**Pedagogical Features Encouraging Reflection.** In each chapter, you will have opportunities to reflect on the material in a feature called “Looking in the Mirror…” Guiding questions reconnect you with your own journey toward social–emotional competence and can be answered only by you. Your self-reflection will help you figure out, at any given time, what course of action on your part will be effective in your work with a child or children.

In addition, throughout the book, you will have opportunities, through interactive exercises and figures posing reflective questions, to practice self-reflection and to consider how your decisions and actions might affect children and families.

**Stories about Real Kids That Illustrate Key Concepts.** Many of the concepts are illustrated with stories about real children from real families and real teachers in real classrooms (with changed names and details). I have come to know these individuals through my experiences along four separate but often converging paths. As a clinical psychologist specializing in the treatment of children, I have provided psychotherapy for thousands of people who would never have needed such intensive intervention had they experienced more positive care and education in their early years. Second, I am the founder and president of a NAEYC accredited child care center with 130 children from six weeks to twelve years old and 30 amazing educators. Third, I work with early childhood professionals in several capacities. As a mental health consultant for various early care and education programs, I see both the creative resourcefulness of and the challenges faced by early childhood professionals. I frequently lecture and lead workshops at professional development conferences and teach college students pursuing degrees in psychology and education. Finally, and most important, I am the mother of two sons whose energy, intellect, and curiosity have kept me on my toes for 23 years. Along these four paths, I have encountered a vast array of individuals whose stories fill the pages of this book.

**Opportunities to Review and Apply Material.** Each chapter includes several review questions and application opportunities, either for college courses or for professional development.
AUDIENCE

Throughout this book, the terms *educator, teacher,* and *professional* are used for the sake of simplicity. But others who work with children and families can easily apply the perspectives and strategies presented. If you are an early intervention therapist, a behavior consultant, a home visitor, or any early childhood professional, this book is certainly for you.

*Guiding Children's Social and Emotional Development: A Reflective Approach* can be used as a textbook for a college course in child development or guidance or for continuing professional education. The format, with parts that can serve as distinct modules, lends itself to ongoing learning communities, staff workshops, or professional development seminars for those already in the field.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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part 1

Reflective Guidance
After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- Understand the importance of promoting social and emotional skills in the early childhood setting.
- Identify your role in applying the principles and practices of the CSEFEL pyramid, developmentally appropriate practice, and the Code of Ethical Conduct.
- Explain what is meant by reflection.
- Distinguish between instinctive reactions and intentional responses to children’s behavior.
- Understand that your own social–emotional competence is shaped by your nature and experiences and plays a role in your efforts to promote skills in children.

Four-year-old Cherese looks around before slipping the superhero into her jacket pocket. The hero belongs to the class, but she wants it to belong to her. During circle time, she repeatedly interrupts her classmates’ stories, bombarding them with questions, comments, and
tales of her own. Cherese enjoys the dress-up area, where she insists on playing the role of teacher, although her classmates would also like to play that role. If she can’t be the one in charge, Cherese threatens to stop playing or being their friend. She insists on being first in line and pushes her peers if they are in line before her. When she is corrected, she stomps her feet and wails in distress. Cherese’s teachers are fed up with her behavior.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE**

Like all young children, Cherese must learn how to control herself and get along with others to become a successful student and an effective citizen. These and other social and emotional skills comprise a developmental domain that lays the foundation for a lifelong journey of relationships and learning. The social–emotional domain is often considered synonymous with *early childhood mental health*, the child’s ability to experience, regulate, and express emotions; form close and secure interpersonal relationships; explore the environment; and learn in the context of family and community (Zeanah & Zeanah, 2009; ZERO TO THREE, 2002).

In an educational climate that emphasizes academic achievement, narrowly measured in terms of literacy and number skills, the promotion of social and emotional competence is often overlooked (Squires & Bricker, 2007). Yet research consistently concludes that a child’s capacities to listen, pay attention, delay gratification, cooperate, and keep his hands to himself are essential ingredients for success in school and life (Conn-Powers, 2010). Hopefully, most teachers support these skills through everyday interactions with children, but we should make it a point to elevate the development of these skills to an explicit place in the curriculum. In early childhood settings, we have countless occasions to build fundamental social and emotional skills, and we should be very intentional in how we go about doing this (Eisenhauer & Katz, 2011).

There are several critical reasons for early childhood professionals to consciously create opportunities that promote these skills. Many children begin their educational career with failure resulting from underdeveloped social and emotional skills. Compiling data from nearly 4,000 preschool classrooms, a Yale University research team concluded that preschool children are expelled from early childhood programs at a rate that is more than three times the expulsion rate for all children from grades K–12 put together (Gilliam, 2005). By far, the most frequent reason for expulsion is “challenging behavior.” And what is challenging behavior other than a child’s solution to a personal or interpersonal problem? In the Yale study, expulsion rates decreased significantly when ongoing behavior/mental health consultation was available to help teachers help children resolve their difficulties in socially appropriate ways. Because professional consultation is not always available, however, it is imperative for early educators to have a repertoire of practical and research-based strategies for promoting social and emotional skills.
Social development and emotional health are also linked to children’s academic success (Wentzel & Asher, 1995; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997; Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong, & Gomby, 2005). Children who have difficulties paying attention, following directions, getting along with others, and controlling negative emotions such as anger perform significantly less well in school (Arnold, Ortiz, Curry, Stowe, Goldstein, & Fisher, 1999; McClelland, Morrison, & Holmes, 2000).

Many undesirable long-range consequences can be prevented if we start early. Children who struggle with behavioral and emotional problems in preschool have a 50 percent chance of continuing to struggle in adolescence and adulthood (Cohen & Kaufmann, 2005). Early-onset conduct problems often predict such adolescent outcomes as drug abuse, depression, juvenile delinquency, and school dropout (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Each and every day, early childhood professionals have the unique opportunity, and therefore the responsibility, to turn this undesirable trend around.

In addition, today’s teacher will most certainly have children from low- or very low-income families in her classroom. At the time of this writing, over 25 million, or 46 percent of American children under age six were living in low-income or poor families (Chau, Thampi, & Wight, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The many stressors experienced by families struggling to meet basic needs contribute to significant vulnerability in young children. Young children living in poverty have a greater likelihood of experiencing academic difficulties throughout their school years and are at greater risk for poor health outcomes, cognitive delays, and social problems (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Other risk factors include being raised by a teen and/or single parent, lack of access to health care, and unsafe neighborhoods. The more numerous are a child’s risk factors, the more likely his or her developmental outcomes will be compromised (Sameroff & MacKenzie, 2003). Social and emotional competence can serve as a buffer that increases a child’s resiliency in the face of stress related to poverty and other issues (Squires & Bricker, 2007). Luckily, teachers have evidence-based practices to guide them as they work with all young children.

PROFESSIONAL FRAMEWORKS TO GUIDE OUR PRACTICES

The notion of targeting the social–emotional domain and the emphasis on using a reflective approach are consistent with the principles developed by The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning or CSEFEL (Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, 2011). In addition, supporting social–emotional development and reflection is consistent with the frameworks presented by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) entitled Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8, commonly referred to as DAP, and NAEYC’s Code of Ethical Conduct (NAEYC, 2009, 2011). Let’s explore each of these briefly because they are a foundation for the work that you are doing. You will also learn more about them in this book.
CSEFEL's Pyramid Model

CSEFEL is a consortium of universities and organizations that focuses on promoting social and emotional competence in young children from birth to age 5. CSEFEL disseminates research and evidence-based practices to early childhood programs across the country.

CSEFEL utilizes a pyramid model to describe the relationships among prevention, promotion, and intervention strategies. The bottom, or most ubiquitous, level of the pyramid reflects the vital importance of systems and policies that support an effective early childhood workforce. The second level, nurturing and responsive relationships, and the third level, high-quality supportive environments, are critically important for all children. The fourth level, targeted social-emotional supports, refers to specific strategies and methods professionals can use to address particular emotional and behavioral skills. The second, third, and fourth levels of the CSEFEL pyramid are the focus of this book. (See Figure 1.1.)

