

Introduction to Early Childhood Education

INTRODUCTION TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

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The Washington Open ProfTech project aims to build high-quality open textbooks for the in-demand professional technical programs of the Washington Community and Technical Colleges. The project was awarded \$1.8 million from the 2021 Open Textbook Pilot Grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), a U.S. Department of Education program. The project received additional funding of \$2.1 million through the 2023 Open Textbook Pilot grant expanding the project. The project is developing a wide range of open textbooks for professional technical programs, including welding, machining, early childhood education, hospitality, public health, information technology, criminal justice, programming, cybersecurity, medical ethics, computer-aided design, and business math.

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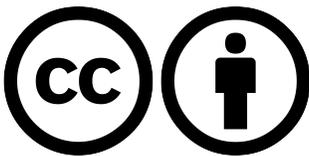
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ABOUT THE BOOK



Figure 0.1. *Child With Hands Painted Blue / Photo Credit: Marcus Spiske, Unsplash License*

Overview to the Text

Welcome to Washington State’s collaboratively written textbook designed for ECED& 105 Introduction to Early Childhood Education course. This course is found in the common course inventory in Washington State and is one of the first courses in the ECE Initial Certificate. This course holds a set of common student learning outcomes that are aligned with Washington State Core Competencies as published by the [Department of Children Youth and Families](#).

Although the authors feel that we have included rich information that meets the needs of students taking an introductory course in the field, individual instructors might choose to add additional materials, edit or move chapters to fit their communities. It is our hope that you will find the book to be a foundational piece to your introductory course keeping in mind that our vision for the book was much like going to your favorite buffet restaurant . . . you get a little bit about a whole big field.

The authors also recognize that becoming an early childhood professional is influenced by our individual identities and lived experiences as well as by our caring interactions with families and community contexts. Chapters in this book will support your growth to connect who you are to your growing identity as an early childhood educator who supports joyful, equitable and inclusive learning experiences for the children and families you will work with in your communities.

Objectives

The book aligns with the following common course student learning outcomes. In addition, each chapter will include objectives discussed in that particular chapter.

Upon completion of the course, the student will be able to:

- Explain current theories and ongoing research in early care and education
- Describe the role of play in early childhood programs
- Compare early learning program models.
- Explain the importance of developing culturally responsive partnerships with families.
- Identify appropriate guidance techniques used in early care education settings
- Describe the observation, assessment, and teaching cycle used to plan curriculum for all young children. Apply the professional code of ethics for early care and education to resolve dilemmas.
- Describe major historical figures, advocates, and events shaping today's early childhood field.

Context for this Text

“Each and every child, beginning at birth, has the opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood education, delivered by an effective, diverse, well-prepared and well-compensated workforce” ~ Power to the Profession Vision Statement (2020, p. 1)

Today's children live in an increasingly diverse world that is dynamic and changing . . . minute by minute. What remains constant in the minds of people who make the profession of early education a part of their world is that the work involves learning about

yourself as much as it does learning about the field of early learning and the children and families we serve.

The [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (NAEYC) is an organization that guides the work that we do every day. NAEYC's [Power to the Profession](#) initiative is a framework to unify the field. Pieces of the framework have guided this textbook, and to that end, the authors would like to share common terminology used through the text that supported our efforts and give context to the text.

Early childhood is defined as the period of life that includes pre-birth through age 8. The field is referred to as **early childhood education** and encompasses education and care provided in all types of settings for children birth to age 8. While reading the text, keep in mind that every state in the United States has unique and sometimes complex systems, and the focus of this text is based on Washington State policies, licensing laws, and education requirements.

Education is defined as a series of learning experiences with related and age-appropriate assessments of learning within a program. Programs may be called **childcare centers, preschools, child development centers** or **family home early learning programs**. Programs might also include components of **parent education** or **home visiting**. Settings in a home environment in Washington State are referred to as **Friends, Families** and **Neighbors** (FFN) and programs for children ages 5 to 8 include **kindergarten** as well as **primary grades** and can be found in publicly funded or privately funded settings.

Probably the most common term throughout this text will be the use of the word teacher because “it is the broadest term, it captures most of the job responsibilities, commands society’s respect, and is, after all, what children usually call the adults who care for and educate them no matter what the setting” (Bredekamp, 2011, p. 21).

Welcome to this journey. It is a beautiful and fulfilling one.

References

Bredekamp, S. (2011). *Effective practices in early childhood education: Building a foundation*. Merrill.

Power to the Profession Task Force. (2020, March). *Unifying framework for the early childhood education profession*. Power to the Profession. <https://powertotheprofession.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Power-to-Profession-Framework-03312020-web.pdf>

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CHAPTER 1: AN OVERVIEW OF THE FIELD OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



Preschool Teacher Reads to Class / Photo Credit: Allison Shelley for EDUimages, CC BY-NC 4.0

Overview

In Chapter 1, we introduce the term teaching practice and refer to the “field” of early childhood education (ECE). In the last two decades, much attention has been paid to the difference between a *field* and a *profession* of ECE (Goffin & Washington, 2007). The intensity of attention about defining ECE as a profession has increased considerably, but this attention is far from new. As early as the mid-1960s, Bettye Caldwell wrote about the limited concern for defining the field (1967). In this chapter, you will explore the definition of “profession” and consider whether ECE fits that definition. You will learn about a recent effort by the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and partners to position ECE to be recognized as a profession. You will also become

aware of the currently used and various systems of standards and codes that define the professional behavior and conduct of the ECE practitioner. This chapter aims to address the expectations of a professional early childhood educator as you prepare to move into that role.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define professionalism using widely accepted criteria.
- Describe the ways in which early childhood education meets the criteria of a profession.
- Describe the process undertaken in the Power to the Profession initiative and the intended goal of the initiative.
- Describe the main issues the Power to the Profession initiative took on.
- Describe standards used to define and regulate the work of early childhood educators, including
 - The Washington Administrative Code
 - Washington State Core Competencies
 - NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators
 - NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct
- Define advocacy and describe how this activity is part of professionalism in ECE.

Key Terms

- Advocacy
- Early childhood education

- Early childhood educator
- ECE field
- Ethical conduct
- Ethical dilemma
- Ethical finesse
- Ethical ideals
- Ethical principles
- Ethical responsibility
- Field of practice
- NAEYC
- Personal advocacy
- Profession
- Professional
- Public advocacy
- Scope of practice
- Stackable certificates
- Unifying framework
- WAC

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1.1 THE NURTURING TEACHER

Holly Lanoue, M.Ed.

Early childhood teachers work directly with children to teach them, talk with them, guide their behaviors, and to provide for their physical and psychological growth and development. Early childhood teachers also document children's progress, model appropriate interactions, and nurture their students. Teachers also interact with the adults in the children's lives to build an essential connection with each child and their families.

One of the primary goals of the early childhood educator is to be a nurturing teacher: one who promotes respect among everyone involved in the classroom. This level of respect is underlined by a sense of the joy in teaching children. You may have an image in your mind of what a nurturing teacher might look like, and it could include some of the behaviors and tasks listed above. It also includes building a caring learning community that creates a positive classroom community. A caring community goes beyond having the appropriate number of math manipulatives. In fact, creating warm inviting classrooms is among some of the most important work that early childhood teachers do for children and families. Positive relationships are at the heart of everything we do as teachers, and the messages we send leave lasting impressions that lay a foundation for children's approaches to learning for the rest of their lives.



Figure 1.1. Talia Sustaita, Family Child Care (FCC) Program provider, sings songs with her children at Shaw Air Force Base, S.C., April 12, 2018./ Photo Credit: Senior Airman Destinee Sweeney, Shaw Air Force Base, Public Domain

Each day you walk into the classroom you bring a set of personal and professional values that guide your work. Although there is no one correct way or one personality that lends itself better to the teaching profession, there are tendencies, personalities, and skills that contribute to the daily success you will have working in the profession. We will begin the book by exploring what all teachers of young children carry with them as they enter the classroom each day.

The Teacher as a Person

Who you are as a person will be the foundation of the daily work that you do with children and families. You will bring with you the skills and knowledge that you have about children and child development, your life experiences, your personal values and morality, all aspects of your identity, as well as your own temperament and personality. Attitudes that you hold about diversity and inclusion of children will factor into how your classroom is set up and managed.

Skills and Knowledge

Every profession has a set of skills and a knowledge base that individuals within that profession use to define the field. For example, a dentist should have skills to check your teeth and fill cavities, and a car mechanic has knowledge about how to diagnose a faulty carburetor. Working as an effective teacher means that you have knowledge and a specialized skill set about many topics within the profession of early childhood education. It also requires that you stay current in the knowledge base of early childhood education and work to apply professional knowledge and skills for the benefit of young children and in partnership with their families.

A recent study entitled [*Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8*](#) explores implications of research-based child development practices that influence those who work with children (Committee on the Science of Children et al., 2015). **The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** has relied on this book and its findings to inform the **Power to the Profession** movement dedicated to improving the well-being of all children focusing on the educational development services for children, birth to age eight. NAEYC has a set of national standards for early childhood professional preparation programs described in [Chapter 2](#) of this text.

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (**Washington State Department of Child, Youth, and Families (DCYF)**) has published a set of **core competencies** and frameworks (2022) to guide decisions and practices carried out by professionals in all early care and education settings. These competencies coordinate and design courses for certificates and degrees as part of the skills and knowledge Washington state feels is important for teachers to possess. These are described in detail in [Chapter 11](#).

Washington state also has a set of certificates called [**Washington State Stackable Certificates**](#) that build on one another and can lead to an Associate degree in early childhood education. The certificates are offered at community colleges throughout the state and are the starting point in Washington to begin a career in early learning. This course, ECED 105 Introduction to Early Childhood Education, is one of the courses listed in the Initial 12-credit certificate, so you are on your way to acquiring the skills and knowledge recommended by our state.

As you work in the field, you will gain a set of skills through college courses along with earning your annual 10 hours of professional development training requirements through the [**Managed Education and Registry Information Tool \(MERIT\)**](#). Many experiences will contribute to your personalized knowledge and skills that are unique to you and your work. Your experiences might include your day-to-day interactions with children and

families, your work with colleagues and leaders in the field, membership in professional organizations, additional reading you enjoy about a particular topic, or choosing to pursue advanced degrees.

Life Experiences

Each of us brings our life experiences with us into our work, including our whole history as a person from early childhood and beyond. Each day when you walk into your classroom, you are bringing your personality, temperament, attitudes, and values that grow from your culture, community, and the individual influences on your own early childhood experiences.

Your early childhood experiences shaped you and are worth thoughtful reflection as you enter the field. Recognize that your experiences will not be the same ones that you provide to the children you work with. Both the positive, as well as the not-so-positive parts of our past influences our work. Compassionately caring for children requires that you know and acknowledge your past experiences, remembering that self-care is critical. There is a proverb that states “you cannot pour from an empty cup.” In one sense, this means it is important to fill your cup by reviewing your past in nonjudgmental ways. Then use your new insights as you observe and work with children. Recognizing that everyone experiences negative feelings and experiences can provide you with a critical lens as you assist a child struggling with their own self-acceptance.

Part of the reflective process (a process that is a critical component to working with children) is to think about every interaction you have with children and families and determine who you want to be as a teacher.

Personal Values and Morality

Personal **values** are the things that are important to us. They are the characteristics and behaviors that motivate us and guide our decision making. Our values are comprised of the moral code that guides our actions and defines who we are. Some values follow a universal rule of conduct. Other values are personal and are defined by our family of origin, our cultural and religious beliefs, and the communities in which we live and work. Our life experiences will also impact the values we hold as a person.



Figure 1.2. *Preschool girl and teacher in garden. What values do you bring to the children you work with? / Photo Credit: Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages, CC BY-NC 4.0*

Maybe you have chosen to work with children and families because you value children. You could also be motivated by social justice, equality, a passion for learning, or an experience you had as a child. Awareness of your values and recognizing that not everyone will have the same set of values as you is the foundation of that makes you you.

Personal **morality** has roots firmly in early childhood education. At a very young age we learn about right and wrong through the adults that care for and guide us. We learn morality in our homes, classrooms, neighborhoods, as well as our places of worship and communities. As we navigate how to treat others and respect differences, morality becomes the basis of how we make daily choices. The **NAEYC** code of ethics, which you will learn about in the next chapter, is a professional document that offers guidance as you work with children and families, especially if situations arise that cause you to question or think about the situation as it is related to your individual set of values and morals.



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online here:

<https://openwa.pressbooks.pub/earlychildedu1/?p=545#h5p-11>

Temperament Personality

Temperament is defined as a set of inborn traits that organize the way we approach the world. These traits are instrumental in the way we learn about the world around us. Researchers Alexander Thomas and Stella Chess (1977) have studied temperament related to ways in which we respond to the environments where we live and work (and for children, play!). Figure 1.3 below illustrates the nine individual traits as related to adult learning shown in a continuum model. Remember that these traits are not good or bad but provide information about how we interact within our environments.

THOMAS AND CHESS TEMPERMENT CONTINUUM EXAMPLES

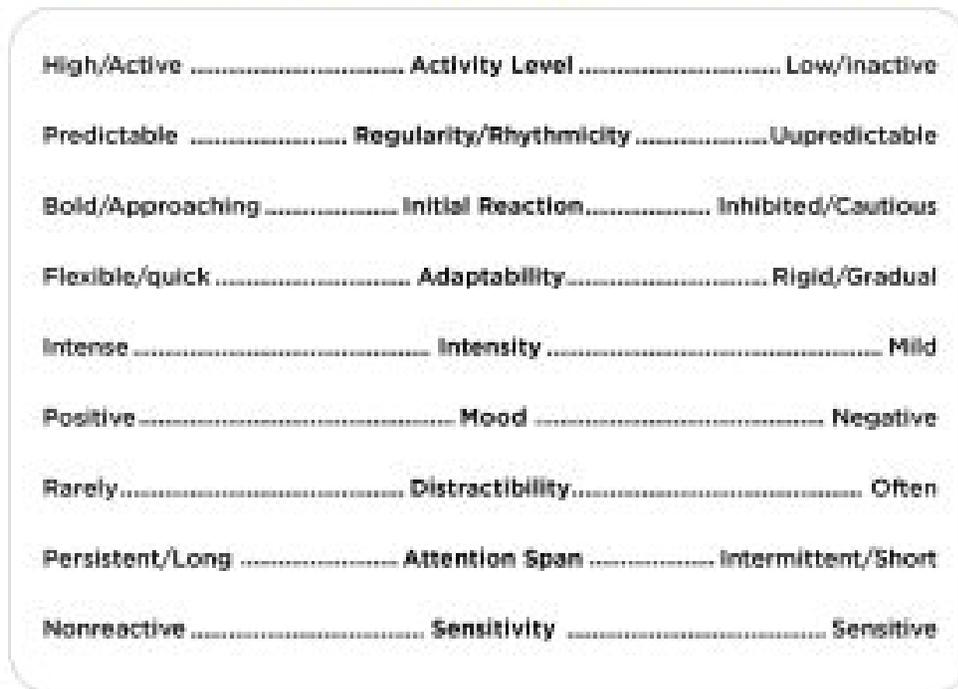


Figure 1.3. *Nine Dimensions of Temperament / Content Credit: Gayle Julian, Illustration: Hannah Adams, CC BY 4.0*

Look at the continuum above and place yourself. Are you at the higher end of the continuum in activity level (very high/active), or anywhere along the continuum to low/inactive? Some of these temperament traits are good fits for individuals working with children daily: positive quality of mood and higher activity levels, for example.

Traits are seen as “goodness of fit” when a person’s temperament aligns with the tasks necessary in a job or career. If you don’t possess certain traits for a career, that can be a starting point for thinking about how your personality fits into the field of early learning.



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Reflection

What are your temperament traits and how do they support working with children and families?

Attitudes about Diversity and Inclusion

Messages we get as young children influence our attitudes as adults. We have developed attitudes about groups of people who differ from us in culture, language, class, ethnicity, gender, appearance, ability, or religion. We develop expectations about people, and it is important to recognize this within ourselves and the communities where we work. A **bias** is “a tendency, inclination, or prejudice toward or against something or someone” (Psychology Today, n.d., para. 1). Some biases are positive and helpful (like choosing to eat foods that are considered healthy). However, bias towards people is often based on stereotypes, rather than actual knowledge of an individual or circumstance, and this can often lead to prejudgment or discriminatory practice.

Many people struggle to recognize their own biases, and everyone has some bias. Our

brains attempt to categorize people and things that are *like* us and people and things that are *unlike* us. If taken to the extreme, this type of categorization can bring about feelings of an us-versus-them mentality, which can lead to harmful prejudice. Bias is a universal human condition and even the most dedicated and well-meaning teachers hold beliefs that may affect their students. If left unexamined, these beliefs can be harmful. Identifying your own biases will help you to resist having a negative effect on the children and families that you work with. When you recognize a bias, be aware of it and take responsibility for your feelings so that your bias doesn't lead to negative reactions.

Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor once said, "Personal experiences affect the facts that judges choose to see" (2001, para. 23). This recognition of bias holds true in the field of early childhood education as well.

Reflection

How will your personal values and goals be reflected in your classroom and teaching each day?



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Inclusion is the "act or practice of including: the state of being included" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Sometimes in the field of Education, the term *inclusion* is reserved for conversations around special needs children and the importance of including all children in work and play. Inclusion can also be seen in day-to-day practice when children might leave a child behind in play or say something like "you're not invited to my birthday party" in an attempt to exclude a particular child.

Teachers can support all children by helping them to understand that they are an

important part of the school community. Our job is to foster a development of belonging that will prepare children for life in their community as they grow.

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1.2 THE TEACHER AS A PROFESSIONAL

Holly Lanoue, M.Ed.

In a bold strategic initiative called **Power to the Profession**, NAEYC made the statement that “positive relationships are at the core of quality, investing specifically in early childhood educators is the best thing we can do to improve early childhood education” (2020, p. 3). Because you are enrolled in this course, it is safe to say that you are interested in becoming a professional within the field of early learning and recognize that positive relationships are at the core of our work. The Power to the Profession initiative is attempting to recognize that the work we do in the classroom each day is a very important profession within our society. It is critically important that the behavior we engage in each day reflects the professional ideals of the field.

Being recognized as a professional goes beyond the personal traits discussed earlier in this chapter. It also requires the typical soft skills a good employee might need (being at work on time, having a positive attitude, communicating well, keeping personal grievances outside of the workplace) and also includes following the values and ethics outlined by the profession.

Early childhood professionals are diverse with different perspectives. This is why we turn to the NAEYC [*Code of Ethical Conduct*](#) (2011), to provide an understanding of professional behavior. The Code can also serve as a guide to help resolve ethical dilemmas.



Figure 1.4. Understanding how children grow and develop is important to being an early childhood learning teacher. *Untitled / Photo Credit: anaterate, Pixabay License*

Code of Ethics

The NAEYC *Code of Ethical Conduct* (2011) provides the field with a set of professional beliefs and commitments. As previously mentioned, this code can guide our daily work, as well as assist as a reference when faced with ethical dilemmas in the workplace.

The Code is composed of ideals and principles, but at the very foundation of the Code is a set of core values. These core values express central beliefs, commitments to society, and the common purpose of our profession.

Core Values

- Appreciate childhood as a unique and valuable stage of the human life cycle.
- Base our work on knowledge of how children develop and learn.
- Appreciate and support the bond between the child and family.
- Recognize that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community, and society.
- Respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, and colleague).

- Respect diversity in children, families, and colleagues.
- Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect. (NAEYC, 2011, p. 1)

Most people within the field of early learning find themselves in agreement with the core values set forth in the Code. As you grow within the profession, you might begin to see alignment of your personal values reflected in your daily work. [Chapter 2](#) will provide a deep dive into the code of ethics published by NAEYC.



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Advocacy

Many people believe that the smartest investment a country could make in their society is to **advocate** for quality early childhood education. An advocate for early learning is a person who supports the field of early learning. A recent UNICEF report indicates that “children enrolled in early education [programs] are more likely to stay in school and to attain minimum reading and mathematics competencies extending beyond primary school” (Wisthuff, 2019, para. 2). The report shows that advocating for early childhood education is not only an investment in our future as a society in general, but an easy decision at that! However, according to the UNICEF report, 175 million children are currently not engaged in any type of early childhood education programs. In low-income countries around the world, nearly 8 out of 10 children are missing out on early childhood classrooms.