The fifth and highest level of the pyramid, intensive intervention, involves treatment by a mental health or other professional. The need for intensive intervention can be prevented for many children if the more basic levels of the pyramid are consistently present. But some children with serious mental health issues and developmental challenges will be enrolled in typical classrooms. For example, the rate of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is on the rise. ASDs are a group of developmental disabilities that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that one out of every 110 children meets the diagnostic criteria for ASD (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011). This finding suggests that a typical teacher will have at least one child with ASD in her class every few years.

Similarly, the CDC reports that approximately one child in twenty will meet diagnostic criteria for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. It is beyond the scope of this publication to provide detailed strategies for children with severe mental health and developmental challenges, but the reflective approach described herein will benefit all children. Consult the Autism Speaks website (www.autismspeaks.org) and the website for Children and Adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (www.chadd.org) for excellent resources to help children with these prevalent conditions. Because a few children will always need a higher level of intervention, you can play an important role in getting children the services they need by making developmental screening and referral a regular part of your program.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices and Code of Ethical Conduct

In NAEYC’s position statement on DAP, several principles of child development and learning are presented to inform our practices with children, regardless of our setting or specialty (e.g., teacher, therapist, administrator). Among many of the principles presented, DAP encourages us to address all developmental domains, individualize experiences to meet the unique needs of each child, and
remember that children learn best through play, all in the context of secure and responsive relationships.

In addition, the principles presented in this book are consistent with NAEYC’s Code of Ethical Conduct for those who work with young children and families. The Code presents a shared framework of our professional responsibilities with children, families, colleagues, and society. It requires us to recognize the comprehensive and unique health, developmental, and educational needs of the whole child in the context of his or her family, culture, and community. Each of these ideas will be elaborated in great detail in this book, and guidance is provided for applying them in our work. For complete coverage of DAP and the Code of Ethical Conduct, please visit the NAEYC website at naeyc.org.

The children in our programs are not simple beings to be controlled with classroom-management strategies. Nor are they simple machines into which we put facts and concepts only to be recited in the future. To the contrary, our young charges are unique, complex, multidimensional, and dynamic individuals brimming with ideas, aptitudes, curiosity, and emotional needs. It is in their best interests and ours as professionals to view children in all their complexity when we guide them to become courteous and effective human beings.

**REFLECTIVE PROCESS**

“When I look in the mirror, I see a happy girl who hates lima beans and loves jelly beans.”

—Mollie, Age 6

Why do we like what we like? Why do we do the things we do? Our preferences and our actions, the ways in which we choose to behave, come from somewhere. They don’t just emerge randomly. But what underlies our behavior choices and patterns? What underlies the behavior choices and patterns of the children with whom we work? These are the questions of reflection.

**DEFINING REFLECTION**

Reflection has several meanings. At one level, reflection refers to the ability to see ourselves as others see us. Self-reflection, or reflecting on oneself, is like looking into a magical magnifying mirror. Through this mirror, we have access to the hidden world of our thoughts and emotions in the context of our life history, current circumstances, and aspirations for our future. Reflection also refers to a thinking process that allows us to consider the many variables that result in the behavior of others. If we angled that magical mirror to see inside another person, we would be able to put his behavior into the context of his thoughts, emotions, and other unique attributes. Daniel Siegel, founder of the Mindsight Institute, refers to “me-maps” and “you-maps” to describe the brain’s process for insight into ourselves and others (Siegel, 2011). For our purposes, reflection includes both the ability to look within ourselves and to look in depth at children so that we may use our enhanced understanding to determine the most effective ways to promote their social and emotional competence.
The field of education and the field of mental health have somewhat different definitions of the word *reflection*. The education literature emphasizes teaching practices. **Reflective practice** in education is *a cycle that involves stopping to consider [teaching] practices and the reasons for them, thinking critically about alternative perspectives and changing practices based on new understandings* (O’Connor & Diggins, 2002). As summarized by McFarland and her colleagues, self-reflection allows educators to distance themselves from their thoughts and actions, make sense of how and why particular practices worked or didn’t work, and use new understanding of these processes to adapt practices to be more effective in the future (McFarland, Saunders, & Allen, 2009; Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2005).

In contrast, early childhood mental health practitioners believe that the purpose of reflection is not to distance oneself from her thoughts and actions, but precisely to examine those thoughts, emotions, intentions, and actions in the context of her history of being in relationships. Rather than setting them aside, the reflective practitioner uses her self-awareness in the very work of promoting positive development in others (Heffron, Ivins, & Weston, 2005). **Reflective functioning** in mental health refers to the essential human capacity to understand behavior in light of underlying mental states and intentions (Slade, 2005). It involves a cluster of related skills that includes the adult’s awareness of her own mental states and those of the child, as well as the ability to understand how these mental states affect the child’s behavior and her own caregiving behavior (Tomlin, Sturm, & Koch, 2009). In the following example, Ms. Keisha demonstrates reflective functioning when helping five-year-old Charlie manage more effectively in the classroom:

Charlie is new to Ms. Keisha’s kindergarten class. His constant motion, disruptive outbursts, and aggressive behavior bring chaos to the otherwise peaceful, organized classroom.

Keisha steps back and realizes that she is feeling particularly frustrated by Charlie’s behavior. Keisha’s own parents and teachers would never have tolerated such behavior and would have imposed severe consequences. She believes that children this age should know how to control their anger and impulses better than Charlie does. Sometimes she feels like his behavior is intentional.

Keisha then remembers that Charlie and his mother, a victim of domestic violence, have moved in and out of homes of relatives and shelters for the past five years. His hair-trigger tendency to fight most likely is an adaptive response to experiences in his past. Charlie has never been in a group setting for longer than a week and probably has no idea how to behave in a classroom.

At first, Keisha considers using a firm, assertive voice with Charlie, looking him in the eye and imposing time-out. But then Keisha remembers that children who have been traumatized often feel threatened by a firm voice and direct eye contact. She remembers that
she hasn’t taken the time to establish a supportive relationship with Charlie, so she decides to focus on building Charlie’s trust and sense of security. She knows that his cooperation will improve when he feels safe and respected.

By examining her own reactions, putting the child’s behavior in context, and intentionally deciding on the most effective response, Keisha’s reflective process has positive results for Charlie.

Keisha recognizes that her role as an early educator goes beyond teaching Charlie and his classmates how to read and write. She knows that she is also responsible for promoting their social skills and emotional health during the many hours that they are together. Keisha acknowledges the importance of looking within herself and also reflecting on the unique attributes of each child in fulfilling this tremendous responsibility.

**What Reflection Looks Like**

Psychologist and researcher Carl Rogers introduced “client-centered therapy,” a therapeutic technique that emphasized a communication technique called **reflective listening** (Rogers, 1951). As the name suggests, the **reflective listener** serves as a mirror to the speaker. Rather than answering the client’s question, challenging his idea, asking questions, or offering advice, the reflective listener **confirms the idea the speaker expresses.** This reflection includes reference to the words, emotional tone, and nonverbal messages that are expressed. In therapy, reflective listening might sound like the following example:

**Client** (holding head in hands and looking at the floor): “I just can’t get my husband to listen to me! I’ve been trying for years!”

**Therapist:** “It sounds like you’ve tried and tried for a long time and you can’t seem to get your husband to listen to your concerns.”

Virginia Axline adapted Rogers’s then “person-centered” approach to her work as a psychologist with young children (Axline, 1947, 1989). Axline’s “play therapy” is an approach to helping children between ages 3 and 11 work through anxiety and other emotional issues through play in the context of a supportive, responsive relationship (Swenson, 2010). Reflective listening with young children recognizes that children express themselves differently from adults and requires that we observe the way they play and interact with others to understand their thoughts, feelings, and needs. A therapy session with a five-year-old might look like this example:

**Child** (bouncing the plastic tiger up and down and hiding the boy doll behind the playhouse): “Grr! I’m going to get that little stinker.”