In Washington state, there are many groups that advocate for quality early learning to support children, families, and programs where children are enrolled. Agencies such as [Child Care Aware of Washington](#), [Children’s Alliance](#), [The Department of Children Youth and Families](#), [Washington State Family Child Care Association](#), and [Washington Association for the Education of Young Children](#) are just a few.

Advocating for all children is very much a part of the fabric of what we do. Advocacy work doesn’t have to be national, sweeping movements, but rather, it can be raising

awareness that early investments in children are important to the healthy growth and development of all children. All children deserve access to the early education they deserve. We provide that support by working together as a profession in our individual communities to share the important work that we do. How to create advocacy opportunities will be discussed in [Chapter 11](#). When thinking about advocacy, many people have images of talking with politicians, trying to convince them of the importance of a passion. Or, some people might think that advocacy involves lengthy letter writing campaigns. But advocacy doesn't have to be that complex and can be as simple as talking with friends, families, neighbors, and others in your community about your passion for working with young children and families. Often, this begins by telling your own story of why you chose to be in this profession. Advocacy also includes keeping up with what is happening in the field, both in terms of current trends and the ties to historical perspective.

Working with Families

Every family is unique and the children you are working with come to you each day wrapped in a blanket of family values, culture, attitudes, and beliefs. Building positive and good working relationships with families is one of the most important roles that an early childhood educator has. Partnering with parents allows the children that you teach to see that the important adults in their life are working together and can help both them and the family to be comfortable in your classroom environment.



Figure 1.5. *The child comes to you wrapped in a blanket of family values.. / Photo Credit: Picsea, Unsplash License*



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Just as any relationship, the family-teacher relationship can be complex and can include many people. This could include the child's family, the teacher, the staff at the child's program, and the community that the child lives in. By working together, you can build a rich environment that supports both the child and their family, which will serve as a model for creating positive relationships within the community.

Early childhood teachers have a wealth of resources to share with families. You may find yourself in the role of bridging resources within the community to the families you serve. This may involve employing a variety of communication techniques to support families. Whether it is a classroom app or other social media, a newsletter or bulletin board, representing all families and including all family members is vital to building healthy relationships.

Some programs, particularly Head Start programs, incorporate a portion of their programming devoted to home visits. This allows the teacher to become acquainted with the family in the child's familiar home environment. In some cases, this can strengthen the relationship with the family, while other families may feel vulnerable when a teacher comes calling.

Whichever type of communication you engage in with children and families, remember that building positive trusting relationships is a core value of the profession.

Reflection

What do you want to learn about in your understanding of how to partner with families and communities?

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1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIELD OF EARLY LEARNING

Holly Lanoue, M.Ed.

It can be overwhelming to consider the many types of program approaches, settings, and models within the field of early learning. This chapter will focus on the more common programs in the United States for children pre-birth to age eight. In future chapters, program philosophies (sometimes called approaches, or curriculum approaches) will be addressed.

NAEYC has also presented a document from the Power to the Profession work entitled the [Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession](#) (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020). This document recognized that the field in general includes a diverse range of individuals and settings that contribute to the field. The document attempts to unify the field and discusses how the United States can make significant and sustained investments in high quality early learning programs. This document is the foundation for discussions about how the field is structured.



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Programs for Children Pre-birth to Age Five

The majority of programs caring for children from birth to age five are small private, tuition-based childcare centers that offer either part day or full day programs. Licensed childcare centers in the state of Washington obtain their license from the [Department of Children, Youth and Families](#) (DCYF). The number of children that a center can be licensed for depends on the available space and the ages of the children they serve. Families can use tools found on the DCYF website to search for care in their community as well as review any licensing infractions or concerns the department has about a center.

The **Early Achievers Program** is one framework in place to assure quality of care in Washington state. This program provides a rating system for childcare providers based on observable elements of quality indicators. In addition, some centers might seek accreditation through NAEYC. This optional accreditation is an independent study of a center focusing on the center's curriculum, environment, education of the teachers, and other quality indicators.

Family home early learning programs (located in the operator's home) are the least visible, yet most prevalent, form of childcare in many communities. In Washington state, Family Childcare Homes are licensed, and they can apply to be Early Achievers sites as well.

Family, Friends and Neighbor care (FFN) differs from family childcare. FFN might include unlicensed grandparents, aunts/uncles, elders, older siblings, friends or neighbors who support families by providing childcare. FFN is the most common type of childcare for infants, toddlers, and school-age children before and after school hours. FFN care is not regulated by the state, although some FFN providers can receive childcare subsidies for childcare if they are willing to follow the DCYF guidelines.



Figure 1.6. FFN is unlicensed family and friends who provide childcare. *Untitled / Photo Credit: ParentiPacek, Pixabay License*



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Preschool (sometimes called part day programs), which also includes cooperative preschools or nursery schools, are unlicensed educational programs that generally offer a school-ready curriculum to support children. In many communities, preschools can be housed in community centers, houses of worship, or even outdoors! These programs are not monitored by DCYF, and to date, there are no education requirements for teachers working in preschools.

Other types of childcare available in Washington state include:

- crisis nurseries that provide care for families in crisis such as domestic violence, homelessness, employment, or other crisis situations;
- developmental preschools that are available to some children with special needs often housed at local school districts;
- private preschools offering curriculum for no more than four hours per day.

Programs for Children Ages Five to Eight

There are several types of program options for children ages five to eight, including kindergarten (found in both public and private schools), elementary or homeschool, or school-age childcare. Most children will enroll in kindergarten at age five, or shortly after their fifth birthday, depending on the community school district calendar for the community in which the family lives. Historically, kindergarten (a German word translation for “a child’s garden”) was meant to be a bridge between the home and elementary school environment, and most kindergartens were housed in local elementary schools. The first public kindergarten in the United States was in the Peres elementary school in St. Louis, Missouri (Moore & Sabo-Risley, 2018). During the 20th century, kindergarten has changed and been innovated into full day programs with rigorous testing and curriculum. Today, kindergarten looks startlingly like what first grade used to be, and the need for high quality early childhood education prior to kindergarten has been the focus of several studies and summarized by the Alliance for Childhood’s report entitled “Crisis in the Kindergarten” (Miller & Almon, 2009).

Elementary school age children can enroll in either their local community public school, funded by federal tax dollars, or a private school in which parents pay tuition for their children to attend. In addition to both of those programs, children can be homeschooled. The numbers of children being homeschooled grew 28.9% between 1999 and 2003, 37.6% between 2003 and 2007, 17.4% between 2007 and 2012. As of 2015-16, approximately 1,690,000 children were being homeschooled (Coalition for Responsible Home Education, 2017).



Figure 1.7. *Socially distant elementary students during the COVID pandemic./ Photo Credit: Allison Shelley, CC BY-NC 4.0*

Reflection

What type of program are you currently working in or do you see yourself working in?

What are the benefits for you?

Is there a type of program that you would not be comfortable working in?

School-age care refers to programs that operate before and after school and during the summer and holiday breaks. School-age programs often include a structured routine that allows children to complete homework, build relationships with children that attend schools different from their own. These programs can be offered through community groups such as the YMCA or other parks and recreation programs , religious communities, or private homes. Not all school-age programs require licenses.

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1.4 THE HISTORY OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Holly Lanoue, M.Ed.

Many of our current ideas in educational philosophy are built on ideas and theories of the past. The roots of early childhood education go as far back as Plato (428-348 B.C.E.) who was a Greek philosopher who believed that the teacher's role was to direct children through play towards "their final aim in life" (360 B.C.E., Book I).

Dr. David Elkind (2010) believes that the field of early childhood education is "the most holistic and least differentiated of any level of education" (para. 2) due to the solid grounding in philosophy, theory, and research. According to many theorists, early childhood education is unique because it starts with the child, and not with the subject matter.

The Origins of Early Childhood Education

The philosophical foundations of Western early education include the early work of many individuals including Czech philosopher John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), British philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), and Swiss philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). Many other influential European and American philosophers will be discussed in [Chapter 3](#). Along with these philosophical applications, the field is grounded in research through education figures such as Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896-1980), German American psychologist Erik Erikson (1902-1994), and German educator Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) as well as European theorists and educators all of whom have contributed to Western approaches to early learning.

It wasn't until after World War II that early childhood education was seen as an important foundation of every child's educational pathway. The roots of this are based in **humanism**. Humanistic philosophy as an influence on early childhood education includes the concern for appropriate practice, a concept discussed in [Chapter 2](#).

The infographic in Figure 1.3 illustrates the progression of thought from some notable theorists that have contributed to the field of early childhood education from Ancient Greece to the first kindergarten funded in the United States. As you look at the timeline, think about how the philosophies of each time period influenced current thinking.

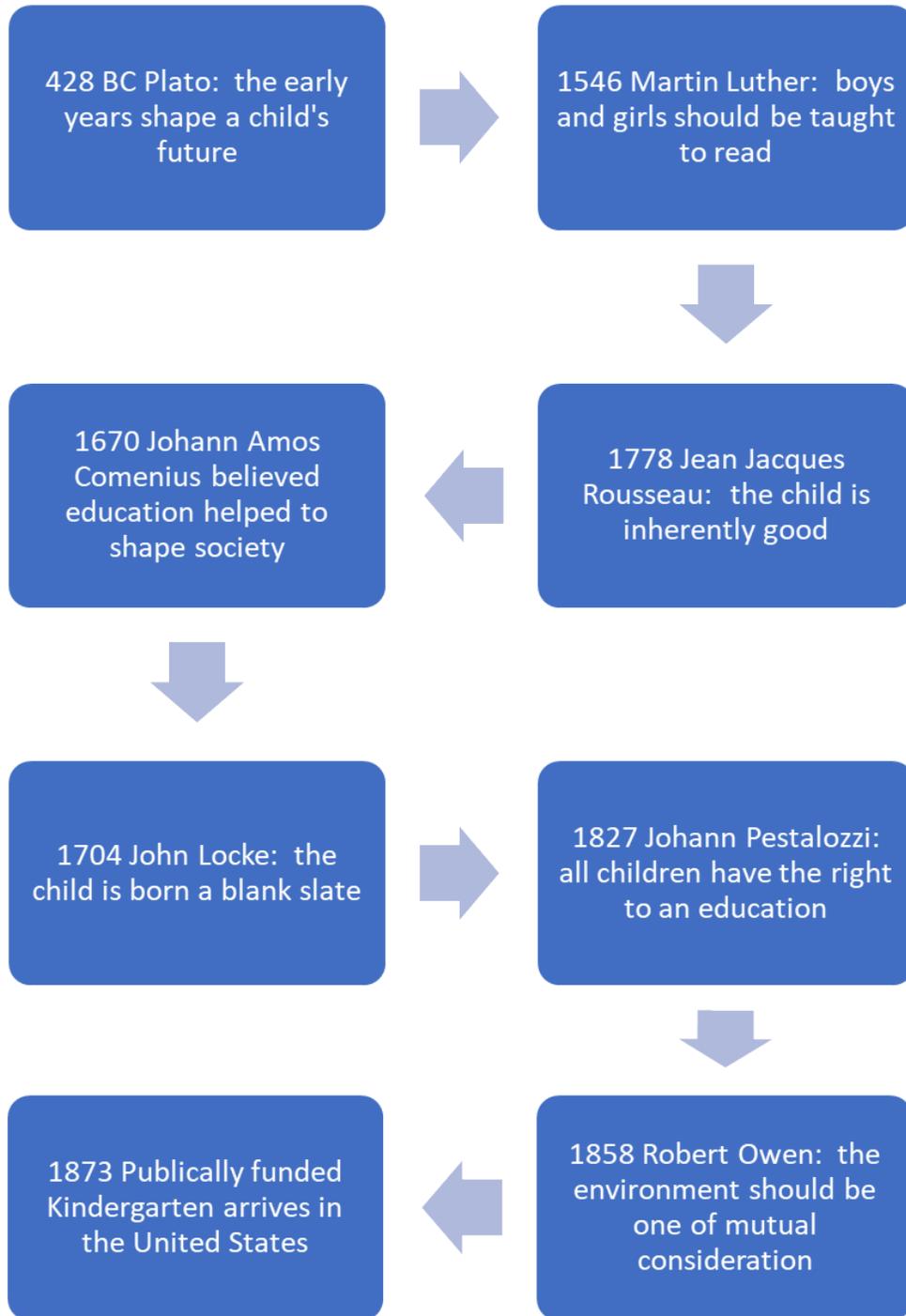


Figure 1.8. Notable historical thoughts about early childhood education. / Photo Credit: Gayle Julian, CC BY-NC 4.0



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The Origins of Childcare in the United States

In the United States, most women with young children are employed outside the home. The necessity (or choice) to work outside the home has created a need for care for young children during working hours. The term *day care* was used historically to refer to the working hours teachers were in classrooms. Today, professionals prefer the term *childcare* as it is more inclusive and reflects the important work of nurturing the child.

The early origins of childcare in the United States can be traced to New York in 1893 with the National Federation of Day Nurseries, the first nationwide organization devoted to childcare. There were no external standards or policies to ensure quality childcare, and so a set of progressive women began the U.S. Children's Bureau in 1912 to set policy for quality childcare (Michel, 2011).

In the 1930s, the Great Depression had an impact on childcare as unemployment rose. During Roosevelt's New Deal, a program of Emergency Nursery Schools (ENS) grew but was open only part of the day. By the end of the 1930s, high staff turnover rates forced the closure of many of the ENS. With the approach of World War II, the unemployment crisis dropped, and many women went to work for the government to support war efforts.

However, it was not until 1943 that government support allocated \$6 million dollars to reopen ENS. In 1944 only 3,000 childcare centers were operating, yet the capacity for 130,000 children was needed. This lack of care during the day began the spread of the “latchkey child” where children were alone at home until their parents returned from work. Some children were found sleeping in locked cars in company parking lots while mothers worked (Michel, 2011).

In 1954 the childcare tax deduction allowed low-to-moderate income families to deduct expenses for childcare from their income taxes. In addition, a program entitled New York Women (led by Elinor Guggenheimer) helped to establish a licensing system for childcare in that city that eventually grew across the United States. In the 1960s, federal support for childcare was tied to “policies designed to encourage poor and low-income women to enter training programs” and the workforce until a group of “labor leaders, civil rights leaders and early childhood advocates worked with Congress to legislate universal childcare policy” (Michel, 2011, para. 19). These efforts failed under President Nixon, and as a result, direct federal support for childcare was limited to low-income families.



Figure 1.9. Daycare nursery under the Aid for Dependent Children Program. / Photo Credit: Thomas J. O'Halloran, PD



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In the 1980s, President Reagan passed the Social Services Block Grant Act (part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981), which allocated funds to support individual states for childcare and development. However, even though there were increased funds for childcare, there were problems with supply and quality for lower income families, and middle-income families faced childcare centers with high turnover rates of childcare employees due to low pay and poor benefits.

In the 1990s, funding through welfare reform initiatives such as the Family and Medical Leave Act (1993) provided some childcare relief dollars for families, but existing federal childcare policies have gone largely unchanged since the 1950s and do not meet the needs of the working families of today.

There are hundreds of private advocacy groups in the United States that are interested in early childhood education and the policies that support quality and equity for all families, but most research concludes that the system of childcare is a fragmented system. In the next section, we will explore how the government has supported early learning.



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1.5 GOVERNMENT FUNDING FOR EARLY LEARNING

Holly Lanoue, M.Ed.

For more than 80 years, the federal government has invested in childcare and early childhood education programs to support parents and children and help them to succeed. Over time, as society has changed, so has the amount of funding and the names of the funding programs. As our society continues to change, so will the need for funding children and families across the United States.

“From a historic point of view, the United States is in the midst of a second child care revolution, as more and more children under the age of six are cared for by someone other than their parents” (Kilburn & Hao, 1996, p. 46). Historians have known for at least two centuries that the well-being of all children depends on the quality of care received in the early years. Some people believe that as a system we have failed to act boldly on that knowledge within the government arena, and funding to support all children is inequitable.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, a two-tiered system of early childhood education programs evolved in the United States. One tier had roots in social welfare systems while the other was rooted in the education system providing preschool education for middle-and upper-class children (Cahan, 1989). During the last century, the federal government vastly expanded its role in early childhood education (Yarrow, 2009). In this chapter, we will focus on government involvement in terms of funding.

The History of Government Funding for Childcare in the United States

As previously mentioned, in 1933 the first federal investment in childcare was made in response to the Great Depression. The Emergency Nursery School program provided childcare for the children of people working government paid jobs, and by 1935 the Aid to Dependent Children program was included in part of President Roosevelt’s New Deal.

During this time, many childcare centers were open seven days a week for 12 months a year and even provided infirmaries for sick children and hot meals for families to take home after work. This all sounds wonderful, but remember that it took two wars

and demands on the workforce for the government to make such meaningful resources available for working families (Kiesling, 2019).



Figure 1.10. *War workers' nursery.* / Photo Credit: Ann Rosener, PD

After World War II, expansion of public kindergarten began, and the government funded programs for low-income children through Head Start funding and federal childcare

subsidies (Economic Opportunity Amendments of 1965). The goal for the funding was to prepare children living in low-income households for elementary school. In 1994 Early Head Start was created to support pregnant women, infants, and toddlers through age three (Human Services Amendments of 1994). Now, Head Start offers a range of comprehensive services to strengthen families.

In 1974 federal dollars helped to create the Social Services Block Grant (Housing and Community Development Act of 1974), to support parents in the workforce by supporting childcare service. In 1990 this program was extended to families with incomes that did not qualify under previous income guidelines. President Bill Clinton signed into law the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which brought welfare reform to working families under a program called the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

Over the past two decades, we have learned more about children's brain development and also have research on what makes quality early learning experiences. The results of this science reflects the government response. Congress is increasing funding for already existing programs. Head Start has had an increase from 6.8 to 10.6 billion dollars to serve 1.3 million children and 769,000 families each month (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2019).

The role that an individual state plays in childcare comes from state involvement in both federally funded and state-initiated programs. For example, not all states match federal funds allocated to some federally funded programs, and states can determine the eligibility criteria for participation in federally funded programs.

Every state regulates childcare in some form, and all states license childcare centers. In Washington state, the Department of Children, Youth and Families is responsible for licensing and monitoring of licenses for childcare and family childcare centers.



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Washington State Involvement in Setting Standards

In Washington state, the [Department of Children, Youth and Families](#) (DCYF) is the agency that supports adult educators who care for and teach young children. The mission of the DCYF is to provide a “comprehensive framework and delivering of services for [professional development] that includes adult learning and workforce development to ensure improved outcomes for children, youth and the adults who provide education and services” (n.d.-b, para. 2).

The agency supports state-approved training through professional development known as STARS recorded in a registry program entitled MERIT. The guiding framework for providing training is found in a document called the [Core Competencies](#). More about this system can be found in [Chapter 11](#).

The state recognizes that children’s outcomes can improve when children attend quality early learning programs and when teachers’ skills and education levels are supported. To that end, Washington state offers an [ECE Career Planning Portal](#) to assist students as they plan their career in early learning. Most community colleges in the state of Washington offer the [State Stackable Certificates](#), of which this class ECED 105 Intro to Early Childhood Education is a part, within the initial ECE certificate. Financial assistance for students is provided at most community colleges through the [Early Achievers Grant](#) program, which can often fund tuition, books, and other costs for students working in the field at an Early Achievers rated childcare site. In addition, financial assistance can be given to students pursuing a bachelor’s degree through Child Care Aware of Washington’s [Scholarships for Child Care Providers](#). Also, DCYF works with the [Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction](#) (OSPI) to support professionals working with school-age children.

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1.6. HISTORICAL TRENDS THAT INFLUENCE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Holly Lanoue, M.Ed.

Some of the historical trends discussed in this chapter apply to early learning today: the field still believes in the importance of play (Plato), that early learning is the foundation for all education moving forward, and that children grow best in environments that are nurturing and supportive.

Looking back historically can also help us to predict what lies ahead. The remainder of this chapter will focus on trends of the past influencing the field today.

Educational Trends that Influenced Early Childhood Education

In the 2013 State of the Union address, President Barack Obama stated: In states that make it a priority to educate our youngest children....Studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold job, and form more stable families of their own. So let's do what works and make sure none of our children start the race of life already behind. (para. 39)

This public address started conversation about what the United States values in terms of early learning initiatives. It was the first time that early learning was specifically called out in a presidential address.