**Therapist:** “That tiger is very angry!”
Part 1 • Reflective Guidance

CHILD: “She won’t find him back here.”

THERAPIST: “It looks like the boy feels safe behind the house.”

Early childhood educators are not expected to be therapists and should not attempt to practice therapy without proper qualifications. But you can learn a great deal about the children in your care by reflective listening. To be more precise, when working with young children, the term reflective listening tells only part of the story. Young children often express themselves through nonverbal means, such as make-believe play, art, movement, and emotional displays (e.g., tantrums, pouting, whining, hiding); thus, the term reflective observation is more accurate. The purpose of reflective observation is to learn about children’s perceptions, thoughts, and feelings through their play, stories, and other behavior. Reflective observation in the classroom may look like the following scenario:

Ms. Marsha asked her students to draw a picture of their family and to narrate the stories while she wrote them down. Four-year-old Lawrence, a playful, sometimes aggressive and defiant child, is the youngest of seven brothers. He drew three big people and about 15 small people standing and sleeping in every corner of a small house, including the roof and the front lawn. Lawrence asked Ms. Marsha to write these words, “I don’t know all these people but they live at my house. This one is Bruce and he’s mean so he sleeps in the doghouse. That’s what the aunties say.”

Ms. MARSHA: “There are lots of people and you don’t know some of them. Your aunties say that Bruce is mean so he sleeps in the doghouse?”

LAWRENCE: “He’s mean to Mommy and me and Lenny and Jack.”

Ms. MARSHA: “Sometimes he’s mean to you and the people you love like your brothers and your mom?”

LAWRENCE (tugging on his hair, sucking on his collar): “I hope he doesn’t hurt the dog.”

Ms. MARSHA: “You are worried about the dog and the people you love.”

Marsha’s comments reflect Lawrence’s concerns expressed through his art and descriptions. Marsha might feel helpless to do anything to relieve Lawrence’s anxiety, but her reflective responses have made a contribution to his mental health and well-being by conveying to him that his feelings are valid and he has been heard and understood. She has helped Lawrence “feel felt,” an essential emotional connection that will buffer the impact of difficult experiences and enable Lawrence to work through troubling emotions and situations (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003).

The next time Lawrence behaves in a manner that is aggressive, Marsha interprets his behavior against the backdrop of a child who has witnessed aggressive
behavior modeled by an adult who is important to his family. The next time he is defiant, she considers the likelihood that Lawrence has very few ways in which he can safely assert his autonomy at home. She recognizes that sometimes he needs to feel that he is in charge because at home, many other people control his circumstances and he feels powerless to control how things turn out.

It takes time and practice to be able to tune in accurately to what children are communicating in these indirect ways. One should consider this time and effort as an investment in becoming an effective interpreter of children’s behavior.

Reflection also involves looking within oneself to unearth the deeper mental states that shape our actions. Throughout this book, the reader is invited to explore those mental states (or inner states), thoughts, feelings, preferences, intentions, and biases, in the context of a variety of subjects. Behavior does not occur in a vacuum, but rather works in a three-way partnership with the emotional domain and the cognitive domain, as Ms. Marsha contemplates:

Ms. Marsha takes a moment to consider her experience with Lawrence. Her feelings and Lawrence’s situation remind her of how she used to feel with her childhood friend, Carla. Carla lived with her extended family of ten in a two-bedroom apartment. The crowded environment resulted in frequent irritable outbursts by adults who in turn scolded the children. Although Carla had little influence on the activities and relationships at her home, Marsha remembers her to be very bossy with their group of friends. With the support of Marsha and a cadre of compassionate teachers, Carla grew up to be a strong leader and the owner of a successful company. As a teacher, Marsha recognizes the importance of her responses to Lawrence so that she can support him and positively influence his development.

WHY REFLECTION IS IMPORTANT

Innumerable strategies can be used to teach a skill or solve a problem. Some approaches are very effective, others are less effective, and some actually work against our desired outcome. For example, when a child is having a temper tantrum, giving him some tools to calm down is usually effective, scolding him is less effective, and spanking him will increase the intensity of the emotional outburst. Reflection enables the adult to articulate the goals he is trying to accomplish, explore the many variables he must consider, and determine the most effective strategy for accomplishing his goals.

INSTINCTUAL REACTIONS AND INTENTIONAL RESPONSES

Reflection is a key element of the distinction between a reaction and a response. A reaction is an emotion or behavior that immediately follows a triggering event with no time taken for consideration of outcomes or other factors. It is a rather impulsive action that follows an event. In contrast, a response is an emotion or
behavior that follows a triggering event and is the result of thoughtful examination of personal and contextual variables, determination of desired outcomes, exploration of all possible actions, and an intentional selection of the most effective course of action. A split-second reaction is a good thing when someone is in immediate danger. When the goal is to foster skills in young children, however, it is more effective to take the time to develop a thoughtful, intentional response.

This is not always easy. We do many things on instinct. An **instinct** is an inherent inclination toward a certain behavior that occurs below a conscious level. Sometimes our instincts are right on target and other times they are off base. Our instincts are based on a combination of built-in survival reflexes, life experiences, and our immediate interpretations of our perceptions, which may or may not be accurate. When we pay conscious attention to the ways in which we interpret our circumstances, we can turn otherwise instinctual reactions into intentional responses. By going through this reflective process over and over, the accuracy of our instincts improves. Like any new skill, however, honing our instincts takes mindful practice (Gladwell, 2005). According to scientists who study the development of expertise in the business world, “through an ongoing process of honest and continuous self-assessment, we can develop expertise in anything. It requires struggle, sacrifice, and honest, often painful self-assessment. There are no shortcuts” (Ericsson, Prietula, & Cokely, 2007).

We do many things out of habit, too. Actions that took some time to learn at first have become so automatic you don’t have to think about them at all, such as brushing your teeth, driving a car, or proceeding through the grocery store. We behave in habitual ways in our classrooms, too. The steps you go through to serve snacks, organize the children for circle time, and gather your things to go home are examples of activities that once required thought but over time have become habitual. Sometimes, the ways we relate to certain people or react to particular behaviors become habitual, too. For example, when a child whines, your hands may go instantly to your ears to muffle the sound. It may take conscious effort on your part to stop and consider the personal origins of your behavior and the need the child is expressing.

**LOOKING IN THE MIRROR...**

Consider the ways you typically respond to challenging behaviors:

- What do you do when a child grabs an object from another child?
- What do you do when children fight?
- What do you do when a child whines?
- How do you handle tattling?

These problems are not easy to solve, and yet you may find yourself in the habit of addressing them in very predictable ways.
We behave in habitual ways because we always have, or we haven’t taken the time to really think about it. We are on autopilot. In fact, automaticity is an essential brain function because it allows us to focus on learning new material. But just because an action is automatic, it is not necessarily the best way to accomplish our goal. Especially when it comes to addressing challenging behavior, it is important to stop and think about what we are trying to accomplish. We should consider if our action will help us accomplish our goal or if it is simply a habitual reaction to a trigger. Keisha, whose classroom was described at the beginning of this chapter, was in the habit of using a firm, assertive voice to correct children’s behavior. It took conscious reflection for her to stop and consider the individual needs of the child and the various approaches that would be more effective in accomplishing her goal of improving Charlie’s coping skills. Please see Figure 1.2 for questions to guide our thinking about child behavior.