If you were searched the internet for trends in early learning, the results would be long and varied. You would find a range of opinions with an assortment of resources both inside and outside of the field of early learning. In addition, it is likely that you would see lists of initiatives that will shape the future of early learning, as well as trends that impact children directly and those that are in place to support families. Keeping that in mind, it becomes difficult to sort out how today's decisions will impact tomorrow's children. However, when looking at trends, two things become very clear: a unifying message that includes all children is essential and advocacy for this movement is critical.

One way that the United States has moved toward improving consistency in childcare is through a quality rating improvement system, also called QRIS. This state-by-state initiative addresses the priorities that former President Obama spoke about in his State

of the Union address (2013). In Washington state, the QRIS system is referred to as Early Achievers. The National Center on Early Childhood Quality Assurance has a state-by-state map of QRIS state profiles ([QRIS Resource Guide](#)) where you can learn what each state is doing to improve childcare in their state and counties.



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Power to the Profession: Professionalizing the Field

The NAEYC document [Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession](#) (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020) provides insight to the current realities in the field and the pathway to unification by taking steps to professionalize the field. The document sends a clear message about the need to align professional preparation for students, compensation for teachers working in classrooms, and making the clear distinction that advocating for “the good of our country’s children, families, educators, businesses, and economy” (as cited in LeMoine et al., 2023, p. 59). This is the message that so many in the field believe will lead to public investment in early learning.

The goal of the Power to the Profession initiative is clear: to establish unity and clarity around the career pathways, knowledge and competencies, qualifications, standards, accountability, supports, and compensation to define the early childhood profession across all states and settings. Much more about the initiative is in [Chapter 11](#).

Responding to Societal Change

As society changes and as we learn more, the issues and trends discussed within the field of early childhood education also evolve. The concerns professionals have in the field historically have been reflective mirrors of those societal changes and these changes may have positive or negative impact. For example, in response to rapidly growing global awareness and the increase of culturally responsive and anti-bias curriculum, teachers are becoming more aware of how their classroom must reflect the communities in which they work. Certainly, the historical nod to play-based learning will become a focus again

as there is less play among young children who are now exposed to technology at an early age. We have yet to see the impact of the 2020 pandemic and the effect it will have on children and families as we move towards a nation that becomes healthy and safe again.

The most significant focus for the past few years has been the diverse communities in which we work and live and how those communities need to be supported. In 2019 NAEYC released the [*Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement*](#) that clearly communicates that all children have the right to equitable learning opportunities. Many people within the field agree that we must respond to this work. In 2019 DCYF in Washington studied how the early learning system can provide strategies to help all children and families thrive while eliminating inequalities in outcomes for children. In a recent statement published throughout the state, DCYF has reminded us of our vision:

Washington state is a place where each child starts life with a solid foundation for success based on strong families, culturally relevant early learning practices, services and supports that lead to racial equity and the well-being of all children and families. (d.-a, para. 1)

Reflection

What societal changes have occurred over the past 10 or 15 years that you feel have influenced the field of early childhood education?

1.7 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Holly Lanoue, M.Ed.

Summary

The field of early childhood education and the profession of working with young children is a rewarding career with a rich history of teaching, nurturing, and caring for young children. As teachers, our skills, knowledge, personal beliefs, and morality shape how we interact with children and families.

Our field is one with historical content that ties to modern concepts that is supported both within our state and nationally through efforts to professionalize the field.

Becoming an ECE teacher is influenced by our individual identities and lived experiences as well as by our caring interactions with families and community contexts. Future chapters will support your growth to connect who you are to your growing identity as an early childhood educator who supports joyful, equitable, and inclusive learning experiences.

One thing is certain: change is all around us in the field, and the profession must respond to the trends. This means we will always strive to do what is best for the children and families we serve and continue to move with the wave of change.

Review Questions

1. What type of relationship is the heart of everything we do as teachers?

2. What is one of the primary goals of the Early Learning Teacher?
3. Who published the Core Competencies?
4. Which agency started the Power to the Profession movement, and why is it so important to the field of early learning?
5. Name at least three groups in Washington state that advocate for early learning.
6. What are the benefits from working with the families of the children you care for?
7. What are the benefits for a center becoming an Early Achievers site?
8. What are the differences of FFN from a family childcare center?
9. Do you need a degree to work in a part day preschool?
10. What was kindergarten originally meant to be?
11. In what year did publicly funded kindergarten arrive in the United States?
12. In what year did the the childcare tax deduction start?
13. What New York woman helped establish a licensing system for childcare?
14. Historically, what was daycare called?
15. Which president shifted funding and passage of the Childcare and Development Block Grant?
16. Explain what Early Head Start and Head Start does for early learning.
17. What is QRIS in Washington state, and why is it important?

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CHAPTER 2: THEORIES AND PROGRAM APPROACHES



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Overview

Imagine a classroom of children playing and learning. What type of activities do you see? How do you know that what is going on in the classroom is supportive of children's development? In this chapter, we will learn about different theories that guide child developmental science as well as early childhood education program approaches that use varying methods to support children's development.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain how child development and learning theories are frameworks for helping teachers understand how children develop.
- Identify the different philosophies of various early learning program approaches that guide their curriculum and practices with young children
- Describe how high-quality early learning programs use theories to inform their work.

Key Terms

- Attachment pattern
- Conditioning
- Constructivism
- Internal working model
- Intrinsic motivation
- Life crisis
- Models
- More knowledgeable other
- Object permanence
- Program approach
- Reinforcers
- Scaffolding
- Schemas
- Theory
- Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Attributions

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2.1 THEORIES AND PROGRAM APPROACHES

Angela Blums, Ph.D.



Figure 2.1. Preschoolers Play With Trains / Photo Credit: Allison Shelley for EDUimages, CC BY-NC 4.0

The best early childhood programs are informed by theory that provides a solid

foundation. Basing a program on trusted theories ensures that the aims of the program are effective and the practices have a positive impact on every child. What is a theory in the context of early childhood education? A **theory** evolves from a set of ideas that are supported by a substantial amount of evidence. These theories go through repeated scientific inquiry and testing. Theories are different from a philosophy, which also is a useful way to organize knowledge about children’s development but is not based on empirical evidence. Theories provide an explanation of a specific phenomenon, and as such, developmental theories explain different aspects of how children develop.

In early childhood education, theories about child development are used to decide how to carry out program approaches. **Program approaches** are practices and philosophies that a program uses to guide their teaching and learning. This is one way that early childhood educators can ensure high quality programs for children and families. High-quality ECE programs turn to child development theory to create effective learning environments for children. For example, child development theory indicates that children learn best through action, engaging in a concept using their five senses. On the other hand, adults have the ability to learn from reading a text or watching a video.

Because of child development theory, we know for sure that the very best way for young children to learn is with hands-on methods. If a person designs a program with this in mind, then that program is rooted in child development theory. That means that if a teacher wants children to learn about the parts of a pumpkin, then she will give the children pumpkins, cut them up, and let the children explore the parts rather than showing them a video about pumpkins. The teacher does it this way because the program has committed to basing their practice on theory.



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1. Figure 2.1: [Preschoolers play with trains](#) by Allison Shelley for EDUimages is released under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#)

2.2 THEORIES

Angela Blums, Ph.D.

There are several theories about child development that are used to inform ECE programs. This section will cover the seven most prominent theories that have influenced modern-day child developmental science. Those are: cognitive developmental, behaviorism, social learning theory, sociocultural development, psychosocial theory, attachment theory, and ecological systems theory. There is no one theory that is correct; instead, we use information from all of these theories to inform how we design early childhood classrooms.

It is critical to examine prominent child development research and theories through a **culturally responsive** framework; an approach that incorporates the cultural knowledge, experiences, identities, communication styles, and cultural norms of the children and families involved in a given setting. Today we know that research needs to consider the social and cultural contexts of children and families when describing its effectiveness or relevance. This means that when teachers apply the principles of a particular theory in the classroom, they should consider how it impacts the identity, agency, and cultural norms of the children and families in your program.

Cognitive Developmental

Cognitive developmental theory focuses on how children think, learn, and acquire new knowledge. It was developed by a Swiss scientist named Jean Piaget (Miller, 2011). According to cognitive developmental theory, children move through childhood in a series of stages. These stages determine what behaviors adults can expect from a child as well as what capabilities a child has at a given stage. There are four stages through which children progress: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations. The features of these stages are outlined in Table 2.1. Between the ages of birth and two years, a child is in the sensorimotor stage. In this stage, children explore objects using their hands and mouth and coordinate sensory experiences through physical movement. If an object is hidden from view, they believe it has disappeared for good. When a child begins to understand that the object still exists, even if they can't see where it went, this is referred to as **object permanence**.

Between the ages of two to seven years, a child is in the preoperational stage. During

this stage, a child engages in symbolic reasoning which leads to pretend play. For example, a child might use a stick as a spoon during this stage.

The concrete operations stage takes place between the ages of seven to twelve years. During this stage, children begin to use logical reasoning, but it is usually limited to real objects that can be seen or touched. During this stage, children might add and subtract using manipulatives.

The formal operations stage starts at age twelve and continues through adulthood. During this stage, children begin to engage in abstract and logical reasoning in multiple situations. This might take the form of solving complex puzzles and games.



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Piaget's stages are a useful way to consider how children develop in thinking, learning, and acquiring new knowledge. One consideration for all stage theories is that there is variability in how children move through stages. The stages are not rigid; for example, just as a child turns two years old, they may not immediately begin pretend play. Some children might do it a bit sooner and some a bit later. Children are living, breathing beings after all! Another consideration is that the transition between stages is not sudden. Just because a two-year-old engages in pretend play does not mean that she is now finished exploring toys and objects with her mouth. Children often have behaviors of two stages when they are transitioning from one to the other.

Stage	Sensorimotor	Preoperational	Concrete Operations	Formal Operations
Age	Birth to 2 years	2 to 7 years	7 to 12 years	12 years and beyond
Behaviors	Learns about the world through interacting with objects using the five senses	Begins to engage in symbolic and pretend play, but cannot engage in abstract or logical reasoning	Begins use of logical reasoning, however, reasoning is limited to objects that can be held or seen	Engages in abstract and logical reasoning and can apply this type of thinking across contexts

Table 2.1 Piaget's Stages of Development

Cognitive developmental theory also includes an explanation for how children acquire new knowledge. This is known as constructivism (Wadsworth, 1996). **Constructivism** means children must use their five senses to interact with objects in their environment in order to gain new information. In this way, they build a conceptual understanding about the world around them. Interestingly, the stage that a child is in determines how a child constructs knowledge.

If an infant is in the sensorimotor stage, they might gain new knowledge about an object by putting it in their mouth. If they take an adult's keys and start to play with them, they will learn that keys feel cold and hard when placed in the mouth. The next time they see something made of metal, for example a spoon, they will expect that it is cold when placed in the mouth because they learned this from a direct experience with the keys. Reading a book or watching a video about keys will never give the infant this same knowledge because children need tangible, concrete items to help them learn about the world.

Constructivism also dictates that new knowledge builds upon previous knowledge. As children build concepts about their world, they start to organize that information into categories. These categories are called schemas. **Schemas** are categories of information about a concept or thing. For example, two-year old Zhe might have a schema about dogs. He might conceptualize dogs as furry, four-legged creatures who have tails. Every time he sees a new kind of dog, he will mentally place it into that category of dogs. This process is referred to as assimilation, fitting in new information into what is already known. When Zhe goes on a walk and sees a black lab, a corgi, and a German Shepherd, he assimilates these different types of dogs into his schema for dogs. But what happens when he sees a Great Dane? It has four legs and a tail, but due to its size, resembles a horse more than a dog. Zhe must then accommodate this information, therefore changing his previously held ideas about dogs, so that his schema for dogs now includes larger dogs as well.

Consider also the first time Zhe sees a cat. It is furry, it has four legs and a tail, but it says "meow" instead of "woof." Zhe must once again accommodate, this time creating a new schema about cats, which he now knows are in a different group than dogs. This process continues throughout childhood as children learn and organize new information.



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Piaget's theory has had and continues to have enormous impact on early childhood practices. More recently, researchers have offered evidence that Piaget underestimated children's abilities in some situations. Today most researchers agree that a gradual shift occurs in cognitive abilities rather than children moving through highly defined stages (Berk, 2006).

Behaviorism

Behaviorism is a theory based on the work of several researchers including John Watson, B.F. Skinner and Ivan Pavlov, which focuses on children's observable behaviors and actions ("Behaviorism," 2009). This theory indicates that children's behaviors can be shaped through external cues called reinforcers. **Reinforcers** are actions taken by adults to encourage or discourage certain behaviors. This process is called **conditioning**. When a child has been conditioned, their behavior has been shaped in response to the cues from the teacher to guide the child to the behaviors desired by the adult. An example of conditioning in a classroom might look like this: A teacher wants all children to sit down for circle time. She may announce that circle time is about to begin, and as each child sits, she gives a sticker to each one. The sticker acts as the reinforcement for desired behavior. After this process has been repeated over a few weeks, the children will come to sit as soon as the teacher announces circle time.



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In recent years, there has been some criticism of behaviorism in classroom settings. Critics assert that reinforcements, like stickers, deter intrinsic motivation. **Intrinsic motivation** is a desire to do things based on one's own wishes and goals. Many believe that children should engage in acceptable behavior simply because it is desirable and interesting. In practice, this means that to get children to sit for circle time, they must *want* to do it. How to make them want to do it? Make it interesting and fun! Sing engaging songs, smile, use shakers and instruments to find a way to draw the children in.

Another criticism of behaviorism is that it does not help children learn acceptable behavior in the long term. In other words, what happens when there is no sticker? In

the absence of reinforcement, the desired behavior can diminish. What happens when children transition to a class where no reinforcers are given for sitting down?

Despite its shortcomings, behaviorism is still used in many classrooms and can be a successful method for guiding children's behavior. Reinforcers can be seen as rewards for children and can contribute to higher class morale. Many teachers appreciate even the short-term effectiveness that behaviorism provides in guiding children toward acceptable behavior.

A final note on behaviorism: some teachers may be tempted to use snacks or treats as reinforcers. This practice is strongly discouraged, as it can interfere with healthy eating habits and raise issues for children who are experiencing food insecurity. Indeed, nothing edible should be used to direct children's behavior.

Social Learning Theory



Figure 2.2. Photo Credit: Ron Lach, Pexels License

Social learning theory is based on the research of Albert Bandura about how children learn particular behaviors based on watching the actions of those around them (Bandura, 1977). The individuals in a child's environment are referred to as **models**. According to social learning theory, children observe the behaviors of others around them and use that as a model for their own behavior. For example, if a teacher commonly uses words like please and thank you with children, the children will begin to use those words as well. Children usually model the important adults in their life but may also model behavior from media sources. For this reason, social learning theory calls into question violent content seen in media because it may have an effect on child behavior. Social learning theory expands upon behaviorism in that children's behaviors are not just a matter of behavior and reinforcement but are also interwoven with the social context as well. In this way, children learn about consequences of actions in a more organic way rather than through prescribed reinforcers leading to more long-term behaviors. Consider an example of a toddler observing an adult opening a jar to find a hidden toy. The adult models the hand coordination involved in the action and expresses delight at the contents. This encourages similar attempts by the child who begins to practice the skill of opening a jar.

Sociocultural Development



Figure 2.3. A Toddler Playing With Developmental Toys / Photo Credit: Karolina Grabowska, Pexels License

Sociocultural development theory addresses how children learn new skills through social interactions (“Sociocultural theory,” 2016). It is related to cognitive developmental theory in that both are focused on how children think and learn. It was developed by the psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Instead of focusing on how children interact with objects and concepts in the environment, social cognitive theory focuses on how children interact with other individuals in their environment. These individuals are referred to as the **more knowledgeable other**, as they have more skills and knowledge about a particular area than the child. The more knowledgeable other can be an older peer or an adult. According to social learning theory, when children are learning a new skill, they best accomplish it by operating on the upper edge of their abilities. This is referred to as the **zone of proximal development (ZPD)**. The zone of proximal development is the difference between what a child can do alone and what a child can do with help from a more knowledgeable other (“Zone of proximal development,” 2016). For example, if 6-year-old Shruti cannot ride a bike alone but can ride it with help from her mother, then this activity is in her ZPD. How does her mother help her learn to ride? She might hold onto the back of the bike seat, steadying Shruti as she pedals. She may hold onto the handlebars, helping her daughter navigate turns. She may give verbal cues, alerting Shruti when she needs to apply the brakes. Whatever help Shruti’s mother gives is dependent on her daughter’s skill. This is referred to as scaffolding. **Scaffolding** is the assistance given by the more knowledgeable other that changes in response to the child’s ability. The best way to support a child’s learning is to give them just the specific help that they need in order to allow them to complete the skill. If Shruti has no trouble balancing and steering, then holding onto the seat and handlebars will do her no good in learning. Verbal cues on when to apply the brakes are what she needs.

On the other hand, if it is her first time on the bike, verbal cues on how to brake will not be very useful as she wobbles around and falls. To engage in optimal learning, a child must be guided within their zone of proximal development. If a task is too easy, then then it may become boring. If it is too difficult, the child may become frustrated and give up. Through scaffolding, a more knowledgeable other can help support a child to learn things that they could not do alone. Then the more knowledgeable other will slowly reduce the support until the child can complete the task alone.



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Psychosocial Theory

Another theory that focuses on the development of the child as they move through stages is psychosocial theory. Developed by Erik Erikson, psychosocial theory posits that human development is characterized by a series of stages (Erikson, 1963). Each stage represents a transition time for learning and development and is marked by a specific aspect of development. Beginning at birth and ending in late adulthood, this theory encompasses the lifespan. As an individual enters into each stage, they are faced with a psychological conflict, known as a life crisis. A **life crisis** is when two conflicting aspects of development must be navigated by an individual. The stages are listed in Table 2.2.

To illustrate how a child might move through a life crisis, consider the following example of the stage “initiative vs guilt.” Three-year-old Leandro has used his crayons to color a lovely picture for his daddy and hangs it on the wall using tape. Daddy praises Leandro for his good idea to hang artwork on the wall using tape. Next time, Leandro decides to color directly on the wall, which leads to a scolding from daddy instead. Leandro has shown initiative, taking independent action for hanging a picture on the wall all by himself. He also experiences guilt for his initiative gone wrong when he colors on the wall. As he moves through this process, he learns to take initiative in the appropriate way and gains pride from his accomplishments.

Age	Life crisis
0-18 months	Trust vs. Mistrust
18 months-3 years	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt
3-5 years	Initiative vs. Guilt
5-13 years	Industry vs. Inferiority
13-21 years	Identity vs. Confusion
21-39 years	Intimacy vs. Isolation
40-65 years	Generativity vs. Stagnation
65 years and beyond	Integrity vs. Despair

Table 2.2 Erikson's Stages of Development

Attachment Theory



Figure 2.4. *Untitled / Photo Credit: balouriarajesh, Pixabay License*

Attachment theory was developed on the premise that infants need physical and emotional support from a primary caregiver early in life in order to become emotionally well-adjusted in early childhood and beyond. Developed by Mary Ainsworth and John Bowlby, this theory is grounded in the mother-child bond but can be applied to the father

or other primary caregiver (“Ainsworth, Mary,” 2008; Bretherton, 1992). Attachment theory proposes four types of bonds or attachment patterns that a child can have with the mother (or primary caregiver). An **attachment pattern** is a description of the relationship between mother and child based on the behavior of the child. Attachment patterns were measured using a lab test called the Strange Situation (Bretherton, 1992). In the **Strange Situation**, the mother and baby played in a playroom along with a friendly stranger. The mother leaves for a brief time, leaving the child to play with the stranger. When the mother returns, the baby’s behavior upon this “reunion” is observed and coded as a type of attachment pattern. There are four main types of attachment patterns which are outlined in Table 2.3.

Attachment pattern	Child’s behavior upon reunion	Caregiver’s responsiveness to child’s needs
Secure	Seeks proximity to caregiver; positive response; is calmed by caregiver’s attempts to soothe	Sensitive to child’s needs; consistent
Insecure avoidant	Does not seek proximity to caregiver; does not seem distressed at caregiver’s absence	Not sensitive to child’s needs; distant
Insecure resistant	Is not calmed by caregiver’s attempts to soothe; resists proximity	Inconsistent in response to child’s needs; sometimes sensitive, sometimes distant
Insecure disorganized	Does not fall into a reliable attachment pattern	Emotionally distant

Table 2.3 Mary Ainsworth’s Attachment Patterns



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There has been some recognition in recent years as to the lack of cross-cultural validity of the strange situation as a measure of attachment, meaning attachment might not look the same for everyone (Keller, 2018). The Strange Situation was developed using a mostly western, middle-class sample. Because adult interactions with infants can vary by culture, the reactions of infants during the Strange Situation might not always look the same.