**A REFLECTIVE APPROACH TO PROMOTING ESSENTIAL SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS**

What social and emotional skills does a child need to be successful in school and in life? Researchers and authors have clustered social and emotional skills into various groupings to communicate their findings. For example, *Mind in the Making* is a highly recommended summary of the research to date on the importance of skills in this domain, and it organizes them into “seven essential life skills every child needs” (Galinsky, 2010). Pam Schiller also describes seven essential skills for school success, though they differ slightly from Galinsky’s seven skills (Schiller, 2009). Ann Epstein explores eleven skills in her coverage of social–emotional learning in preschool (Epstein, 2009). As a clinical psychologist and behavior consultant, I have found that the competencies children need to thrive can be summarized by two sets of...
emotional skills and two sets of social skills. This discussion is consistent with the other texts on the subject, but our emphasis on the reflective process lends itself to this organizing structure. The essential skills discussed in this book include the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional Skills</th>
<th>Social Skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-regulation</td>
<td>Empathy/sense of community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reflection and Self-Regulation**

Research suggests that a caregiver’s ability to reflect on her own personal life story predicts the quality of the attachment relationships she will have with children in her care (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003). The caregiver’s self-reflection enables her to hold and manage the child’s emotions when those emotions overwhelm the child’s ability to cope. Over time, such a pattern of responsive caregiving enables the child to regulate his own emotions.

Early childhood professionals also promote self-regulation in children by modeling self-reflection. If you have ever tried to break a habit or respond differently to circumstances, you know that before you can change your patterns of behavior, you must heighten your awareness of yourself in those circumstances where the behavior has become automatic. For example, to use relaxation strategies to calm down when you are angry, you must first identify that you feel emotionally aroused, ascertain the nature of that feeling (anger? frustration? impatience?), consider alternative ways of coping, and consciously replace the automatic angry outburst with practiced strategies. So it is with children. When we model self-reflection, it allows children to see the underlying basis of our decisions and actions, as can be seen with Ms. Keisha in the following vignette:

It has been a week of cold rain and slush. Getting the children outside for recess has been impossible and everyone is cranky. Ms. Keisha has worked tirelessly to keep the children engaged and active, but today is Friday and the children are bouncing off the walls! Poking and pestering each other, the children are producing a continuous stream of tattling and whining.

Keisha invites the children to the circle-time area for a chat. She begins the conversation with self-reflection:

"Children, I feel frustrated and irritable. We have had to stay inside all week, and I wish we could get out and run around, but the weather is awful. Sometimes when I can't get outside, everything seems to bother me. I get angry about little things. It is hard to remember to calm myself down so I don't hurt other people with my words or actions. I wonder if some of you feel the same way?"
Keisha is thinking aloud about her feelings and concerns so that the children can observe self-reflection in action. Through repeated exposure to adult self-reflection, children become increasingly able to develop these skills themselves.

**Reflection and Autonomy**

Three ingredients are necessary for children to develop *autonomy*, the sense that one is able to do things for himself or herself. These ingredients are wonder, confidence, and motivation. Children are born wondering about the world in which they live, and it is our job to support their natural inclination toward discovery. With our society’s emphasis on educational outputs such as test scores, we often lose sight of the importance of the process of wonder and discovery in children’s learning. It can be tempting for educators to use worksheets and flashcards to ensure that children are learning the facts necessary for success at their next stage of development. When we reflect on our own learning, however, we realize that our richest educational experiences have come from our self-directed exploration of the environment, seasoned with conversations and fortified by time for contemplation. Upon reflection, we realize that confidence and motivation emerge over time as a function of our successful interactions with the world. To promote the confidence and motivation necessary for the development of autonomy, we must provide children with opportunities to explore and interact with a healthy array of materials, people, and circumstances.

**Reflection, Empathy, and Sense of Community**

“How would you like it if he did that to you?” This question is common in early childhood settings. The question has two parts and both parts require self-reflection. “If he did that to you” is a hypothetical premise that requires a child to step into the shoes of another person and imagine that person’s experience. “How would you like it . . .?” is a question that requires a child to look within and reflect on how she would feel in a similar situation. It is by imagining oneself as having the experiences of another person that we are able to understand the way others feel.

During a typical day with young children, we have countless opportunities to model the use of self-reflection to promote empathy. We model self-reflection when we say, “That would make me feel sad (or angry or scared), too.” We model the capacity to reflect on the feelings of others when we say, “Look how sad Tina feels when you hit her.” When young children observe reflective
processes offered by role models, they are more inclined to practice these processes themselves in their own interpersonal relationships.

Self-reflection is also useful in building a sense of community. When we stop to consider the qualities of a group experience that make us feel connected to that group, we can more effectively create such an atmosphere in our classrooms. For example, by creating opportunities for small and large group goal-oriented activities, children are able to see their important role as part of the community. A classroom garden is one such experience wherein all students can have roles and responsibilities that are important to the success of the project as a whole. By discussing each child’s contribution, they all can recognize their important place in the classroom community.

**Reflection in Communication**

Scientists use the term **meta-cognition** to describe the process of thinking about thinking. We use reflective words every day to describe our inner states and the thoughts and feelings of others. Self-reflective words that describe our inner states include “I think,” “I feel,” “I remember,” “I wonder,” “I wish,” “I suppose,” and “I imagine.” Similarly, “You seem,” “You appear,” and “It sounds like you feel” are phrases we use when we reflect on the verbal and nonverbal expressions of others, essentially putting words to other people’s inner experiences. That we use all of these words with such regularity is a testament to the centrality of reflection in everyday communication.

**Expressive communication** refers to the process involved in the transmission of oral, nonverbal, or symbolic communication to another person. Self-reflection increases the effectiveness of our communication and includes filtering, considering the desired outcome, selecting the best communication approach from among alternatives, and delivering the message effectively. Sometimes we must filter what we say, or inhibit the expression of words or gestures that might offend other people, get us in trouble, or interfere with accomplishing our goals. Imagine, for a moment, that a parent in your program spent all day cooking stew for you. It looks awful, smells putrid, and tastes even worse. Think of how hard you have to work to resist making a face of disgust or saying, “Ugh!” If you are like most people, as a young child, you did not have the capacity to reflect on the impact of your communication on another person’s feelings. The ability to stop, filter, and judge the best response after a reflective analysis of choices only begins to emerge in early childhood and develops throughout the lifespan. But when you model self-reflection by thinking through communication issues aloud, you provide children with a strategy that they can use for the rest of their lives.

Reflection is also important in **receptive communication**, the process of perceiving and interpreting the communication of others. Because young children are relatively inexperienced in communicating their inner states, we must observe closely and recognize that they are communicating through their behavior, play activities, and creative art. We must tune in to the nuances of the
child's behavior, in the context of the child's developmental level and family and cultural influences, to fully understand his underlying messages. When we then put words to the child's behavior, his emotional vocabulary will grow and he will increasingly be able to communicate more directly in the future.

Summary

Working with young children is complicated, and many variables must be considered when determining the most effective ways to support their social and emotional growth. As an early childhood professional, you may have dozens of children to get to know. Busy as a typical classroom day can be, we must make time to reflect on the unique attributes of each child and our own inner states as we attempt to meet their needs. Each child enters our classroom with his own unique array of interests, sensory needs, skills, strengths, and weaknesses in the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional domains of development. Each comes from a family with its own structure, cultural values, educational status, and socioeconomic background.

Just as each child is complicated and unique, you the professional also bring a unique profile into the classroom. You have your strengths, weaknesses, biases, and preferences. You are influenced by your own history of having been cared for and taught. You are guided by the values of your culture and family as well as by the principles you have developed over the years as a result of your training and experience.

Because of the complex and often intensely emotional nature of early childhood work, it is important that early educators have regular, built-in opportunities for self-reflection and supportive conversations with coworkers or supervisors. These conversations should provide a safe, secure space for the professional to think aloud about his thoughts, feelings, ideas, and concerns regarding the children in his care. Many early childhood programs have designated time periods for staff to participate in individual, group, or peer reflective supervision (Weigand, 2007). Reflective supervision is highly recommended because it enables us to work through the complexity and emotional intensity we experience in our work so that we can better promote children's development.