While there are some other ways to measure attachment, more research is needed to uncover ways to measure attachment across a variety of cultures.

Secure attachment leads to positive outcomes for children. Securely attached children are more likely to have positive social relationships and are more successful in school. On the other hand, insecurely attached children have trouble forming and maintaining social relationships and tend to have behavior and academic problems in school.

What do mothers and other primary caregivers do to form a secure attachment? It mostly relies on sensitivity. Sensitivity in this sense refers to a responsiveness to an infant's emotions. If baby cries, the mother soothes her. If baby laughs, mother laughs along. In this way, the infant builds a reliable bond with the mother that sets them up for stable emotional connection. Additionally, it helps a child develop an internal working model for how relationships should function in general. An **internal working model** is a conceptual understanding of how the relationship between an individual and a loved one should be. With a securely attached child, their internal working model might be something like "the adults in my life are people who love me and take care of me. My needs are met by them." This is later transferred to form trusting relationships with others like grandparents, teachers, and later, romantic partners.

Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, focuses on the child in the context of their environment. The premise of this theory is that the child develops in response to the multiple systems that influence them (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). For example, a child is influenced by their immediate household family, extended family, neighbors, schools, and society at large. These systems are organized into categories based on their immediate contact with the child and how directly or indirectly they influence the child (Morris, 2009; "Psychosocial development," 2016). The systems also influence one another. For example, the language a family speaks at home is influenced by the society in which the family lives. These systems each have names. The system that refers to the child's immediate environment is the **Microsystem**. The child's immediate family, school or childcare, and friends are in the microsystem. The **Mesosystem** refers to the connections between the entities in the microsystem. The interactions of parents and the teachers at school are an example of the mesosystem. The next layer is the **Exosystem**, or the social influences that are more removed from the child. Parent's workplace, healthcare services, and local politics are examples of the exosystem. The **Macrosystem** represents attitudes of the larger culture. Examples of entities within the macrosystem are society's acceptance of women working outside the home or societal

racism. The last system is the **Chronosystem**, or the way larger societal events change over time. Global warming, and the political policies in place to hinder it, is an example of the chronosystem.

Let us take a look at an example of three-year-old Maria. She lives with her parents and older sister, and they speak Spanish at home. Her parents emigrated from Mexico to the United States seven years ago. Her microsystem includes her mother, father, sister, her best friend Lucia, and the childcare they attend at the local community center. Her mesosystem is when her parents volunteer at the community center where her childcare center is and when she has a playdate at Lucia's house. Her exosystem includes the marketing firm where her parents work, the healthcare provided by the parents' employers, and the state funding that runs her community-based childcare center.

Maria's macrosystem contains the attitudes of society about her family's native language and her parent's immigration status. Her chronosystem reflects the changing status of women of color – as Maria has more and more role models in the media who represent her culture. As this example illustrates, the ecological systems model represents the dynamic environments that shape how a child develops. It is not just the parents, extended family, peers, or teachers, but rather all the parts of society working together.

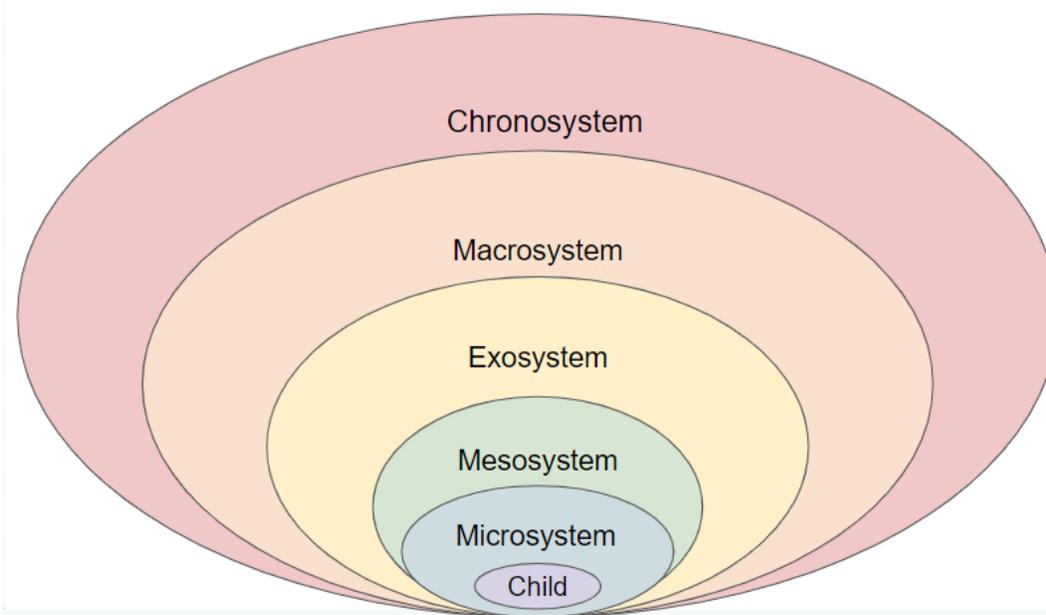


Figure 2.5. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model / Photo Credit: Angela Blums, CC BY 4.0

These theories all have strengths and limitations, which require teachers to consider many theories as they apply them to their daily practices. It is okay and even encouraged to choose parts of theories that work well in your program.

Reflection

What are some practical ways in which you could use child development theories in your work with children?

Which of these theories do you align with the most and why?

Beyond Historical Theories

Many of the theories listed in this chapter are rooted in a white, European perspective. This has led some to critique the relevance of these theories in our diverse contemporary society. To do so, it is important to consider how specific parts of a theory can be applied in a culturally responsive way. Consider this example. In many European American families, where independence is valued, teaching a baby to feed oneself is considered a critical skill and toddlers are expected to feed themselves. In cultures where collaboration is emphasized, an adult feeding a toddler is considered more appropriate. These differing practices could impact how a caregiver scaffolds a child to feed themselves independently. In both cases, an adult provides some scaffolding to the child on feeding, but the type and degree of scaffolding differs based on culture. This example illustrates one way in which a theory can be applied across multiple cultures, and how theories can even broaden the understanding of the diversity of your program.



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Reflection

What are some other ways in which culture can influence child rearing practices?

Beyond prominent theories, what are some other ways that educators can inform their practice?

Another key source of information that should inform programs is current scientific research about child development and early childhood education. In order to keep curriculum relevant to modern-day approaches, ECE professionals should stay informed about new research through professional development organizations such as [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (NAEYC). When reading current research, check to see who were the participants in the study. Were they from diverse racial, cultural, geographic, and economic groups? This can provide some context for how this research could be applied in programs.

Cultural knowledge that has been passed down orally is another source of information that can help shape programs. For example, Indigenous knowledge can provide valuable information about behavior, care, and education of young children. This knowledge has not been incorporated into many mainstream early childhood programs, but it has the potential to provide teachers with a wealth of understanding about early childhood education (Gordon, 2023).



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2.3 PROGRAM APPROACHES

Angela Blums, Ph.D.



Figure 2.6. Untitled / Photo Credit: newarta, Pixabay License

Early childhood programs use child development theories to inform their practice. High-quality programs know that grounding program practices in sound theory leads to better outcomes for children. When programs use real, hands-on experiences to teach children about their world, it is due to the influence of the cognitive developmental model. Likewise, when programs include family involvement or community connections, we can thank the influence of the ecological systems theory. Program approaches may be dynamic based on the individual needs of the students or a specific student population. That is, they may change based on the families who are enrolled. The next section will take a look at some programmatic approaches which are combinations of theory and practice that create specific curriculum choices.



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High Scope

High scope is a program model that is child-centered and provides children with hands-on experiences. Its roots are unique – it originated from a research-based preschool program in Michigan in the 1960s called the Perry Preschool Project. The goal of the Perry Preschool Project was to enroll low-income children in high quality preschool experiences to see if it would improve their life outcomes (Schweinhart, 2003; Schweinhart et al., 1993). The researcher David Weikart followed the children’s progress for decades to measure the results. Weikart chose to include low-income children because, in comparison to middle-income children, children in low-income households are at greater risk for lower academic achievement, have lower rates of high school graduation, higher rates of crime, and a higher likelihood of poverty later in life.

The goal of the Perry Preschool project was to counter the effects of poverty early in life. This was one of the first and most published pieces of scientific research to investigate how economic investments in early childhood education could have long-term benefits to the child, the family, and to society. The idea was that if you give a child a strong start early on, it will pay off when they become adolescents and adults. What the researchers hoped for came true. Children who participated in the Perry Preschool Project had greater academic achievement, greater high school graduation rates, lower rates of crime, and higher adult earnings than their low-income peers who were not in the Preschool project. This study showed that access to high-quality preschool programs in the first few years of life can have long-term benefits for the child. This research highlighted the importance of the early years of a child’s life in influencing the course of their future.

So, what was the magic formula of the Perry Preschool Project? There were several components, but two main pieces stand out: The classroom system of plan-do-review and family involvement. **Plan-Do-Review** is a system that helps children organize their play activities. Children gather in a circle and the teacher asks them what activity center they plan to play in during the morning free play time. The choices range from blocks and art to dramatic play or puzzles. Children make their choice to the group, such as “I plan to play with Jakeem in the blocks area. We are going to build a really big bridge!”

After the children make their plans, they go and do the activity of their choice. It is okay if kids switch activities or change their plans during this time. After free play, the children return to the circle and report back on how their plans went. Did Jakeem and his friend build a successful bridge? What went well? Did anything unexpected happen? The teacher asks these types of probing questions to get the children to think about their activities. This method supports cognitive development because it involves planning. Children are able to explore their world and engage in hands-on activities. The plan-do-review helps to support their memory development and helps them to develop concentration, attention, and focus, all skills that are related to the academics they will engage in when they enter elementary school.

The second main component of the Perry Preschool Project was family involvement. Families were visited in their homes by teachers to create connections between what was happening in the classroom and at home. When a child learns a concept in class, it should not stay in class. Having families participate in learning at home can help create layers of learning for the child. It also provides an opportunity for family support and education. This approach aligns with the ecological model by integrating family and community into a child's early childhood education setting, supporting development using the multiple contexts involved in a child's life.



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The High Scope model follows the findings from the Perry Preschool Project. It has taken those **evidence-based strategies** and created a program model to serve children in early learning settings. The Perry Preschool Project is the embodiment of the philosophy that

family income does not need to be the sole determining factor in children's academic and life outcomes.

A similar program to the Perry Preschool Project is Head Start. Head Start is a preschool program that also has its roots improving the lives of children in poverty. Head Start research has found similar results to the Perry Preschool, and with comparable methods (Weikart et al., 1978). Head Start has become a long-term, nationwide program that still exists. Indeed, many Head Start programs even follow the High Scope method. These programs demonstrate the need and effectiveness of high-quality preschool programs.

Fact

Supporting Children and Families: Head Start Programs

Head Start programs were developed in the 1960s to promote school readiness for children whose families needed extra support. Head start programs focus on the whole child: with healthy meals, family involvement, and developmental check ins. According to research, children who participate in Head Start have positive long-term outcomes: they are more likely to graduate from high school, less likely to live in poverty as adults, and have lifelong better physical health (McKey et al., 1985).

Developmental Interaction

The Developmental Interaction approach was founded by Lucy Sprague Mitchell, an education reformer who developed innovative ideas for educating children and helped to professionalize teaching for women. Mitchell also founded the Bank Street College of Education in New York. The developmental interaction approach, sometimes called the Bank Street approach, focuses on developing the child in all areas – physical, intellectual, social, and emotional (Nager & Shapiro, 2000). Teachers in the Developmental Interaction approach see learning as a holistic process and consider developmental domains (physical, intellectual, social, and emotional) as inherently interconnected. It emphasizes meeting children where they are and providing opportunities for making choices (Nager & Shapiro, 2007). The Bank Street approach is play-based, so children have lots of free time to explore on their own terms. It also emphasizes the child's role in society – another nod to the ecological model of child development.

Montessori

The Montessori approach to education was developed by Maria Montessori, an Italian physician and educator who was interested in reforming the way children learn in group settings (Montessori, 1964/2013; Seldin, 2002). The Montessori method has distinct key features that make it stand out from other approaches. Children in Montessori classrooms are mixed-age groups in a single class. Ages can range from 2.5 to 6 years old. This means that there is a great deal of peer learning. Older children can model behavior for younger children, which can facilitate learning better than direct instruction from a teacher.



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Another feature of the Montessori classroom is the concept of constructivism. Montessori classrooms rely on a carefully structured classroom with materials that children can use to discover new concepts on their own using real life materials. Items are often made from natural materials to give the child a realistic concept of the weight of an object based on its size. In order to deeply engage with materials, children are given a large block of free play time – usually about 2.5 to 3 hours. During this time, teachers will help children on an individual or small group level with materials. The materials have an emphasis on child development. Some may involve fine motor skills, like threading beads on a string, and some may promote problem solving, a part of cognitive development, such as ordering pegs into holes by size and shape. Many activities are related to practical life: washing dishes, placing flowers in a vase, and cleaning up after oneself. Materials for practical life are always child-sized so that the child can feel that she can master the activity without unnecessary impediments

Montessori programs place a strong emphasis on completion. Children will not be interrupted by a teacher when they are in the middle of a task, as this is thought to disrupt learning. Independence is also emphasized. Children are encouraged to learn how to use buttons and zippers in order to dress themselves at an early age. Teachers without a Montessori background are often surprised to see the abilities of a two-and-a-half-year-old getting a jacket on and zipping it alone.



Figure 2.7. Child Holding Blue Round Plastic Montessori Toy / Photo Credit: Jackie Hope, Unsplash License

Mealtimes in Montessori centers often differ from those of traditional classrooms. When a meal is served, children are invited to the table and asked to join when they are ready. There is no large-scale, formal transition from playtime to lunchtime. If a child is still working on an activity, then he may complete it in as much time as he wishes. Typically, children gather around the table more or less at the same time, but it happens organically.

Children are drawn to the smell of food and a chance to visit with playmates at the table. Children serve themselves and pour their own milk using child-sized utensils and milk pitchers. At the end of the meal, children clear their own dishes and place them on a cart after removing unfinished food.

With such a free environment, how do teachers encourage classroom harmony in a Montessori classroom? Teachers use guidance strategies that are similar to other approaches, but children often learn from observing older peers. If a three-year-old is approaching the art easel for the first time, she may watch a five-year-old first. She may observe her peer carefully dipping the brush into the cup, keeping paint on the paper, and wiping up any spills with a cloth. This approach to learning how to use and respect classroom materials may resonate more with a young child than when a teacher outlines strict rules for how to properly use paint.

Waldorf

Waldorf schools originated in Germany and were developed by Rudolf Steiner in the 1920s (Barnes, 1991). Waldorf programs have a strong emphasis on everyday practical activities, and centers are designed to resemble a home in order to facilitate this. Cooking, cleaning, sewing, and building are all activities that children engage in in a Waldorf program. Oral storytelling, creative arts, and music are important. Historically, Waldorf programs included mystical and spiritual elements, but many modern programs do not (Goldshmidt, 2017). Children are encouraged to engage in free play using toys and activities made of natural materials. Like in Montessori programs, the belief is that children are more connected to toys and tools that are made of wood rather than plastic, as it is more aesthetically pleasing and facilitates a connection to nature.

In that spirit, Waldorf classrooms include natural materials such as acorns, shells, and wool that are used for counting games, art, and storytelling. Academic subjects are integrated with one another – math is taught through storytelling, combining mathematical problem solving with language development. This helps promote cognitive development in a holistic way. Teachers facilitate early math activities using small wool dolls and other natural, tangible materials. However, formal learning of letters and numbers are not pushed on young children in Waldorf schools. It is the belief that children will come around to letter and number identification when they are ready, and that is usually not until the age of six or seven, which is when it is formally introduced in Waldorf schools. Interestingly, this coincides with most modern European educational systems as well (Sharp, 2002). Preschools in the United States, on the other hand, typically begin letter and number identification well before age five (although this is beginning to change).

This variation is a valuable lesson in cultural differences in developmentally appropriate practice.

Another key feature of the Waldorf approach is the daily rhythm. While many preschools follow a daily schedule with specific hour or minute intervals, Waldorf programs follow a rhythm instead. What matters here is the sequence of the day, not how long each activity takes. So daily activities always follow the same sequence but may not be at the same time every day. In the morning, for example, the teacher may invite the children to help bake bread or make soup for lunch. Children gather around kneading dough or chopping vegetables. (Children are encouraged to learn knife safety at an early age.) As children finish one activity, they may disperse into other activities like sewing, building with blocks, or dancing with scarves.

Another teacher might gather a group of students to invite them to hear a story that she is telling using puppets and props to act out the plot. Children may naturally come and go from the story based on what they are interested in playing with at that time. When the lunch is ready, the teacher will invite children to the table with a song and, oftentimes, by lighting a candle. (Children are also taught safety around the candle.) There is no set time, but meals are typically served at about the same time each day. Children rely on the order of events to help them predict their environment. A difference of 15 or 20 minutes makes no difference to them, however. This focus on rhythm is also reflected in the practice of honoring the changing of seasons. Waldorf programs also include rituals that celebrate the rhythms of nature. This gives the children a connection to the larger system of which they are a part.



Figure 2.8. *Rainbow Colored Wool / Photo Credit: star athena, CC BY 2.0*

Reggio Emilia

The Reggio Emilia approach takes its name from the Italian city where it originated. A constructivist approach, the Reggio method provides encouragement for children to explore their world using hands-on methods that are child-directed. The approach was

developed by Loris Malaguzzi following World War II (Edwards, 2002). It was his belief that children should be able to freely express themselves. In that vein, Reggio programs encourage arts and music.



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Figure 2.9. Untitled / Photo Credit: EvgeniT, Pixabay License

Central to the Reggio approach is the **Hundred Languages of Children**, or the ability of children to express their thoughts and feelings through arts such as painting, sculpting, and drawing (Edwards et al., 1998; Gandini, 1993). Indeed, Reggio programs are known for their emphasis on beautiful artwork. Children's art is displayed on the wall at the child's eye level, often with a description of the work written by the teacher in the child's own words. This honors the child's creative spirit and helps promote healthy emotional development. Another feature of the original Reggio school in Italy is the connection to community. The children there learn directly from members of the community, and the

community members feel responsible for taking part in children’s education. American programs emulate this goal with strong parental involvement. U.S. programs are referred to as “Reggio inspired” because the true Reggio schools in Italy have the connection to community that is unique to that location. The Reggio approach believes that children learn from adults, peers, and the environment. The environment is thought to be the “third teacher” and is set up so that children can explore independently as their interests guide them. Spaces are set up with natural light, living plants, and materials that encourage creativity.

Forest Schools and Outdoor Learning

The model for most American forest schools originated in Sweden and other European countries, and their popularity has been growing in the United States in recent years (Knight, 2013; Williams-Sieghfredsen, 2017). However, Native Americans have been practicing nature-based learning for generations, and these models are also used in the development of forest schools and outdoor learning programs (Lees & Bang, 2022).

The concept of forest schools is that children spend their whole day outdoors, in all weather. All activities take place outside – stories, art, construction, and even meals. Children are dressed in appropriate clothing for all weather so that they are comfortable and safe while outside. Many of the same activities that take place in indoor preschools also happen in forest preschools. Children create art, often using natural materials, but might also use paint, clay, and crayons.

Science activities are well-suited to a forest environment, as children can collect leaves and rocks to sort and categorize, or examine bugs using a magnifying glass. Nature-based learning can include life cycles of plants and animals, foraging for edible foods, and nature-based medicines. Nature-based learning also lends itself well to teaching children about Indigenous culture and practices, which provides opportunities for cultural understanding as well as practical knowledge.

An outdoor environment is well-suited to engage in construction projects, which may include building a tower with rocks or building a giant fort out of sticks, branches, and rope. Forest schools sometimes have a covered shelter or area where materials are kept in bins and teachers can take out the materials at the start of each day so that children have access to all the things they need for free play. Teachers do circle time, read books, tell stories, and sing songs, the same as in a typical preschool. Mealtimes take place outdoors and children wash hands using an outdoor hand washing station. Usually children do not sleep outdoors, so forest schools are typically either half-day programs or include only children who are old enough to not need naptime. Children in forest

schools have a strong connection to nature, and it is believed to provide many health and developmental benefits.



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On a related note, in July 2021 Washington state became the first state to permanently license outdoor, nature-based childcare for preschool and school-age children under a new Senate Bill 5151 (Russillo, 2021). This comes after a four-year outdoor preschool pilot program, which gave DCYF the ability to set the precedent as the first state in the nation to develop licensing requirements for outdoor education.

Reflection

How can a child's individual culture be reflected in program approaches?

Consider a program within your community. How is that program culturally relevant?



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2.4 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Angela Blums, Ph.D.

Summary

Theories give us insight into how children develop. There are seven major theories of child development, and each one is useful in understanding children's needs at a given age. It is important that teachers have a deep knowledge of children in order to create learning experiences that support development. High-quality early childhood programs must be informed by theory. There are a variety of approaches and philosophies in early childhood program models, and each has its own unique benefits. One thing that most program models have in common is the connection to theory that supports children's optimal development.

Review Questions

1. How can constructivism be used to plan activities for young children?
2. What are the limitations of using behaviorism in an early childhood classroom?
3. Why is it important to consider cultural context when engaging with children?
4. How can Bronfenbrenner's work be used in a preschool setting? Is it equally important for older children? Why or why not?
5. If you had to choose the best features of the program approaches presented in this chapter to create your dream classroom, which features would you choose? Why did you choose these features?

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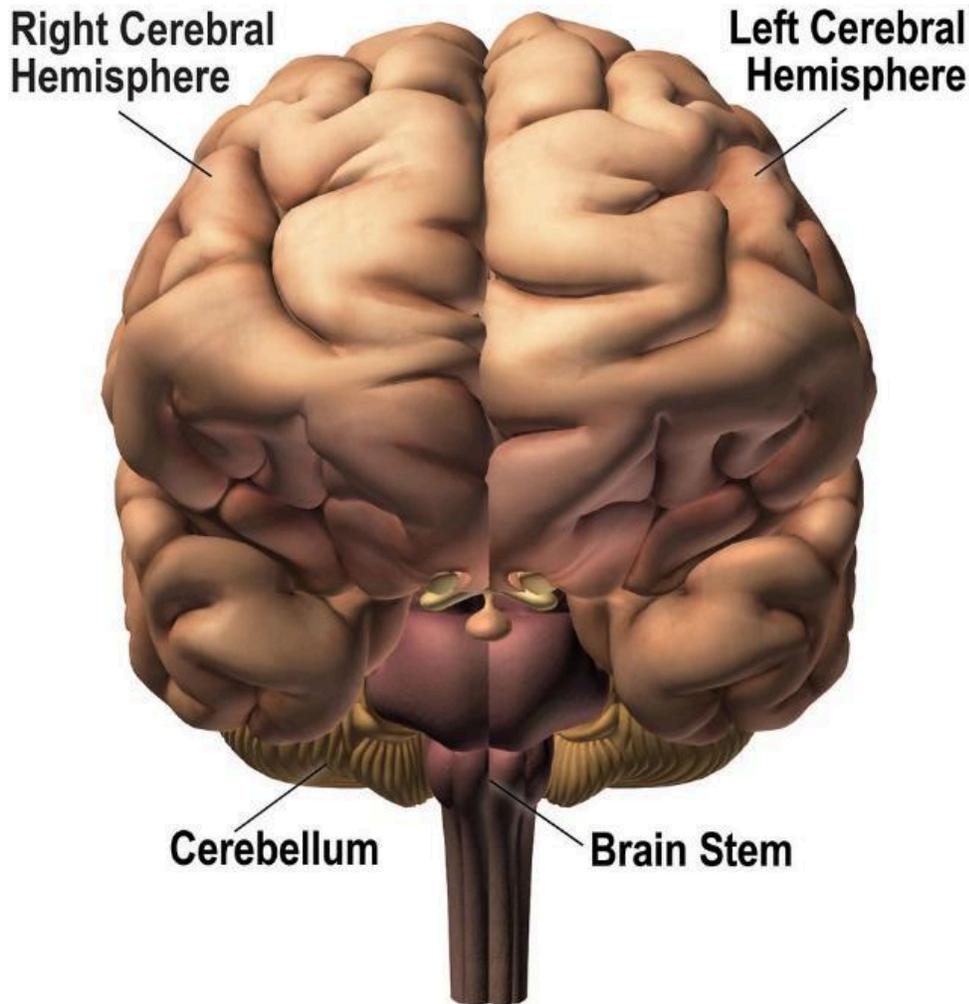
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CHAPTER 3: BRAIN DEVELOPMENT



Front View of Brain / Photo Credit: National Institute on Aging, National Institutes of Health, PD

Overview

A baby is eating breakfast and drops their spoon from the highchair tray. The adult nearby picks it up and places it back on the tray with a smile and kind word. The baby looks at the adult and then the spoon, picks it up and drops it onto the floor again. The adult laughs and picks the spoon up, replacing it on the tray as they gently smooth down the baby's hair. This interaction happens three more times. The adult recognizes the child's need for

repetition of this cause and effect activity and gladly participates in the back and forth game. It is a game that is building a healthy brain.

A clear understanding of brain development helps adults support healthy brain growth in the children they live and work with. Studying the brain gives us a better understanding of children's development, differing abilities, and it guides us in improving programs and policies impacting children and families.

This chapter will explore current information on how the brain develops and what is required to keep it healthy. It will also explore functions of brain regions in a typically developing brain and the impact of trauma and stress. Finally, this chapter addresses applications of brain development to the field of early childhood education. The science of brain development is constantly changing, and teachers should strive to stay abreast of current research by visiting reliable websites such as the [Center on the Developing Child](#) at Harvard University or the [Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences](#) at the University of Washington.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify basic anatomy of the brain.
- Explain how neurons connect to create pathways in the brain.
- Describe how early experiences impact brain development.
- Examine the role of brain development in early childhood education.
- Describe the elements a child needs to develop a healthy brain.

Key Terms

- ACEs—Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Amygdala
- Axon
- Boundaries
- Brainstem and midbrain
- Cell body
- Cerebellum
- Compassion fatigue
- Cortex
- Cortical modulation
- Cortisol
- Dendrite
- Distress
- Emotional intelligence
- Enriched environment
- Eustress
- Frontal lobe
- Glial Cell
- Limbic system
- Mindfulness
- Myelin
- Neuron
- Neurotransmitters
- Occipital lobe
- Parietal lobe
- Plasticity
- Prefrontal lobe
- Resilience
- Plasticity
- Pruning
- Stress

- Synaptic gap
- Temporal lobe
- Thalamus
- Toxic Stress
- Window of opportunity

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3.1 BRAIN DEVELOPMENT BASICS

Christine Moon, M.S.

Introduction

The brain is the most complex organ in the human body, and the only organ to study itself. How does the brain develop and what is necessary to maintain its health? The answers to these questions are important because they inform and impact everything we do in our lives, especially when working with children. As we will learn, the brain develops quickly in the early childhood years and continues to change throughout our lives.



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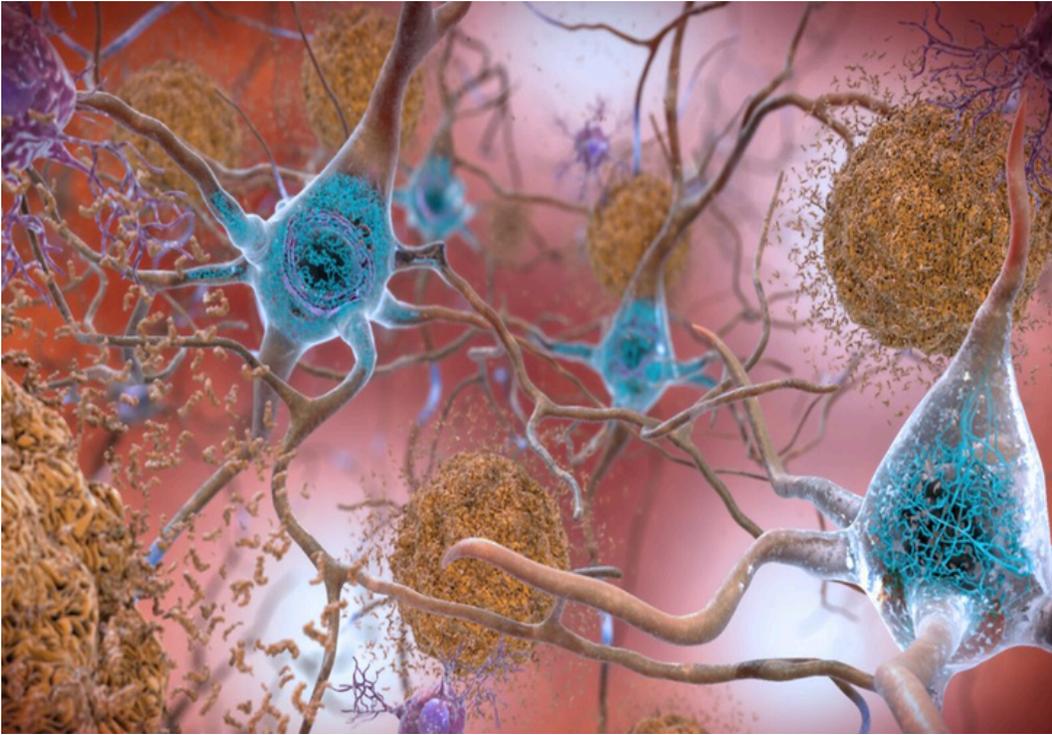


Figure 3.2. *Beta-Amyloid Plaques and Tau in the Brain / Photo Credit: NIH Image Gallery, PD*

When we understand the brain, we understand the power and impact of positive early childhood experiences. We also come to understand the impact on young brains from toxic stress and trauma and how we can prevent this. Building healthy brains from the start benefits everyone.

Brain Anatomy

At the cellular level, the brain is made up of 86 billion nerve cells called **neurons**. There are at least 10 times more support cells, called **glial cells**. Neurons communicate with each other through billions of connections in an electrochemical process. There are about 500 trillion connections in the adult human brain.

Fact

Research estimating the number of neurons has improved over the years. Earlier research estimated there were 100 billion nerve cells. Newer techniques developed by neuroscientist Suzana Herculano-Houzel give us a more accurate estimate of 86 billion (as cited in BrainFacts.org, 2018).

Although there has been a long-standing debate about whether we are more impacted by nurture (our environment) or nature (our individual biology), we now understand that it is actually a unique combination of both. Neither nature nor nurture fully explains what makes us human; it is a complex relationship between the two. Biology and genetics provide the potential, but our social environment shapes our ability to access that potential.



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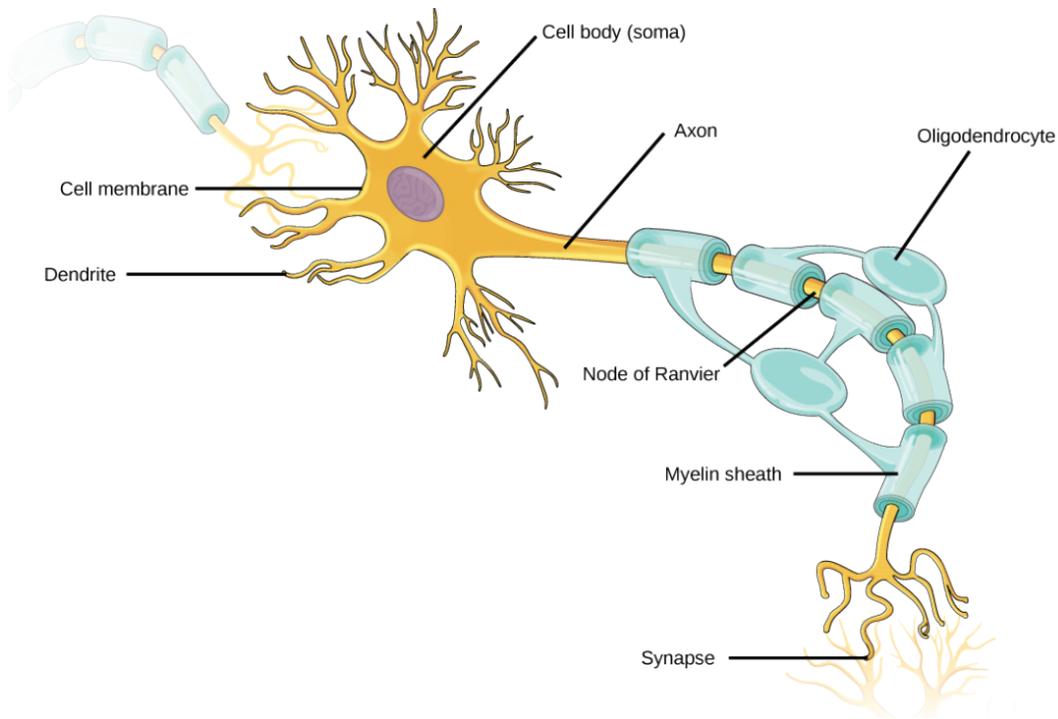


Figure 3.3. *Nervous Tissues / Photo Credit: OpenStax, CC BY 4.0*

Neurons

At the most basic level, a neuron is made up of a dendrite, cell body, axon, and myelin. Between neurons there is a small gap called the synaptic gap.

A **dendrite** and its spines receive information from other neurons. The number of dendrites on a neuron varies from a few hundred to thousands. Dendrites are covered with spines (varicosities) that are neurotransmitter receptor sites.

The **cell body** and its DNA genetic system use the nutrients that the blood brings to maintain the cell and to synthesize neurotransmitter molecules (messengers between cells).

The **axon** sends information from the neuron to other neurons. Each neuron generally has one axon branching out into many terminals. Axons vary in length from 1 millimeter to about 3 feet! Mature axons are covered in an insulated coating, which looks like sausage links, called **myelin**.

The **synaptic gap** is the tiny space between neurons; the neurons don't actually touch. Neurotransmitters are released into the gap and act as chemical messengers to the receiving neuron.

Neurons transmit information to each other through axons and dendrites by using the synaptic gap to exchange neurotransmitters. The axon sends a message through a

series of electrical impulses called the action potential. When the impulse reaches the end of the axon the electrical activity ceases. A chemical process takes place in the form of neurotransmission. If the message is “transmit information” an electrical charge is triggered in the next neuron. That neuron’s dendrite receives the message and electrically sends it through the axon to the next neuron. The process repeats until the message has reached its destination. If the message is “don’t transmit information,” the message is not passed on.



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Neurotransmission

When the electrical impulse that carries information reaches the end of a neuron’s axon, it is stopped at the tiny synaptic gap that separates them from the receiving neuron. The circuit is broken. **Neurotransmitters** are chemical messengers secreted at the synapse that have the potential to continue the circuit and transmit information between neurons.

Without neurotransmitters the brain could not process information or send out instructions to run the rest of the body. They affect the formation, maintenance, activity, and longevity of synapses and neurons. Neurotransmitter molecules are produced within a specific type of neuron (different neurons are specialized in different neurotransmitters) and stored in tiny sacs known as vesicles. When an electrical signal reaches the vesicles, they release their neurotransmitters into the synaptic gap.



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Each type of neurotransmitter has a unique shape that acts like a key. Released neurotransmitters attempt to attach to receptor sites (usually on the receiving neuron’s

dendrites). Each receptor site is shaped like a lock that will fit only certain types of neurotransmitters. If the “key” fits, the neurotransmitter will send a message to turn on a receiving neuron (excitatory message) or off (inhibitory message).

When a neurotransmitter’s job is done, the receptors release the molecules, which are either broken down or recycled. Each neurotransmitter has a very specialized function. Some neurotransmitters carry emotional information that impacts our mood, outlook on life, and behavior. For example, cortisol has an impact on our stress response system, and dopamine has an impact on our motivation, satisfaction, and pleasure. Serotonin plays a role in our mood management.

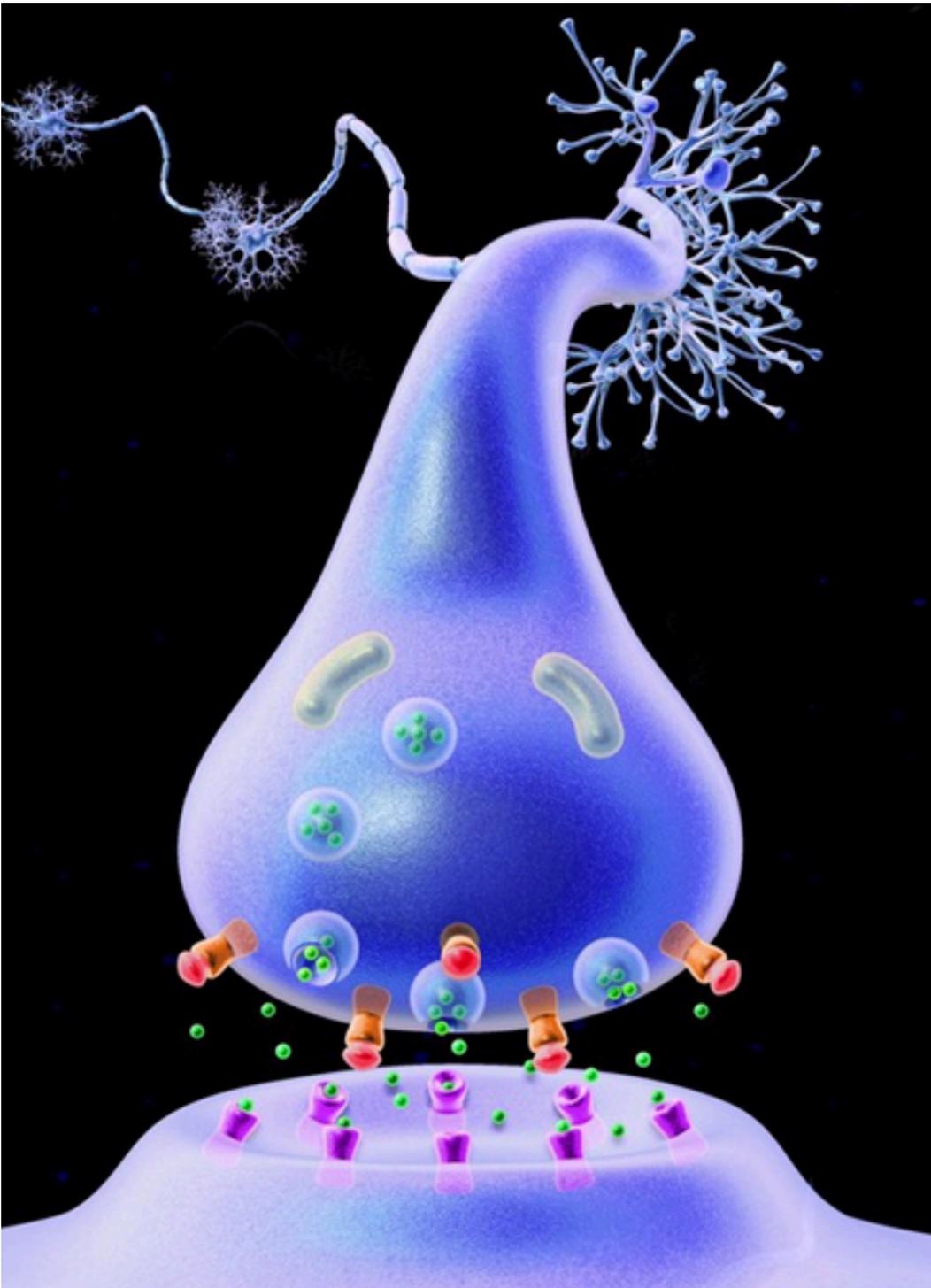


Figure 3.4. Action of SSRIs and NRIs / Photo Credit: Arran Lewis for the Wellcome Collection, CC BY 4.0

Growth and Development of the Brain

Brains begin development in the womb, starting as a neural tube and rapidly developing from the bottom up to form the lower, midbrain, and outer brain. Development is

impacted by the mother's nutrition, stress, environment, and other factors such as their mental health. During this time neurons migrate along the glial cells and move into place. The specific time table for migration is unknown and can be negatively impacted by the mother ingesting drugs or alcohol during pregnancy.