Review and Apply

1. Explain why reflection is important in promoting social skills and emotional competence.

2. Five-year-olds Tonja and Bonita are arguing loudly about who will play the mom and who will play the child in their story.
   a. Describe how you would react to their argument out of instinct or habit.
   b. After reflecting on yourself and on the needs of the children, what strategies could you use to help them resolve their conflict?
"There is no job in the world that is more important than mine. I plant the seeds of wisdom, water them with love, nurture them with mindfulness, and watch them grow and thrive."

—Ms. Rachael, Age 38, Teacher of Three-Year-Olds

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

▶ Define emotional intelligence and multiple intelligences.
▶ Describe how the dimensions of your temperament influence the ways in which you approach your work.
▶ Recognize the ways in which your early relationships influence your relationships and interactions today.
▶ Assess your level of comfort with, and competence in, the cognitive, social, and emotional skills you are trying to promote in children.
▶ Describe the strategies you use to manage stress and minimize its impact on your work with children.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES

The groundbreaking works of Howard Gardner, father of the theory of multiple intelligences, and Daniel Goleman, creator of the concept of emotional intelligence, have reframed the way we understand intelligence. Their efforts expand intelligence beyond the purely cognitive domain to include physical and
social–emotional components. According to Gardner's theory, each of us has strengths and weakness in several types of intelligence. The seven most studied intelligences are logical-mathematical, spatial, linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Gardner initially proposed these seven intelligences, and subsequent research suggests that there may be even more, including naturalistic and existential. Debate continues about whether Gardner's intelligences are merely patterns of strengths and weaknesses within one global concept of intelligence or are, indeed, distinct intelligences. This debate is beyond the scope of this book, but Gardner's theory is useful as we explore how we make sense of our experiences.

In Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman proposes that emotional skills like "self-control, zeal, persistence, and the ability to motivate oneself" are perhaps more important for life success than the cognitive capacities typically associated with intelligence. He explains that the abilities to recognize one's own emotional life, regulate one's feelings, understand the emotions of others, work with others, and have empathy are critically important skills for effective living (Goleman, 1995).

Gardner and Goleman emphasize the importance of developing "interpersonal" and "intrapersonal" capacities to function successfully (Gardner, 1999; Goleman, 1995). Interpersonal intelligence refers to a person's capacity to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people and, consequently, work effectively with others. Interpersonal intelligence is vital for teachers, clinicians, and leaders (Gardner, 1999).

Among his proposed intelligences, Gardner states that perhaps the most important for success in any person's career is intrapersonal intelligence, the capacity to understand oneself, to have an effective working model of oneself—including one's own desires, fears, and capacities—and to use such information effectively in regulating one's own life. This is the stuff of self-reflection. Intrapersonal intelligence is especially important in working with young children because the work elicits such strong emotions.

The capacity for self-reflection as a component of emotional intelligence varies a great deal between people and develops over time. We use words such as insightful and introspective, both of which mean able to look within, when we describe people who seem naturally self-reflective. Even some young children demonstrate an amazing capacity to look within themselves and describe their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. Perhaps you are someone who can look within with ease. In contrast, you may find self-reflection to be difficult, perhaps uncomfortable, and you may have to consciously work at it. Self-reflection, introspection, intrapersonal intelligence, or whatever we may call it, is an aptitude that can be improved with concerted effort.

An intern once told me, "I'm an after-thinker." She was explaining that she cannot always grasp what she is feeling and thinking at the moment an event occurs; only later can she look back and describe what she had been experiencing. This retrospective analysis is very common and, in fact, describes
how we develop skills in many areas. Think for a moment about how athletes learn to improve their performance. Many athletes use video clips to look back at their event or game to determine how to perform more effectively in the future. Therapists develop the capacity for self-reflection by sitting with supervisors and poring over audio or visual recordings of interactions with clients for the purpose of understanding the perceptions, thoughts, and intentions behind the therapist’s responses. Humbling as this experience can be, it greatly increases the self-reflection skills of the therapist. As an early childhood professional, you can improve the effectiveness of your work by taking a few minutes after your interactions with children to think about your underlying perceptions, thoughts, and intentions as well as how you might improve such interactions in the future.

In the following scenario, Dianna invites Patti, another teacher, to observe a challenging classroom experience to help her gain insight to the problem:

Dianna has been struggling to get Jayson to settle down for activities and finds herself increasingly frustrated. Patti agreed to spend a few minutes observing Dianna’s classroom during certain problematic transition times. After lunch, Patti and Dianna took a few minutes to talk.
Dianna: “See what I mean about Jayson? He’s so hyper. I’ve never seen anybody move around so much. He’s just wild!”

Patti: “He *does* move around a lot! When he knocked over his paint, what was your first thought?”

Dianna: “I was ready to scream at him! If he’d just settle down, things like that wouldn’t happen!”

Patti: “You are really frustrated with him. You don’t know how to help him settle down, which makes you want to scream. It sounds like you feel helpless.”

Dianna: “I mean... he’s a sweet little boy. He’s always wanting to help, but he’s always bumping into things because he moves too fast and too much. I feel like I need to be in overdrive to keep up with him. I just don’t move that fast!”

Patti: “So you can see nice qualities in Jayson, but he’s more active than you are and moves faster. You’re kind of a mellow person... and he’s *not*! I noticed that when you stopped to take a deep breath, he did the same thing. Did you notice that after a few deep breaths, he became a little calmer? I wonder if you can use that as a strategy?”

Dianna was fortunate to have a reflective observer in Patti. Patti could see some events that Dianna missed, and those observations proved very useful in changing Dianna’s way of thinking and interacting with Jayson. Trusted colleagues can provide different perspectives for us. With practice using our magical magnifying mirror to look within ourselves and look deeply into the unique qualities of the child, we can begin to develop multiple perspectives for ourselves as well.

In any given situation with a child, there are limitless ways you can respond and limitless reasons for why you respond the way that you do. A fast-moving child like Jayson can lead one teacher to feel frustrated, helpless, or angry, while another feels energized. Our responses differ from one another because we differ in our temperaments, relationship histories, strengths, weaknesses, and expectations. We also vary from one day to the next because of the inevitable realities and stresses in our own lives. It is important to reflect on and understand these unique and interacting aspects of ourselves so that we can be intentional in our responses.

**Understanding Your Temperament and Personality**

In the field of child development, we talk quite a bit about child temperament, but we adults came into this world with our own temperament as well. Temperament refers to *individual differences in emotional reactivity and regulation that appear early in life, are relatively stable, and are at least partly biologically based* (Rothbart & Bates, 2006). Developmental scientists Buss and
Plomin (1984) proposed that to be considered a temperament dimension, a trait has to be evident in the first two years of life, at least somewhat hereditary, and continuous into later personality. Your temperament is every bit as important as the temperament of the child in understanding your interactions.

Extensive research has been conducted on the subject of temperament and the various behavior qualities that make up temperament. Scientists have looked at ways certain characteristics cluster together, how stable they are, how they correlate with brain processes, whether they predict mental health problems, and the roles they play in relationships (Thomas & Chess, 1977; Zentner & Bates, 2008; Dougherty, et al., 2011; Goldsmith, Lemery, Aksan, & Buss, 2000; Kagan & Snidman, 2004). In an excellent review of the temperament literature, Zentner and Bates (2008) report that the most evidenced-based temperament traits cluster into five general categories: (1) behavior inhibition, (2) irritability/frustration, (3) positive emotionality, (4) activity level, and (5) attention/persistence. This vast body of research gives us information about why we do the things we do and why we are the way we are as adults. Because the original nine dimensions described by Alexander Thomas and Stella Chess are well known and straightforward, discussions of temperament in this book utilize their classification system.