Babies are born with an estimated 86 billion brain cells. They create new connections, in the form of neural pathways, in response to active engagement in stimulating experiences. In the first few years of life more than 1 million new neural connections form every second (Center on the Developing Child, n.d.-a). Most neural pathways are created after birth as a result of stimuli coming from the environment that the child interacts with through the senses.

Each time the brain responds to a similar stimulus there is an increased propensity for the neurons to reconnect along the same pathway. Connections grow in the brain when experiences are repeated over and over or when an experience triggers a strong emotional reaction. The brain becomes hard wired to respond along established pathways. Think back to the opening story of the baby in the high chair dropping their spoon. That repeated experience with the caring adult is building pathways in the brain as they learn about cause and effect.

Neurons physically change as a result of this activation. Neurons grow new dendrite branches and receptor sites allowing the brain to process information more effectively and efficiently in more areas of the brain. The brain changes in response to experience by making connections between new input and what is already known and in place. The brain learns by recognizing patterns to make sense of new experiences. For example, when a baby tracks a toy with their eyes while grasping at it with their hand, their visual and motor pathways are connecting and growing stronger. Experience literally sculpts the brain!



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Fact

Babies need rich sensory interactions with caring adults. Long periods of time spent alone can inhibit brain growth and physical development.

The most active period for creating connections is in the early years of life, but new connections can form throughout life. After this rapid proliferation early on, unused brain cells and connections wither away in a process called **pruning**. Pruning is necessary in order to make room for the pathways the child needs most to survive in their world. Creating room also has the function of making the remaining pathways more efficient. Think of how pruning a fruit tree is essential to make room for new growth and fruit to mature. Pruning too many neurons that are important will decrease the brain's efficiency. Pruning happens most rapidly between ages 2 and 10, but is happening in some form throughout life, starting at about 8 months and ending in the late 20s (Cafasso, 2018). The intensity of the pruning is dependent on which area of the brain is being affected at the time.

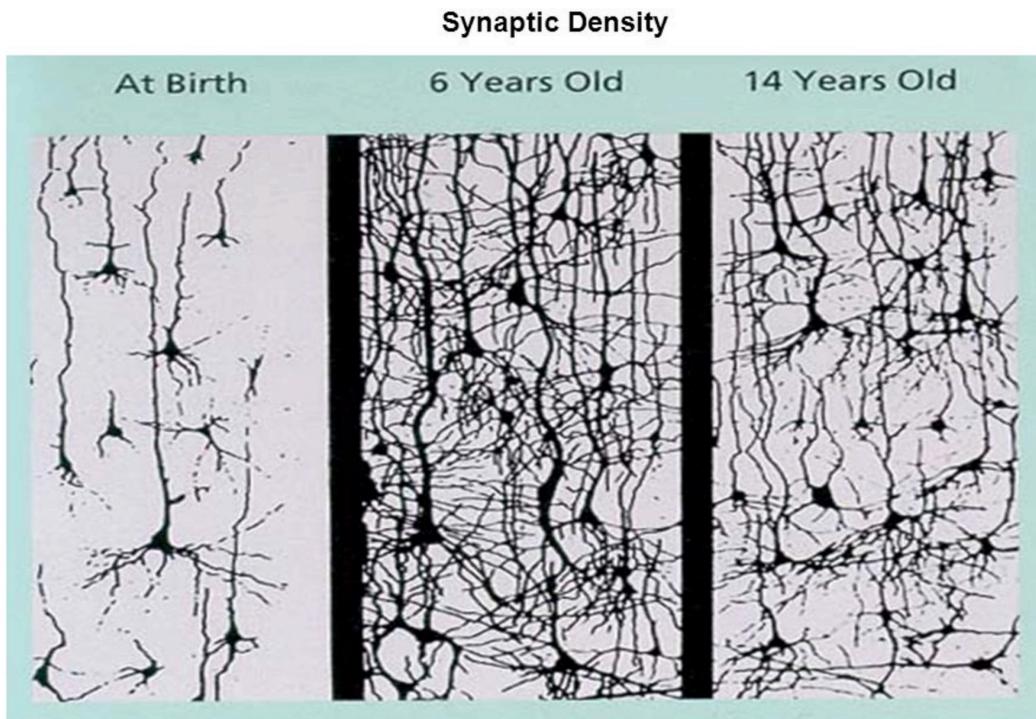


Figure 3.5. *Synaptic Density* / Photo Credit: Harry T. Chugani, CC BY 4.0

Plasticity of the Brain

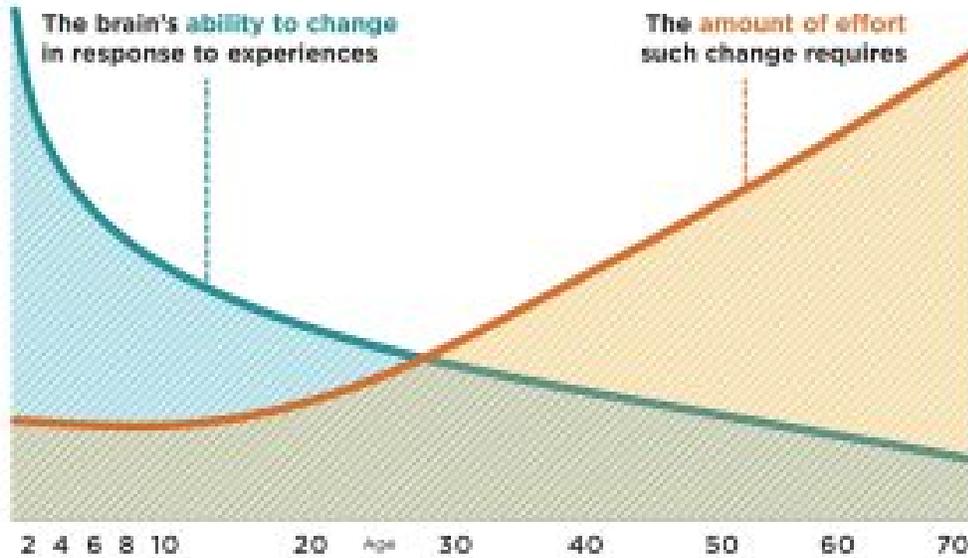
Plasticity describes the ease with which the brain can change itself. Our genes provide the blueprint, and our experiences are the architect. Which genes get turned on or off is determined by our experiences and environment. The brain's pathways strengthen as they are used. As stated above, the neurons that are not used are subject to pruning. In other words, we need to use our neurons or risk losing them.

There is a remarkable increase in synapses during the first year of life. In the beginning of life the rate of connections is about 1 million per second (Center on the Developing Child, n.d.-a). The brain is most plastic early in life, and it is easier to influence a baby's brain than try to rewire parts of it in the later years.



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Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University | Lewis 2008

Figure 3.6. Untitled / by Hannah Adams, for WA Open ProfTech, © SBCTC, CC BY 4.0, Content Credit: © Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University

Windows of Opportunity

There are some stages of brain growth where parts of the brain become more active in response to what the senses absorb. This is called **windows of opportunity** in the brain . It is when optimal growth occurs.ii These parts of the brain grow and learn faster than at any other time in life.

Children need the right experiences at the right time for their brains to fully develop in these areas. Some areas in the brain have windows that are merely an easier time to learn a task (like a second language) and others are more critical. Sight is one of these critical windows of opportunity. If the eyes are deprived of sensory input early in life the neurons poised to connect for visual pathways reassign to areas in the brain where there is more experiential input happening (Eagleman, 2020). Most windows of opportunity are only optimal times and not absolutes. Every child is on their own timetable and so the age they reach the window will vary.

When developmental stages are interrupted or skipped, or an injury of any degree is experienced, some sensory-motor and cognitive functions may be impaired or missing. For most functions it is never too late to grow new neurons and pathways, but it gets increasingly harder to do as the brain ages. The human brain has a remarkable ability

to heal. Windows don't slam shut but slowly close as we age, never really permanently shutting.

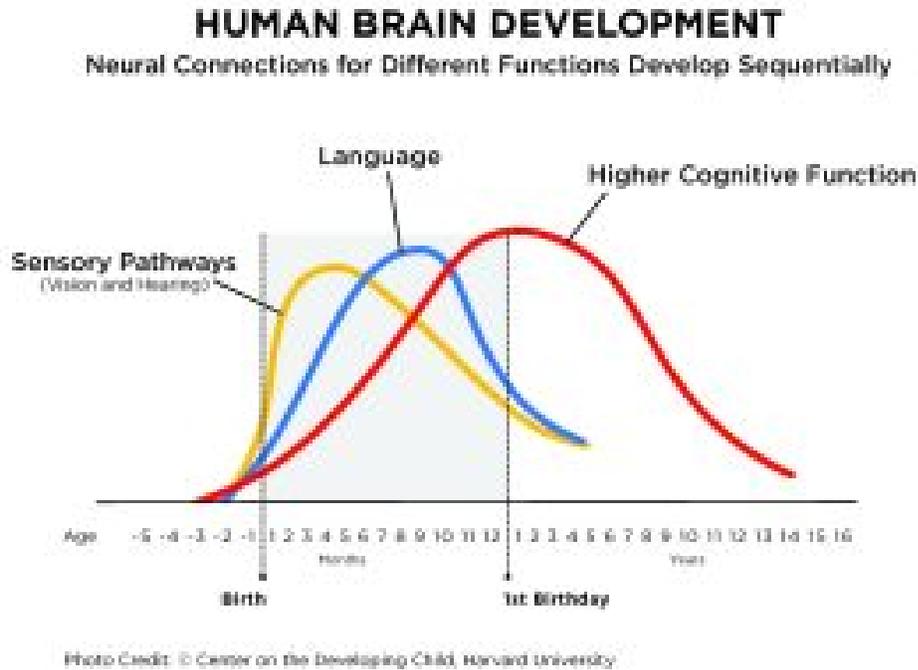


Figure 3.7. Human Brain Development / Photo Credit: © Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University



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Tip

Early intervention is key to helping the brain get back on track for optimal development when a

cognitive or sensory deficit is noticed. Check with your local school districts, family support agencies, and others to find out more about early intervention services available near you.

Enriched Environments

Children need active involvement in a stimulating, challenging, and loving environment for the brain to grow and flourish. This is called an **enriched environment** for the brain to develop. Passive involvement, isolation, and an impoverished environment diminish the brain.

What is included in an enriched environment for the brain? Sleep, nutrition, water, a safe environment, positive role models, and more. It is very important that babies, children, and adult brains have adequate sleep (see Table 1). Sleep is when the brain renews itself and cements learning.

Brains need proper nutrition with the right types of fat, protein, fruit, and vegetables. We are what we eat, and our brain can only function as well as the fuel we give it. Foods high in refined sugar are toxic for a growing brain. The American Association of Pediatrics recommends limiting the amount of sugar children consume each day to no more than six teaspoons for ages two and older; a typical child consumes more than triple that on average (Jenco, 2016). A great resource for a balanced diet for children is [MyPlate](#) by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Water is essential for the brain and body to stay hydrated. Encouraging children to drink water instead of juice reduces the amount of sugar they are consuming while hydrating their brain. WebMD suggests the following: Toddlers need 2-4 cups, children 4 to 8 years old need 5 cups, 9-13 year-olds need 7-8 cups and children over 14 years need 8-11 cups (Wheeler, 2016).

In addition to sleep, nutrition, and water, children need a safe environment with appropriate boundaries. Giving kids the freedom to explore while making sure that the environment is free from toxins and hazards helps young brains grow. They need the chance to interact with interesting materials and be given clear guidance about what is safe and not safe. We can think of boundaries as a fence we provide that surrounds the child and enlarges as they mature. The fence keeps them safe but within it they are free to explore and push against the boundary, so they know they are safe. Emotional warmth and safety is key!

An enriched environment also includes positive role models and guidance. Adults

should model the lifestyle and behavior they want from children. Healthy eating, drinking water, getting adequate sleep and exercise, and modeling emotional intelligence and growth mind set skills are all part of this. If the adults around children strive to keep their brains healthy, then chances are that kids will follow suit. Positive guidance lets the child know they are safe. Because behavior is a learned skill, children learn how to behave by watching the adults in their lives. Learned skills like tying their shoes or following positive guidance activate neurons to build strong pathways.

Young brains do best when media is limited, and when they have daily exercise with time in nature. Movement of bodies creates an increase in the oxygen and blood flow to the brain, helping to keep it healthy at any age. Movement is important not only for keeping the brain healthy but also for improved mental health and school success. “For example, researchers found that children who had an opportunity to run for 15 to 45 minutes before class were less distracted and more attentive to schoolwork” (Wilson & Conyers, 2014, para. 5).

Nature provides the brain with a complex bath of sensory input that will strengthen pathways and connections in a way that can’t be replicated indoors, while helping kids build confidence, creativity, and responsibility. “Many researchers agree that kids who play outside are happier, better at paying attention and less anxious than kids who spend more time indoors” (Cohen, 2023, para. 1).

Our brains need down time and unstructured play. Down time for brains allows children to follow their own interests and develop mastery over skills they are learning. It is through unstructured play time that children feel free to learn about their world and strengthen their abilities. Young brains need practice repeating positive developmentally appropriate experiences with caring adults supporting them.

It is important not to stress the child by pushing them to do things they are not ready for. In addition, try to avoid providing an overstimulating environment. The best approach is to follow the lead of the child and focus on their interests and unique timetables.

The child’s brain is not a smaller version of an adult brain. Neurons are still moving into position. As the brain develops, neurons migrate from the inner surface of the brain to form the outer layers. Immature neurons use fibers from cells called glia as highways to carry them to their destinations.



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Tip

Some things you can try in your classroom are: take a nature walk and collect and sort things around you (leaves, sticks, insects, etc.). Have kids move through an obstacle course on the playground, or bring loose parts outside and let kids build big structures using boxes, tape, and other recyclable items. Use your imagination to get kids' bodies moving and spending lots of time outside.

	Age Range	Recommended Hours of Sleep
Newborn	0-3 months old	14-17 hours *includes naps
Infant	4-11 months old	12-15 hours *includes naps
Toddler	1-2 years old	11-14 hours *includes naps
Preschool	3-5 years old	10-13 hours *includes naps
School-age	6-12 years old	9-12 hours per 24 hours
Teen	13-18 years old	8-10 hours per 24 hours
Adult	18-60 years old	7-9 hours
Older Adult	65 or more years old	7-8 hours

Table 3.1 Recommended Sleep By Age Group

Note: Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022).

Myelination

Mature neurons have axons that are coated by a fatty layer called **myelin**, the protective sheath that covers communicating neurons. Myelin acts in two ways: it provides substance for the brain and insulates the cells. The myelination of axons speeds up the conduction of nerve impulses through an ingenious mechanism that does not require large amounts of additional space or energy. Areas of the brain do not function efficiently until they are fully myelinated. Babies are born without much myelin.



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According to Harvard Health, “how the brain begins is how it stays” for the rest of life (McCarthy, 2018, para. 3), so it is important to make sure nerves grow and connect and get covered with myelin. The essential nutrients for brain growth include:

- Protein. Protein can be found in meat, poultry, seafood, beans and peas, eggs, soy products, nuts and seeds, as well as dairy.
- Zinc. The food that has the most zinc, interestingly, is oysters — but it’s also found in many meats, fish, dairy products, and nuts.
- Iron. Meats, beans and lentils, fortified cereals and breads, dark leafy vegetables, and baked potatoes are among the best sources of iron.
- Choline. Meat, dairy, and eggs have lots of choline, but so do many vegetables and other foods.
- Folate. This nutrient, which is especially important for pregnant mothers, can be found in liver, spinach, fortified cereals and breads, as well as other foods.
- Iodine. Seaweed is a great source of iodine, but we also get it from iodized salt, seafood, dairy products, and enriched grains.
- Vitamin A. Liver, as well as carrots, sweet potato, and spinach are good sources of this vitamin.
- Vitamin D. This is the “sunshine vitamin,” and the best way to get it is to get outside. The flesh of fatty fishes such as salmon have Vitamin D, as does fish liver oil, and products fortified with it, such as fortified milk. (McCarthy, 2018, para. 6)

Breast milk contains a fat almost identical to the fat in myelin, so if possible, mothers should nurse during the first year or more of life. Recent research has shown positive neurodevelopment and longer term cognitive outcomes for babies that are exclusively breastfed at least the first three months of life (Deoni et al., 2018). Any formula used should include ingredients as close to the composition of breast milk as possible.

In order to protect a babies' unmyelinated neurons, never shake a baby. Although there may be no outside sign of damage, the neurons get whipped around and have no myelin to protect them from the impact to the skull.

Boundaries and Readiness

The brain has **boundaries** around how quickly it can develop that are established by myelination timetables. Myelination can be stimulated when the brain is ready, but it cannot be rushed. Pushing a child to do something before they are ready can result in learning problems later on. Follow the child's cues: their interest and frustration level will tell you when their brain is ready (or not) to learn a new skill.

Fact

One study by Rebecca Marcon (2002) found that children who participated in child initiated preschools did better academically than their peers who attended academic focused preschools. Her conclusion is that "their progress may have been slowed by overly academic preschool experiences that introduced formalized learning experiences too early for most children's developmental status" (Marcon, 2002, para. 1).

Myelination continues to develop slowly all during childhood and adolescence in a gradual progression from lower to higher level systems. Early childhood is spent primarily on the brain stem, cerebellum, and sensory cortex. Puberty is when the limbic system is primarily being myelinated and late adolescence is when the prefrontal cortex finishes myelination.

Layers of the Brain

The brain develops sequentially from the brainstem up, with the cortex developing last and continuously throughout life.

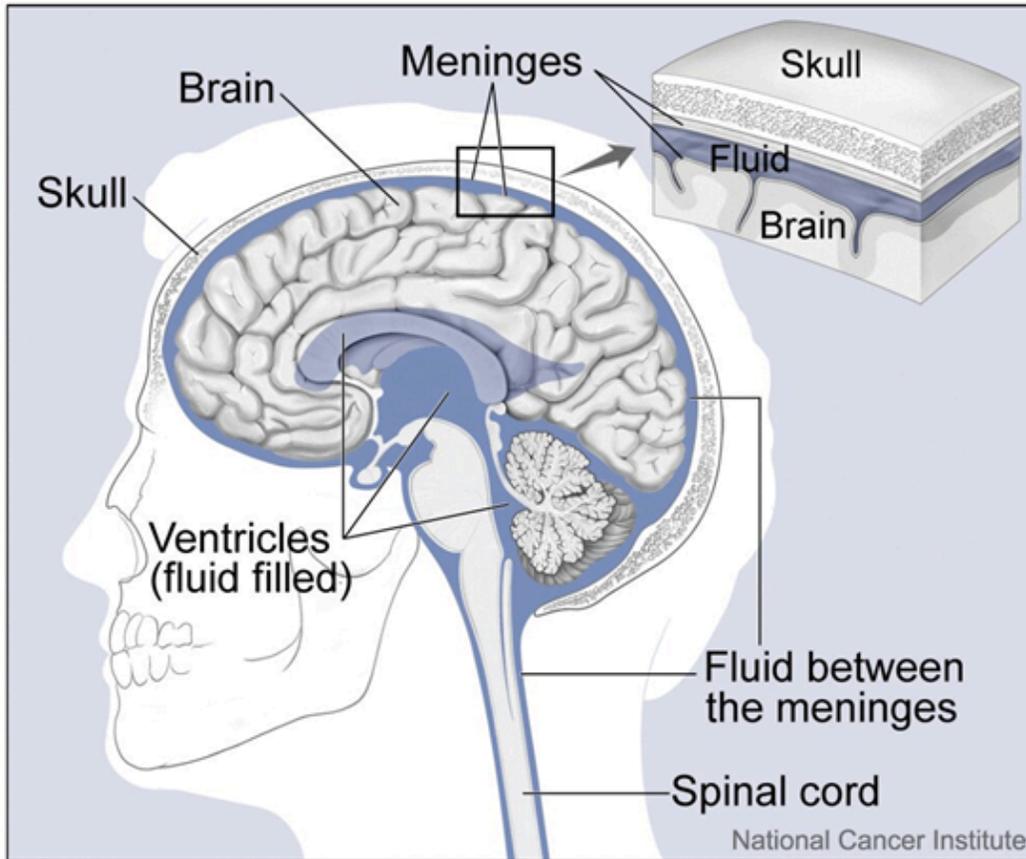


Figure 3.8. Brain and Nearby Structures / Photo Credit: NIH Image Gallery, PD

The **brain stem and midbrain** are the first to develop and are mostly concerned with survival. The autonomic nervous system is regulated by the brain stem. It is the first part to mature. Babies are born with autonomic nervous system neurons fully myelinated. These neurons control survival needs such as heartbeat, breathing, and sucking. The brainstem and midbrain monitor the outer world through sensory input and activate the body to respond in ways that ensure self-preservation. The brain stem processes information at a subconscious level; it is quick and reactive. Some of its functions include autonomic nervous system, fight/flight/freeze/fawn response, defense mechanisms, territoriality, reflexes, rote responses, routine, and habits. It is the least plastic layer of the brain and the most highly resistant to change. The reason habits are so hard to break is because they reside in this region of the brain.



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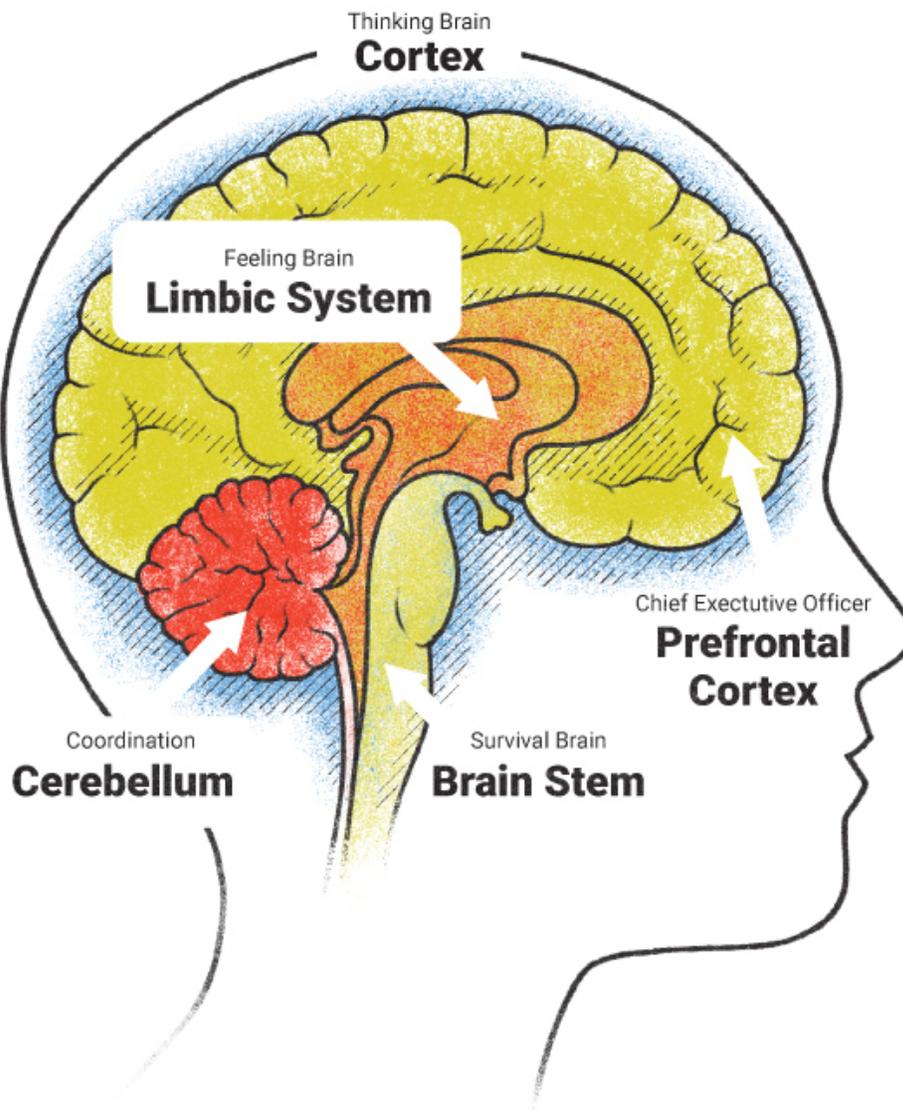


Figure 3.9. Photo Credit: Nicholas Malara

The **cerebellum** is mostly in charge of coordination. It controls automatic movements

and the coordination of movement and thought or balance. The cerebellum is where procedural memory is stored like our motor skills. It does not involve conscious thought except when we are first learning something (like riding a bike). This area of the brain matures in early childhood and works in coordination with the brain stem.

The **limbic system** is where emotions are processed. The limbic system is made up of many structures in the middle of the brain including the amygdala, hippocampus, thalamus, and olfactory bulbs. This area receives, interprets, and responds to emotional signals sent from the body. It processes information at the subconscious level and forms emotional patterns. This area is also associated with long-term memory and matures during puberty.

The **cortex** is where higher level thinking at the conscious level occurs. This includes, making sense of the world, decision making, creativity, reason, logic, imagination, self-awareness, and self-control. Everything that makes us uniquely human is the result of the interplay between the cortex working in harmony with the lower brain structures. The cortex loves change, novelty, fresh input, and variety. It is the most plastic layer of the brain. The cortex is divided into specialized areas called lobes that are determined by their function. It matures over a long period of time, from the back to the front of the brain.



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Lobes of the Brain

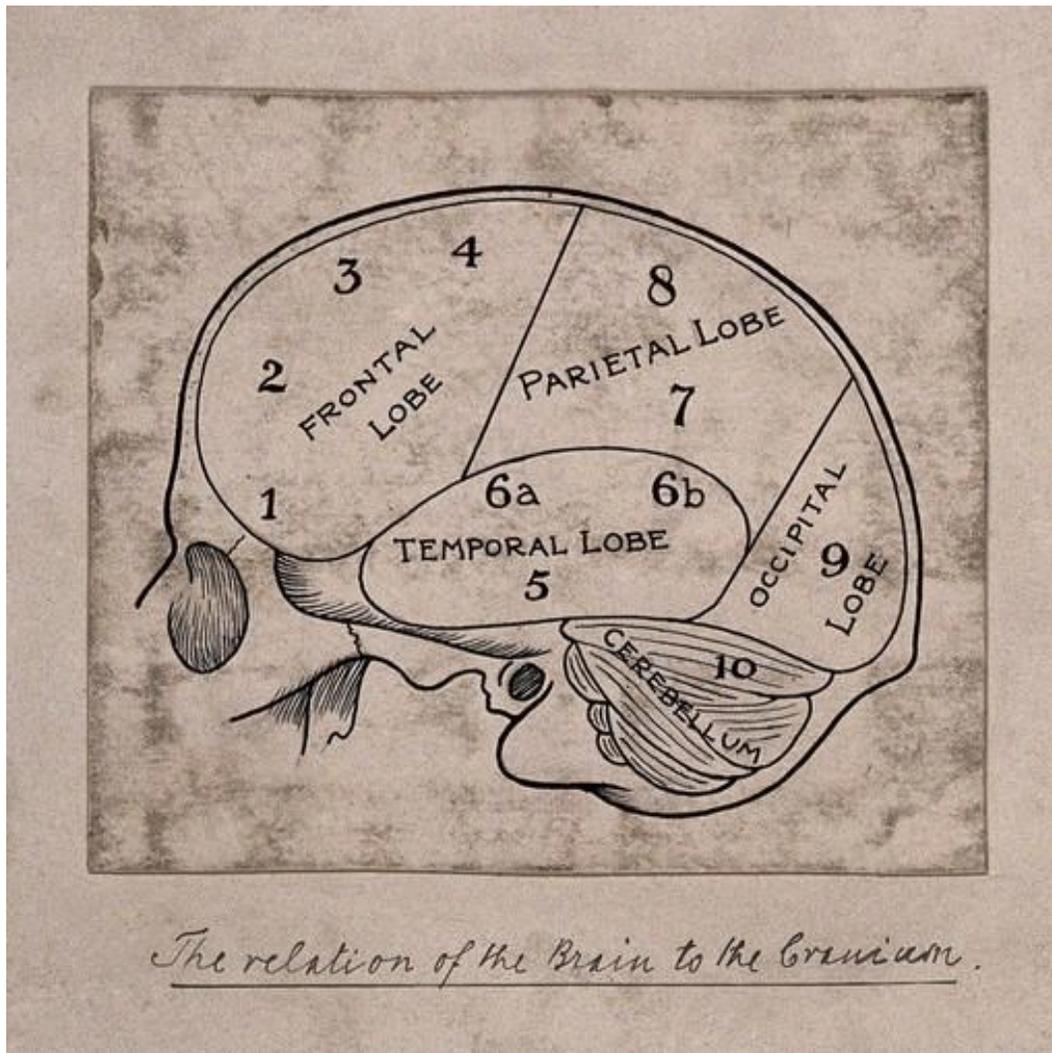


Figure 3.10. Diagram of the Brain / Photo Credit: Bernard Hollander, Wellcome Collection, PD

The cortex is split up into areas that are responsible for different functions. The back and side lobes are mostly related to sensory functions.

The **occipital lobe** is mainly responsible for vision and develops very early. The **temporal lobe** processes hearing, speech, language, and memory. The **parietal lobe** processes incoming sensory information like touch, pressure, pain, cold, heat, taste, and proprioception. The **frontal lobe** is responsible for gross and fine motor movements.

The **prefrontal lobe**, the very front section of the frontal lobe, is responsible for critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem solving. It is the part of the brain that allows us to imagine, plan and rehearse future actions. This area connects to the limbic system to regulate emotions. It is this integration of emotions with thought that is essential to the

decision-making process. This area of the brain starts to develop around eight months and continues to develop late into adolescence (around age 26).

Executive function and self-regulation are also associated with this area of the brain. A child who develops the ability to self-regulate has better impulse control, mental flexibility, and emotional intelligence. These functions are critical for learning. Although children do not have executive function from birth, it can be strengthened through practice with games and activities specifically aimed at reinforcing these skills.

Tip

There are many activities you can do in your classroom to develop the executive function and build self-regulation. Simple games like red light/green light or Simon Says are excellent for this purpose. You can also find wonderful activities at the [Center on the Developing Child](#).

Attributions

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3.2 CONNECTING BRAIN DEVELOPMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Christine Moon, M.S.

Now that we have a basic understanding of the building blocks of the brain and how it develops over time, it is important to understand how this knowledge can help us create brain healthy early childhood experiences for all children. The following section will discuss the importance of creating environments and interactions that help the brain grow and give it the best possible opportunities for cognitive and emotional outcomes.

Media and Screen Time

The developing brain needs positive interactions with caring adults in an enriched environment for optimal growth. Interactions with media or screens can be detrimental to this development as it deprives the brain of multisensory interactions which are necessary for neuronal growth. Media includes phones, television, computers, and anything with a screen. The Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has recommended limited media for all ages and adding emphasis on in-person interactions.

A healthy [Family Media Use Plan](#) that is individualized for a specific child, teenager, or family can identify an appropriate balance between screen time/online time and other activities. It is also important to set boundaries for accessing content, guide displays of personal information, encourage age-appropriate critical thinking and digital literacy, and support open family communication and implementation of consistent rules about media use. (Chassiakos et al., 2016)

The Family Media Use Plan recommends none or very limited screen time for children under two years old. If media is used they suggest that an adult be present and interact with the child while watching and limit this to video chatting. For children ages two through five, they recommend a maximum of one hour per day of viewing. School age children should be limited to no more than two hours per day. They suggest adults co-view with all children so that they can reinforce lessons and point out stereotypes and bias that may be hurtful. I

It is also important to consider the type of media being consumed. Passive viewing has

a different brain impact than creating content or interactive games. Adults need to select high quality programming for young children that is educational (Chassiakos et al., 2016).

The American Academy of Pediatrics shares important information about why limited media use for children is important. (Note that they use the term “behavior problems”; a strength-based way to reframe this would be to say “behavior challenges” or “unwanted behaviors.”) This guidance from AAP recommendations on media use for children (2016) is summarized below from EduResearcher (Marachi, 2016):

Overuse of digital media may place your child at risk of:

- Not enough sleep. Young children with more media exposure or who have a TV, computer, or mobile device in their bedrooms sleep less and fall asleep later at night. Even babies can be overstimulated by screens and miss the sleep they need to grow.
- Delays in learning and social skills. Children who watch too much TV in infancy and preschool years can show delays in attention, thinking, language, and social skills. One of the reasons for the delays could be because they interact less with parents and family. Parents who keep the TV on or focus on their own digital media miss precious opportunities to interact with their children and help them learn.
- Obesity. Heavy media use during preschool years is linked to weight gain and risk of childhood obesity. Food advertising and snacking while watching TV can promote obesity. Also, children who overuse media are less apt to be active with healthy, physical play.
- Behavior problems. Violent content on TV and screens can contribute to behavior problems in children, either because they are scared and confused by what they see, or they try to mimic on-screen characters. (para. 8)

The [Common Sense](#) media website has wonderful resources for parents and teachers and even has lessons for school age children to help develop positive media habits.



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Social Emotional Development: The Limbic System

One of the first brain constructs to develop before birth are those that process emotion. Early emotional experiences form a kind of template that continued emotional development is built on. These experiences have a disproportionate importance in organizing the mature brain. Emotions develop in layers, each more complex than the last, as the child responds to their emotional environment. Emotional learning becomes ingrained as experiences are repeated over and over.

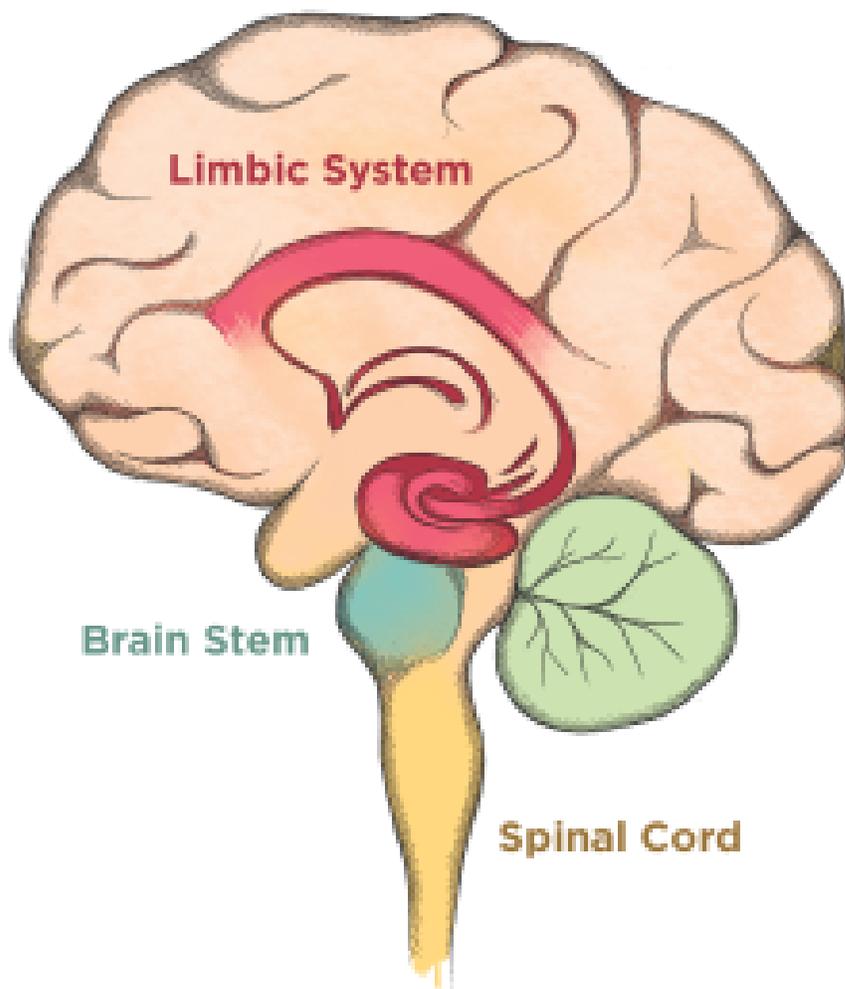


Figure 3.11. Limbic System / Photo Credit: Hannah Adams, CC BY-NC 4.0

The prefrontal cortex regulates emotional responses and is developed and connected with the limbic system early, between 8 and 18 months of life. These neural pathways in

the limbic system and prefrontal lobes provide the framework for emotional intelligence, which may develop differently for children on the autism spectrum.

Peter Salovey (a Yale Psychologist) and John Mayer (a University of New Hampshire psychologist) first proposed that we also have emotional intelligence (1990). Daniel Goleman popularized this concept in his book *Emotional Intelligence* (1995).

Emotional Intelligence (EI) consists of a person's abilities in five main areas or domains (Goleman, 1995):

1. *Self-Awareness* –the ability to recognize or know feelings as they are happening and using them to make life decisions you can live with. This includes pleasant, unpleasant and multiple emotions at once. It is critical we teach children about all their feelings and give them a wide range of emotional labeling (see Figure 3.12).
2. *Mood Management* –the ability to handle distressing emotions in appropriate ways to maintain our wellbeing.
3. *Self-motivation* –the ability to persist in the face of setbacks and channeling your impulses in order to pursue your goals.
4. *Empathy* – the ability to recognize and share another's feelings.
5. *Social Arts* – the ability to interact with others in positive and socially acceptable ways.

Emotional Intelligence is important because studies have shown that higher emotional intelligence is a better predictor of success in children than IQ (Durlak et al., 2011). Kids who participated in social emotional learning (SEL) programs at school had significantly improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behavior, and academic performance.

In order for emotional intelligence to develop, children need to feel secure and that their needs for survival are being met. The fundamental task of an infant is figuring out how to get their needs met in their world. Children need to feel loved and emotionally secure. It is essential that they have a consistent, nurturing relationship with the same caregiver early in life in order to develop a secure attachment.

Attunement is critical to the development of emotional intelligence. This is when a child's inner feelings are accepted and mirrored back to them by caregivers. "The brain uses the same pathways to generate an emotion as to respond to one" but "if emotions are repeatedly met with indifference or a clashing response," they may "fail to strengthen" or be eliminated (Begley, 2010, para. 15). Feelings mirrored back to children help them develop self-awareness, the foundation of emotional intelligence. It is important to teach and help label a wide range of feelings when interacting with kids. Using a feelings wheel in your classroom is a great way to expand the range of feelings you teach.