The concept of temperament became the subject of study in the 1950s when Thomas, Chess, and their colleagues noted that environmental differences alone could not account for all the variability between children and that children bring their own unique attributes into their environments. This observation inspired the New York Longitudinal Study (NYLS), where researchers followed 133 individuals from 84 families from the age of three months to adulthood.

The results of NYLS suggested that there are nine basic dimensions of temperament, each of which is characterized by specific patterns of behavior and that these dimensions can differentiate between individuals. The nine temperament dimensions on which people were found to differ are summarized in Table 2.1. These include sensory threshold, intensity of reaction, activity level, initial response (approach/withdrawal), rhythmicity (regularity), adaptability, quality of mood, distractibility, and persistence. According to Thomas and Chess, “Temperament can be equated with the term behavioral style. Each temperament dimension refers to the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what’ (abilities) or the ‘why’ (motivation) of behavior” (Thomas & Chess, 1977; p. 9).

Everyone, you the professional as well as the children with whom you work, entered the world with a distinctive temperament. Your personality as an adult is the result of your inborn temperament and the experiences you have had over the years. On each of the temperament dimensions, our behavior tendencies fall somewhere on a continuum. You may rate yourself high on the adaptability dimension and high on activity level but low on intensity and low on persistence. If that profile describes you, you are someone who enjoys new things but would not go out of your way to look for them. Or, you may rate yourself low on sensitivity, low on activity level, high on adaptability, and high on mood. If that profile describes you, you might be someone who cheerfully goes with the flow, but you have trouble keeping up if things move too quickly.
TABLE 2.1 • Dimensions of Temperament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity threshold</td>
<td>How easily aroused or disturbed is the individual by sensory stimulation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensity</td>
<td>How intense is the individual’s response to stimulation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity level</td>
<td>How much movement and activity does the individual typically display?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>How does the individual respond to changes in routine or expectations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach/withdrawal</td>
<td>What is the individual’s first response to a new situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>Does the individual continue an activity until it is finished?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythmicity</td>
<td>What is the regularity of the individual’s rhythm of activity, bodily functions, sleep, arousal, and so forth? Is the rhythm predictable?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of mood</td>
<td>Is the individual generally pleasant and friendly or fussy and unpleasant?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distractibility</td>
<td>How easily is the individual drawn away from an activity?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on Thomas and Chess (1977)*

---

**LOOKING IN THE MIRROR...**

Using the nine dimensions of Thomas and Chess, we can explore our own unique temperament patterns. Look at Table 2.2. Rate yourself on the dimensions listed in the first column by circling 1 if you are low in this dimension, 2 if you are at a medium level, and 3 if you are at a high level on this dimension. (When completed, put Table 2.2 aside. We will use it again in Chapter 3.)

You might find that on one dimension or another, the answer will be, “Well, it depends the situation.” That is true. Sometimes we are more or less positive in our mood, more or less active, and so forth. For the sake of identifying your temperament profile for further exploration, please think about your most typical behavior style when you complete the chart. Your results will reflect your behavior style in many situations. This exploration will help you understand yourself in relation to the children in your program.

- When you identified your levels on the temperament dimensions, were you surprised by anything?
- Do these observations about yourself help you understand why some situations, interactions, or people are enjoyable and easy for you, while others are more difficult?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Compared to Your Peers:</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>How easily are you bothered or aroused by sensory stimulation?</td>
<td>Penny doesn’t like loud music, wool shirts, roller coasters, or bright lights. She is very sensitive.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Easily bothered or aroused = 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensity of reaction</td>
<td>How intense is your reaction?</td>
<td>Maggie screams when upset and laughs with her whole body when amused.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Most intense = 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity level</td>
<td>How active are you?</td>
<td>Jazzi is in constant motion.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Most active = 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>How well do you respond to changes in routine/expectations?</td>
<td>Polly can easily go with the flow.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Very comfortable with change = 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach/withdrawal</td>
<td>How comfortable are you when approaching new situations?</td>
<td>Rebecca actively seeks new experiences.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Most comfortable = 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>How well do you continue an activity until it is finished?</td>
<td>Jeff won’t stop working on the huge jigsaw puzzle until every piece is in place.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Can stay with it well = 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhythmicity</td>
<td>How regular is your rhythm of activity, sleep, arousal, and so forth?</td>
<td>Regardless of circumstances, Anna wakes up, needs a midday snack, and falls asleep at the same times each day.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Very regular = 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of mood</td>
<td>How positive is your mood?</td>
<td>Caryn is upbeat and cheerful most of the time.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Most positive = 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distractibility</td>
<td>How easily are you drawn away from an activity?</td>
<td>Zach has trouble finishing what he starts because his attention is drawn to everything around him.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Easily distracted = 3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationship between Temperament and Environment

The temperament with which you came into the world is only part of the story. Your temperament interacts with the environment every minute of the day. It is the culmination of those interactions that determines how you behave, the friends you pick, and the activities you choose. Thomas and Chess emphasized that there is no good or bad temperament, but it is the goodness-of-fit between a person’s temperament and the environment that provides the basic dynamic influence for the process of development (Thomas & Chess, 1977). **Goodness-of-fit** refers to the degree to which an individual’s temperament is compatible with the demands and expectations of his environment.

One aspect of that environment is the other people in it. When a person’s temperament is incompatible with that of another, tensions may arise. Think about the goodness-of-fit between your temperament and the temperaments of the teachers and other caregiving adults with whom you have interacted in the past. The memories of the two professionals described next were discussed at a recent workshop:

Mildred said, “My first grade teacher was **scary**. As you can see, I’m a wiggler, and what you see today is calm compared to how I was in first grade! Mrs. Smith liked peace and quiet. I’ve always been a social butterfly. Mrs. Smith liked order and routine, and if something was out of place, even coloring outside the lines, she scolded us in front of the whole class. I could not concentrate if I wasn’t moving, and I was always dropping pencils or whatever else I was fidgeting with. If we got out of our chair, she put our name on the board. You would have thought the blackboard was named after me because it always said **Mildred** in big letters! First grade was awful!”

Patrice said, “As a child, I was terrified to try new things. Now I’m not scared. I just get nervous. Routines make me feel comfortable because I know what to expect. I hate surprises! I’ll never forget my first day of preschool. My dad dropped me off and there was so much commotion. The kids were loud, the lights were bright, and Ms. Saylor was super-hyper! She would break into song unexpectedly. She moved very fast from one thing to the next. The whole thing was overwhelming. Our aide, Mr. Brian, was very mellow, and I think that if it weren’t for him, I never would have made it through that unbearable year!”

Mildred and Patrice were so profoundly affected by the mismatch in temperaments between themselves and their early educators that those classroom experiences are still vividly remembered with shadows of the discomfort they felt as children.
Looking in the Mirror...

Think about a teacher from your childhood whose temperament was similar to yours:

- What emotions do you feel when you think about your relationship with that teacher?

Now think about a teacher whose temperament dimensions were different from yours:

- What emotions do you feel when you think about your relationship with that teacher and the memories of that classroom?
- What might have made those experiences more positive?

Understanding Your Early Relationships: Attachment, Ghosts, and Angels

Early childhood educators assume many different roles with young children, including caregiving, being the provider of physical and emotional care and support. Attachment is an important aspect of caregiving and refers to a child’s sense of security and support from a particular adult—the attachment figure—especially in situations that arouse anxiety or distress. Trust develops from the caregiver being psychologically and physically available to provide comfort, protection, and safety when the child is upset or needs help managing stress. The caregiver is the child’s “safe haven.” The attachment figure also serves as a “secure base” from which the child can confidently explore and engage with the environment (Powell, Cooper, Hoffman, & Marvin, 2009). Secure attachment fosters feelings of self-efficacy, the sense that an individual can have an effect on the world (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). From early attachment relationships, the child develops internal working models, or cognitive-emotional expectations for relationships that influence
how he experiences and reacts to the caregiver and, over time, to other people (Boris, Aoki, & Zeanah, 1999).

You, like all adults, grew up with your own internal working models of caregiving relationships. **Ghosts in the nursery** is a term borrowed from the field of infant mental health that suggests that *the ways in which our primary caregivers (parents and guardians) related to us, for better or for worse, profoundly influence our present relationships with children in our care* (Fraiberg, Adelson, & Shapiro, 1975). Fraiberg’s group was the first to articulate how our past experiences exert ongoing influences on our values, expectations, and interactions with others. More recently, the term **angels in the nursery** was coined to describe *the influence of positive early relationships on ongoing caregiving relationships* (Lieberman, Padron, Van Horn, & Harris, 2005). Lieberman and colleagues explain that angels in the nursery are those early relationships that have given messages of unconditional love and provide the child with an ongoing sense of worth and security.

Each of us has our own ghosts or angels from our past. The stories of Linda and Marla illustrate the continued influence of early relationships on current caregiving styles:

Linda and her mother lived in a one-bedroom apartment above a liquor store on a busy city street. Although they did not own any books and Linda had few toys, Linda’s mother made sure that their regular bus rides to the library were filled with stories, conversations, and games like “I spy.” Linda remembers that her mother often worried about paying bills but always told her that they were “a clever family that could handle anything.” As a teacher now, Linda has particular sympathy for children whose families struggle with poverty, and she instinctively engages them in activities that promote their creativity and self-efficacy.

In contrast, Marla and her brother, as children, were careful to stay quiet during meals and at bedtime. Even when their parents were not fighting, the ever-present, ominous tension in the air warned of an impending temper explosion by one parent or the other. Disobedience was severely punished and complaints were not tolerated. Marla was prohibited from playing with neighbors because, according to her mother, “They are ignorant.” Her father insisted that the world was unsafe and people were out to hurt her. As a teacher, Marla is appalled by students who do not obey immediately. She also feels intimidated by her students’ parents who are assertive. She finds herself avoiding conflict and controversy.

Linda and Marla relate to their young students in ways that mirror their relationships with their primary caregivers. Although Linda lacked material possessions, her mother was sure to attend to Linda’s needs and inner states, as
evidenced by her reassurance about their ability to make ends meet. Marla’s parents were preoccupied with their own emotional states and demonstrated little regard for Marla’s needs. Marla’s ghosts in the nursery strongly influence her relationships in the present and make it difficult for her to tolerate the challenges of working with young children and their families.

We might conclude that Marla’s attachment to her parents was insecure, largely due to their unpredictable moods and lack of regard for her inner states. Nonetheless, there is hope for Marla as a professional. Research suggests that a person’s ability to reflect on her own early relationships and to recognize their impact on present interactions is a strong predictor of her capacity for healthy attachment with children in her care. In fact, those abilities may matter more than whether those early relationships were positive or negative (Siegel, 2001). To improve her effectiveness in guiding the children, Marla’s task is to explore in depth her childhood experiences within the context of a supportive relationship in the present, such as in therapy or reflective supervision. Through the process of developing her own narrative of her life story, she is likely to learn to trust herself and the world around her. As she improves in her ability to reflect on her own life history and inner states, she will increase her ability to attend to the needs and inner states of the children in her care (Siegel & Hartzell, 2003).

**Understanding Your Competence and Preferences in the Domains of Development**

In the various domains of development—cognitive, physical, and social-emotional—we vary in our levels of competence and pleasure. Naturally, we tend to select activities that complement those areas in which we feel most comfortable and competent. The teacher who loves to create art but is physically uncoordinated might offer children more artistic opportunities than physical ones. Although this is understandable, we should always remember that all the domains of development are important for all children. In fact, early learning standards require that we actively and directly address all the domains of development and content areas in our everyday work with children. Your awareness of your own strengths, weaknesses, and preferences can remind you to make a variety of activities available for the children in your program. This is why a reflective examination of your lesson plans is a good step toward becoming a reflective practitioner.

**Physical and Cognitive Domains**

Some of us are extraordinary athletes or dancers with wonderful coordination, endurance, and grace. Many of us are not. We vary a great deal in our gross-motor development. We also vary in our fine-motor skills, such as writing, drawing, sewing, and tinkering with appliances. It is important to recognize how we subtly encourage or discourage children’s activities on the basis of our own preferences. Again, we must remember that children need many assorted opportunities to develop their gross- and fine-motor skills and be sure to provide them—whether we enjoy them or not.
The cognitive domain has many components, including language, literacy, number skills, problem-solving, abstract reasoning, creative thinking, and the integration of all of those. We differ from each other in our patterns of strengths and weaknesses among the various cognitive areas, as is evident in the following classroom description:

The two-year-olds are lucky to have Katrina and Leila as their co-teachers. Katrina is a by-the-book, follow-the-rules, detail-oriented person. If Katrina is in charge, there are no worries that a licensing regulation or curriculum standard could be overlooked. She struggles, however, with handling unexpected events, thinking creatively to solve a unique problem, or acting spontaneously when novel opportunities arise.

Leila, in contrast, is a big-picture, go-with-the-flow, think-outside-the-box kind of person. No problem is too difficult to solve with a little creative ingenuity. She has to work very hard, however, to remember such details as documenting important events, bringing emergency contact information on field trips, and putting on a hairnet to serve snacks. Leila’s creativity and spontaneity are matched only by her lack of attention to details. Together, Katrina and Leila are an effective team whose skills complement each other.

Like in the other skill areas, we must be sure to utilize our strengths, work on improving our weaknesses, and offer our students the opportunities they need for their optimal development.

**Social–Emotional Domain**

Just like in the physical and cognitive domains, we also have strengths and weaknesses in the social–emotional realm. As early childhood professionals, we play a critical role in fostering the skills that let children experience, regulate,
and appropriately express their emotions so they may confidently explore the
world. We are also responsible for supporting their development of empathy,
sense of community, and the ability to communicate effectively (Goleman,
1995). With such an important task, we must first reflect on our own competen-
cies in those emotional and social areas.

**SELF-REGULATION**

As our students get older, we expect better and better impulse control from
them. We expect them to delay gratification for increasingly longer periods of
time. For example, it doesn’t surprise Leila when the two-year-olds grab for
snacks as soon as the serving platter is placed on the table. But when Leila visits
the kindergarten classroom, she is shocked to see a child grab rather than wait
for everyone to be served.

We also assume that children will be able to regulate their emotions more
and more effectively as they get older. Again, Leila expects some aggressive
behavior or temper tantrums from her two-year-olds but is surprised when she
sees those reactions in the kindergarteners.

Like any skill, you have strengths and weaknesses in these important skill
areas. It is useful to think about times in our own lives when we have done
impulsive things only later to regret them and wish for a do-over. Step by step,
we tried, made mistakes, and eventually became competent enough with our
skills to become early childhood professionals. In fact, we will continue to work
to master these competencies throughout our lives. We know that these skills
don’t develop in children without support from the adults in their world and
that we are those adults. But how well do we control our own impulses, delay
gratification, or regulate emotions?

**LOOKING IN THE MIRROR...**

- Can you resist the impulse to eat the chocolate cake, yell at a bad driver, or bite your
  fingernails?
- How difficult—or easy—is it for you to pass up fun activities in the moment and instead
  work toward a long-range goal?
- What experiences helped you learn to regulate your impulses and delay gratification?
- When you are angry, how well do you stop to calm down, consider your options, and select
  the most appropriate response?

Think about a time when you had an emotional outburst. For example, maybe you were ex-
tremely angry and blew up at someone. Or, maybe you were unable to control your laughter at a
time when laughing was inappropriate:

- What were the consequences?
- What did you learn about emotional regulation from that experience?
- What factors helped you learn to manage those emotions more effectively?
When helping children develop self-regulation, we can use experiences from our past to guide us in what to do (or not to do) for them.

**AUTONOMY**

We can also use experiences from our past to help us support children’s emerging sense of autonomy. As with other competencies, we have strengths and weaknesses in the components of autonomy. Autonomy requires a sense of wonder, confidence, and motivation. It can be enlightening to think about experiences in your past that encouraged or discouraged these components of autonomy.

**LOOKING IN THE MIRROR…**

- As a child, were you encouraged to explore, try new things, and even get messy?
- As an adult, are you still driven by curiosity and a desire to learn about the world?
- If not, did specific experiences inhibit your exploration?
- What did your caregiving adults do to encourage or discourage your autonomy?

**EMPATHY AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY**

If you ever walked into a room with multiple infants, it probably didn’t take long to notice that babies cry or laugh in sympathy with one another. We come into the world with a certain level of empathy for the emotions of others around us. Over the years, some of us become jaded and we no longer feel the pain and suffering of others as much as we did when we were young. Others

**LOOKING IN THE MIRROR…**

You received messages from your family, school, and community about how to treat others. Perhaps you were encouraged to “turn the other cheek” or to reach out and help the less fortunate. Sometimes adults advise children not to put up with mistreatment from other people and, indeed, it can be unsafe to back down from a threat in some circumstances. It may even have been the case that you received all these messages about empathy, and many more, over the years:

- What messages did your family or community give you about how to treat others?
- Were you encouraged to overlook negative behaviors of others?
- Were you encouraged to stand up for yourself or to back down?
- Were you ever encouraged to intimidate others?
become more in synch with the distress of other people. How is that we are so different from one another in the dimension of empathy? Perhaps we are born with variable predispositions for empathy, but it is also likely that our level of empathy was more or less influenced by our experiences.

You can use the lessons you learned from your past to create environments and deliver messages for children that promote empathy and foster their sense that they belong to a community that cares about them.

COMMUNICATION

Recall that communication involves both expressing your needs, thoughts, and feelings in such a way that others can understand you as well as comprehending the messages expressed by others. For example, Linda, described earlier, enjoyed a warm and open relationship with her mother, who made it a point to ask her about her thoughts, ideas, and feelings. In contrast, Linda’s colleague Marla was strongly discouraged from expressing her inner states for fear of negative consequences. Messages like these can diminish a child’s willingness to practice the complicated skill of communicating.

People vary a great deal in their communication styles. Some people are dramatic with their gestures or can turn a simple event into an epic tale. Some people like to expound on every imaginable detail, going off on tangents and focusing on minutia until the listener backs away looking at his watch. Others communicate in short sentences, giving only minimal answers to questions and volunteering very little information. Some can express a thousand words simply with their facial expressions, shrugging their shoulders, or rolling their eyes. These communication styles and everything in between result from a combination of your temperament, your experiences, and your comfort level with your audience.

Listening with your ears and eyes takes practice and is important in your work with young children, especially as you guide them to express their needs, thoughts, and feelings.

LOOKING IN THE MIRROR...

Think about how well you express yourself.

• Is it easy or difficult for you to share your experiences and opinions?
• Is it easy or difficult for you to find the words that accurately describe your thoughts and feelings?
• Do you prefer to use words or to express yourself through art, poetry, dance, or music?

Communication also involves listening and observing, focusing on both the verbal and the nonverbal aspects of communication:

• How well do you listen?
• How well are you able to read the emotional messages conveyed by another person’s tone of voice, selection of words, body language, and facial expression?
Understanding Your Beliefs about Teaching and Learning

It is important to be aware of the beliefs and expectations with which you entered the profession of early childhood educator. At a recent workshop, teachers were asked the following question: “Why did you become a teacher of young children?” Some of the participants were new to the field and some were “quite seasoned,” as one experienced teacher described herself. A partial list of their answers includes the following:

Xavier: “So, I can be a strong role model for them.”

Clarissa (with a chuckle): “Because I have a lot to say! Isn’t that obvious?”

Maureen: “Children inspire me with their innocence and curiosity. My role is to observe and guide, not unduly influence them.”

Norville: “If I can get them to read before they start kindergarten, I’ll have set them on the right course forever.”

Laverne: “The little ones just need so much loving. Sometimes they don’t get what they need at home, and I can show them they are special and teach them right from wrong at the same time. That’s my job and I love it!”

Your beliefs about your role as a professional strongly influence how you structure your program and your approach to teaching. In later chapters, we

LOOKING IN THE MIRROR...

- Why did you decide to be an early childhood professional?
- What is your motivation to pursue this challenging work?
- What comes to your mind when you hear the word “teacher?”
- Do you see yourself doing the following?
  - Playing with children
  - Telling them what to do and how to do it
  - Standing back and supporting their natural curiosity
- Is classroom management a high priority for you?
- Do you consider challenging behaviors to be teachable moments or inconveniences?
will explore how these beliefs and expectations shape your relationships and interactions with children and families.

**Understanding Stress and Your Coping Strategies**

Stress is an inevitable and important part of life. It keeps us alert and growing. Sometimes, we knowingly seek out stressful experiences, like when we enroll in college, take on a new sport, or begin dating after a relationship ends. Sometimes, stress finds us and brings along fear, anxiety, and frustration. Unwelcome stress may come in the form of financial, employment, or transportation difficulties. Sometimes relationships with coworkers or family members are stressful. Problems with our health or the health of our loved ones are stressors that can seem to take over our every thought.

We need healthy outlets for our stress because holding it in can lead to the soda-can effect. A little stress is like shaking a closed can of soda a little, which builds up pressure in the can. A little more stress shakes it up a little more, creating more pressure. Without letting off some of the pressure created by the stress in our lives, we do what the soda can does with the last fateful shake: we explode!

If we do not have healthy outlets, our stress can result in health problems, irritable interactions with coworkers and children, or worse, aggressive behavior. The first principle in NAEYC’s Code of Ethical Conduct, indeed in all codes of ethics, is that we “do no harm” (NAEYC, 2011). When our responses to children are driven by unmanaged stress in our lives, we can do devastating and lasting harm. As one gauge for measuring the impact of stress on your interactions, listen to the sound of your voice when asking a child to do something. If the voice you hear is a voice with which you would like to be addressed, then you probably have found healthy outlets for your stress. If the voice you hear is overly harsh (like the bark of a dog), you might need to develop some more effective outlets.

Countless positive and healthy behaviors can help handle stress. Some people relieve stress physically, like with deep breathing, physical activity, or relaxation exercises. Others prefer verbal strategies, such as talking with a close friend or writing in a journal. Some feel better through artistic activities, like drawing, molding clay, creating and listening to music, or acting out scenarios with a friend. Regardless of what stress-management technique you use, remember that the result does much more than just make you feel better: it influences every interaction you have with children, parents, and coworkers. It can change the atmosphere in the room from one of impenetrable tension to one of safety and security for all.
Summary

To provide optimal learning experiences for children, it is helpful for you to look within yourself and understand the factors that underlie your choices and responses. Your temperament is as important as a child’s temperament in your interactions with him. Your self-awareness and the goodness-of-fit between temperaments and the learning environment can make learning experiences productive. The attachment relationships you had with your parents or guardians, that is, your ghosts or angels in the nursery, continue to influence your relationships today, so it is important to reflect on the nature of your early relationships.

In addition, understanding your pattern of strengths and weaknesses in all domains of development will facilitate your efforts to promote skills in young children, especially in the social and emotional domain. It is also useful to keep in mind your expectations and beliefs about your role as a teacher. And finally, day-to-day experiences, such as stress and how well you manage it, can impact the quality of your relationships with children and the effectiveness of your guidance strategies.

Review and Apply

1. Describe how your emotional intelligence, temperament, relationship history, expectations, and stress management influence your approach to your work.
2. You have been assigned to teach a class of four-year-olds. Your co-teacher differs from you in temperament, classroom expectations, and coping strategies.
   a. What do you need to consider in order to work effectively with your co-teacher?
   b. What steps can you take to work through those differences?