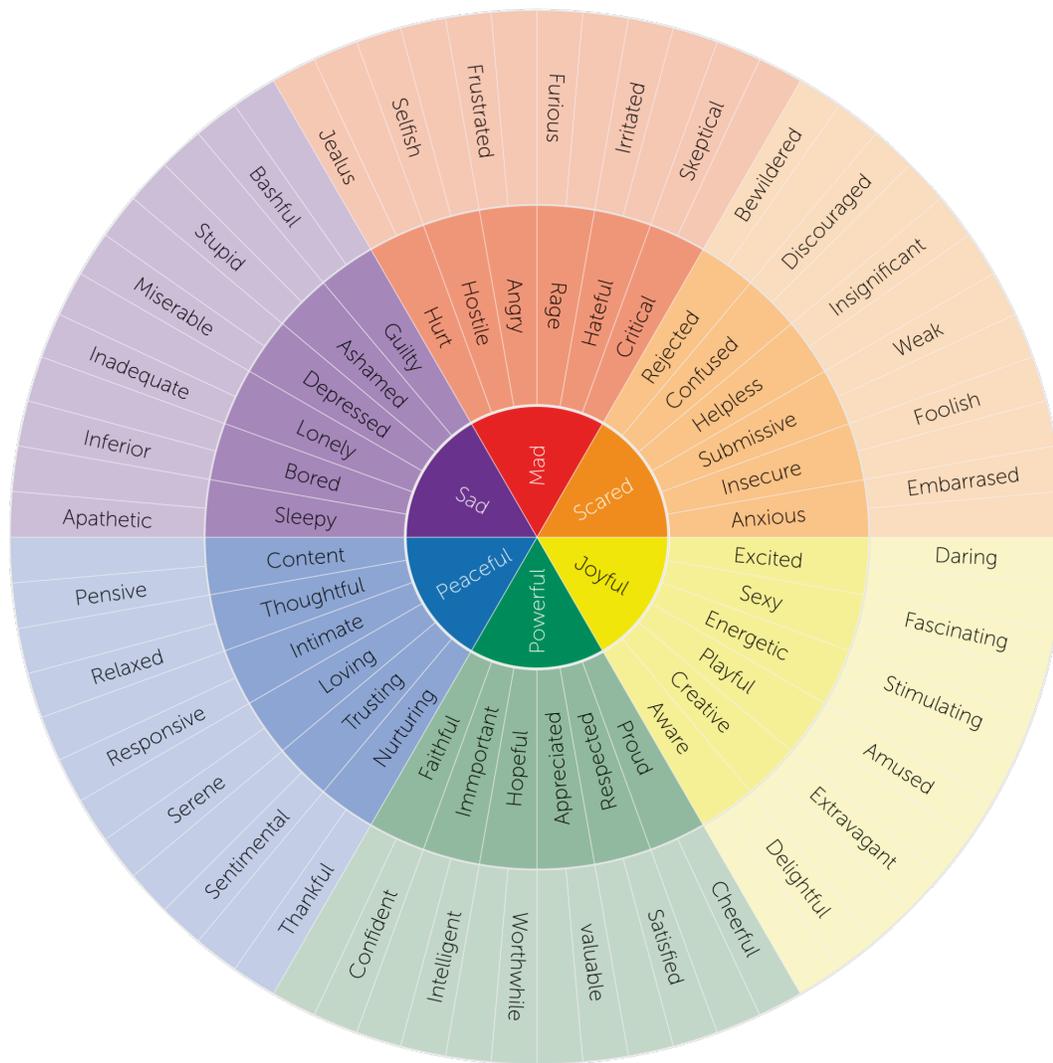


Figure 3.12. The Feeling Wheel / Photo Credit: Feeling Wheel, CC BY-SA 4.0

Fact

A child’s ability to regulate their emotions (calm down or self sooth) is built when they feel soothed by their caregivers. It is generally accepted that a baby does not have the ability to self –sooth until six to eight months (Burnham et al., 2002). It is not recommended that babies “cry it out” until after this time because even if they do become quiet, stress chemicals, like cortisol, stay active in their brain and inhibit optimal development of the stress response pathways.

Stress and Trauma

The Impact of Stress

Stress is defined as a “physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation” (Merriam-Webster, 2024). Stress is a normal part of life and our brains are capable of handling stressful events in a positive way if given the right experiences in childhood. In general, there are two types of stress: positive stress, or **eustress**, and negative stress, or **distress**. Which type of stress we experience, how much and how we interpret it all impact how damaging stress is to our systems.

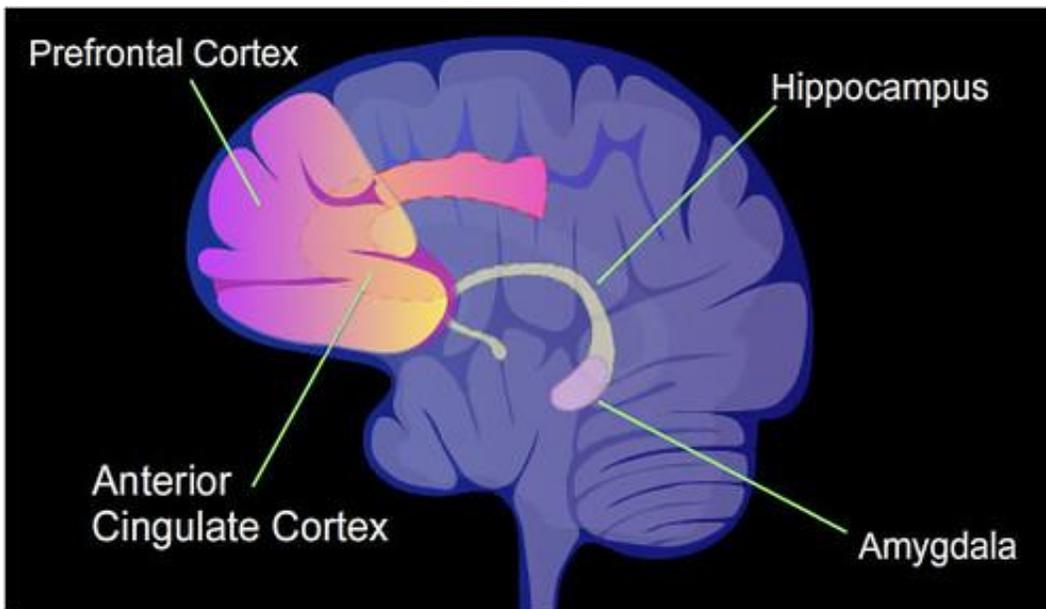


Figure 3.13. Illustration of Brain Regions / Photo Credit: PD

Neural pathways run from the eyes, ears and other sense organs to a central clearing house deep in the brain called the **thalamus**. The thalamus works with the hypothalamus and amygdala to pass on the information to the higher levels of the cortex. They act like a gate to pathways that run to the cortex and are activated by how we feel about the information being processed by the limbic system (Zhang et al., 2019).

When we experience a positive emotion, are actively engaged, or appropriately challenged, while retaining a sense of control, we experience eustress. The thalamus opens the gateway, or upshifts, to the cortex where higher level thinking takes place.

When a threat is perceived, we experience distress. The thalamus quickly sends a message to the **amygdala** that there might be danger. The amygdala, acting as an alarm

company, activates a cascade of chemicals (neurotransmitters and hormones) involved in the stress response: freeze-flight-fight-fawn. This distress closes the gate to the main road to the cortex and the brain downshifts to the lower survival brain, resulting in freeze-flight-fight-fawn responses instead of higher level problem solving (LeWine, 2024). The good news is that at the same time, another slower pathway moves up to the cortex—like a detour route. We can now access the prefrontal lobes to modulate our emotional reactions. This helps us make a rational decision about how to respond to an emotional trigger.

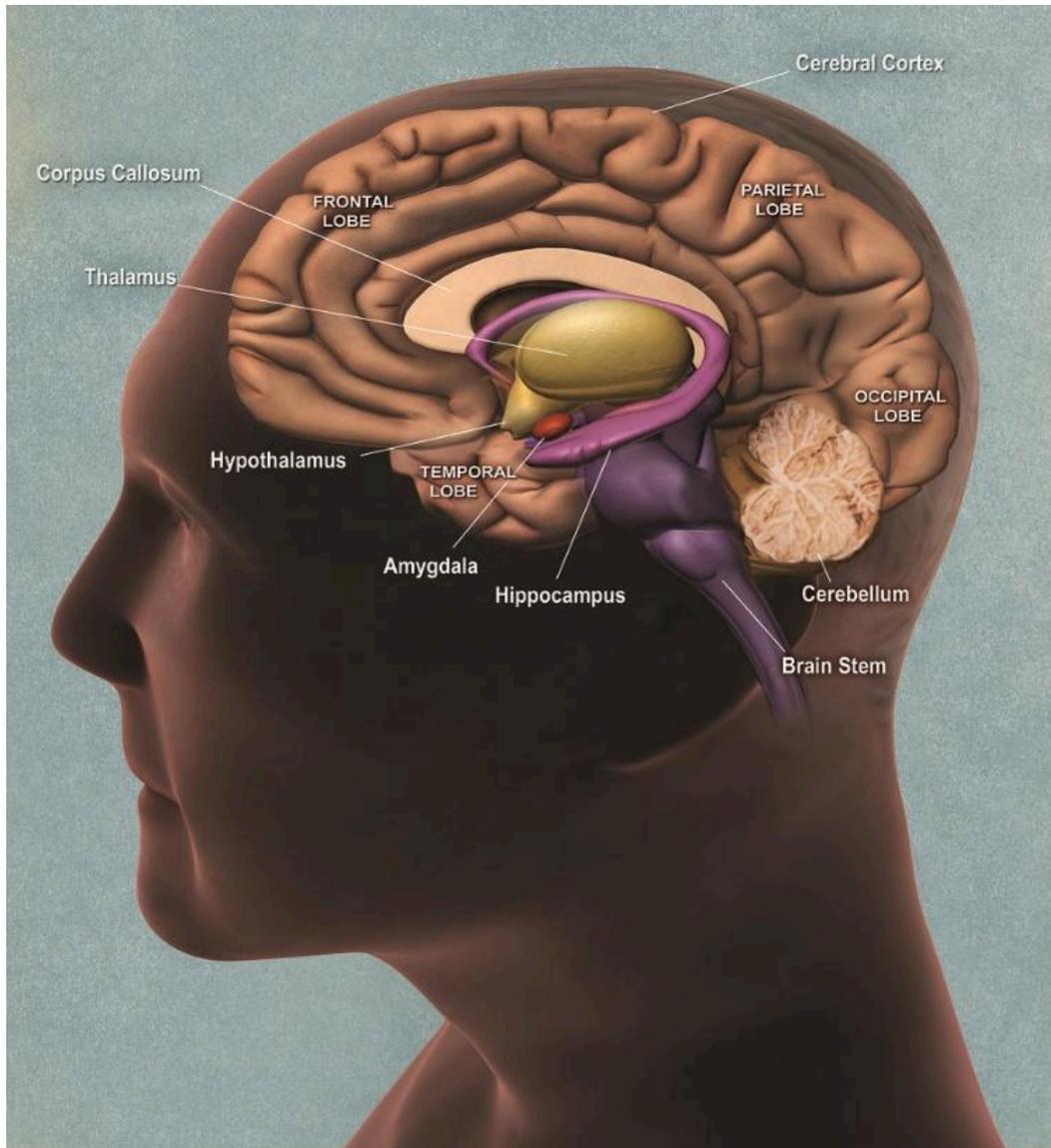


Figure 3.14. Brain Side View / Photo Credit: NIH Gallery, PD

Some emotional reactions bypass the cortex and can be formed without any conscious or cognitive participation at all. The degree of control we perceive we have over the

threatening situation determines whether this hi-jacking will take place. If the brain continues to perceive the situation as a threat the stress hormone **cortisol**, is released and keeps the body revved up and on high alert. When the threat passes, the cortisol level will decrease.

New research is finding that the vagus nerve plays an important part in how the body interprets sensory input and reacts with fight/flight/freeze/fawn. If the vagus nerve senses threat the child becomes deregulated and the parasympathetic response takes over. It is important to help the child regulate their body by helping them to calm the vagus nerve. You can do this through movement and breathing activities along with other sensory experiences like playing with playdough. Co-regulating with the child when they are younger and even as they age, can help them to build the ability to regulate themselves as they get older (Bornstein & Esposito, 2023). Co-regulation is the interactive process by which caring adults 1) provide warm supportive relationships, 2) promote self-regulation through coaching, modeling, and feedback, and 3) structure supportive environments (Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017).



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Tip

Breathing with movement is a great way to calm the vagus nerve and help a child regulate. For example, put your hands on your heart and slowly inhale as you move the right hand out to the side, exhale as you return your hand back to your heart. Repeat on the left side and then again on the right so that you complete four to six breaths. Another idea is to tape a silk flower to a pinwheel. Have the child sniff the flower then blow on the pinwheel to make it spin. Repeat several times. When you breathe along with the child you begin to co-regulate.

Research by Kelly McGonigal of Stanford University found that how we view stress makes a difference in how harmful it is. There are three ways to change our perception of the stressor effectively: 1) View your body's stress as helpful and energy you can use; 2) view yourself as capable of handling and learning from the stress, and 3) view stress as a common problem everyone deals with (as cited in Parker, 2015).

Children need experiences that help them develop a strong stress-response system so that they recover from stressful situations quickly and build stronger pathways between the limbic system and prefrontal lobe in their brain. The main way adults can help build this healthy stress response system is a process called serve and return, which is a back-and-forth exchange between the child and adult. [The Center on the Developing Child](#) at Harvard University (2019) suggests five steps to build positive brain pathways through serve and return practices:

1. Notice the serve and share the child's focus of attention. It is important to pay attention to what the child is focused on and follow their lead on the interaction.
2. Return the serve by supporting and encouraging. Offer comfort when they are distressed, play with them, be curious about what they are doing. Mirroring their thoughts and feelings lets them know they are seen and understood.
3. Give it a name! Name what a child is seeing, doing, or feeling will make important language connections in their brain, even before they can talk or understand your words. This helps them understand the world around them.
4. Take turns...and wait. Keep the interaction going back and forth. Make sure to take time to let the child respond to you as you take turns interacting. They need time to form responses as they are learning so many things at once.
5. Practice endings and beginnings. Sharing focus with a child helps you know when they are done. Did they turn away, fuss, or walk away? Let them take the lead and be sensitive to when they are ready to start something new.

Think back to the opening story of the baby in the high chair. This loving exchange between the adult and baby is a practice of serve and return.

When children are experiencing extreme amounts of stress and are not getting the positive interactions to mitigate it, they are experiencing what is known as **toxic stress**.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Too much toxic stress in a child's life can damage the developing brain and lead to life-long problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health. Toxic stress can come

from extreme poverty, repeated abuse, or severe maternal depression. These situations or experiences are also called **Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs** and are a cause of prolonged toxic stress. Many studies have confirmed the negative impact of ACEs on the health and wellbeing of children and adults (Webster, 2022). The Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University has a wealth of information about the [impact of toxic stress and ACEs](#); there is also evidence of how racism is connected to poor outcomes for children due to the impact of this as a toxic stress on child development (n.d.-b). Toxic stress impacts a growing brain's development by causing neurons to have fewer connections in the limbic and prefrontal cortex, the areas of the brain that control emotional reactivity. Keep in mind that ACEs scores are not meant to be diagnostic and should not be used to make clinical decisions (Pondiscio, 2020).

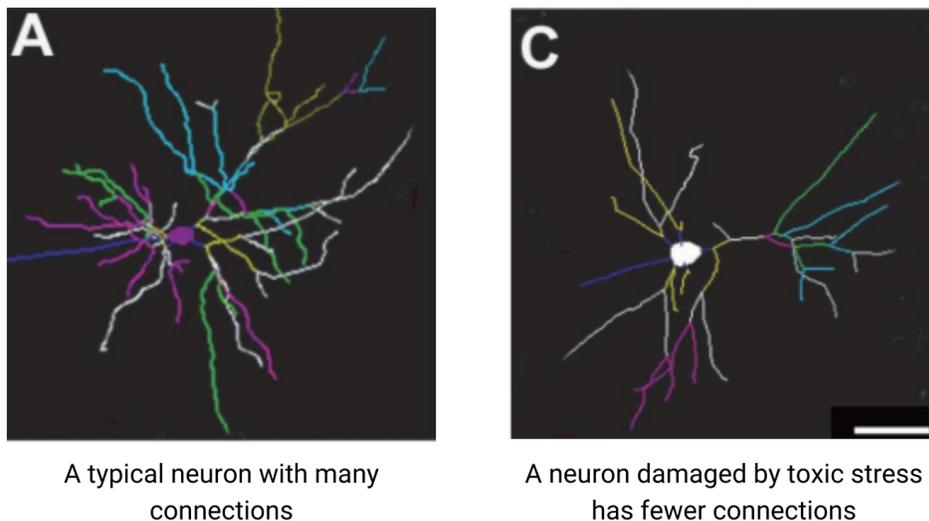


Figure 3.15. *Toxic Stress and Brain Architecture / Photo Credit: Radley et al., PD*

Cortical Modulation

When a child experiences toxic stress or ACEs, the higher regions of the brain become less developed since the brain is constantly activating the pathways to the lower, survival regions of the brain. Neuroscientist Dr. Bruce Perry (1997) developed a model for understanding the functioning of the layers of the brain in connection to each other called **cortical modulation**. In other words, how do the higher layers modulate the lower levels of the brain? He has demonstrated that most brains that have experienced high ACEs will not function as optimally as the brains of children who have had adults help them develop a strong stress response system. When looking at the number of connections in

each of the layers in children’s brains we see a difference in their function based on their experiences.

In a healthy brain where a child has low ACEs, the higher levels or cortical areas of the brain have the most connections, and higher ratios. The thinking part of the brain is the strongest and therefore a child would have a strong stress response system developing. The brain of a child with high ACEs will have a ratio where the lower regions of the brain (brain stem, etc.) are bigger than the higher thinking regions (cortex). In these brains the lower regions of the brain have more connections and thus downshifting happens in the brain more readily (Perry, 1997).



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Resilience

Some children who experience ACEs and toxic stress can develop brains with better ratios than others, even within the same family. We consider these children to have **resilience**. Resilience requires supportive relationships and opportunities for skill building. These relationships can be outside of the family, for example a teacher or coach, and are the active ingredient for developing resilience. If children experiencing ACEs have access to these positive experiences, their brain can reverse the ratio and develop a greater ability to handle the stress in their lives. These experiences are called “Positive and Adverse Childhood Experiences,” or PACEs, and have a mitigating impact on ACEs, leading to the best developmental outcomes for children who become adults who are flourishing (Audage, 2021). A child’s temperament can also be a factor in developing resilience (Center for Child & Family Well-Being, n.d.).

Tip

Building children's resilience to ACEs is something you can do in your classroom by building positive relationships, teaching self regulation skills, and providing a safe place for kids to explore and learn with positive guidance. You will learn more about these topics in upcoming chapters. You can also learn about programs that are working to build resilience with children and families like the ones at [University of Washington's Center for Child & Family Well-Being](#).

Trauma Informed Care and Education

Understanding how the brain develops and what can happen if children do not get positive, caring experiences at home, helps teachers create classrooms that will benefit all children. One of the keys to creating trauma informed care is understanding what the brain needs in order for a more optimal outcome. We need to move from blaming the child to understanding them. Providing consistent care and attachment with a teacher who is loving and compassionate is essential. Classrooms must be built to allow for healthy, developmentally appropriate experiences that provide an enriched environment for young brains to flourish.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) programs in schools are helping children develop skills to build strong pathways between the limbic and cortex layers of the brain (Calhoun et al., 2020). These programs have demonstrated success in building a child's resilience and emotional intelligence.

Elements of Trauma Informed Care (TIC)

According to Erdman et al. (2020), there are several elements that are an essential part of helping kids overcome trauma and develop resilience. The first element is a safe and inviting environment that includes structure, a variety of materials, and providing thoughtful choices for children's activities. Secondly, children need strong, loving relationships with adults and their peers. These can be fostered by following a child's lead and implementing training in **mindfulness**.

The third element is an awareness of the importance of play for a child’s optimal development and also for helping them learn to effectively manage stress. Lastly, they stress the importance of connecting with families to create supportive partnerships. The researchers stress that we must not just treat individual behaviors but the whole child and to remember that creating a trauma sensitive classroom benefits all children.



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Tip

Self care is an important part of being an early childhood professional. People working with young children and their families can experience **burnout** or **compassion fatigue**. We can combat these by taking the time to care for our own needs through positive self care like exercise, mindfulness, and other brain healthy strategies (Stein et al., 2022); also see NAEYC’s [Preventing Compassion Fatigue: Caring for Yourself](#) for additional self-care strategies.

Attributions

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3.3 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Christine Moon, M.S.

Summary

Understanding the brain, how it develops, how it functions and what it needs for optimal development is essential in creating a developmentally appropriate early childhood classroom. Once we understand how to provide a place where children's brains are getting what they need, we are more likely to reverse negative impacts they may be experiencing elsewhere. This chapter has given you a brief overview of brain development and function and the necessary elements a child needs in the early years and beyond.

10 Things Every Brain Needs:

1. Adequate sleep
2. Proper nutrition
3. Proper hydration
4. Safe environments to live and learn in
5. Positive role models
6. Limited screen time
7. Time in nature
8. Unstructured play
9. Avoid overstimulating environment
10. Healthy loving relationships

Review Questions

1. What are the four basic parts of a neuron?
2. Does the message always get sent between neurons?
3. How do new neural pathways get built?
4. When is the most active time of neuron growth and connection?
5. Why is pruning necessary?
6. When is the brain most plastic?
7. Are windows of opportunity absolutes?
8. What are some elements of an enriched environment?
9. Why does sleep matter?
10. Are there boundaries to when myelin can develop in the brain?
11. What happens in the limbic system?
12. What is the prefrontal lobe responsible for?
13. Why should adults co-view media with children?
14. Studies show children gain what from participating in social emotional programs?
15. Serve and return activities help children develop what?
16. Why do positive and supportive adult relationships help children develop resilience?
17. Why is toxic stress bad for a child?
18. Why is self care important?
19. How can you implement the ten things every brain needs into your classroom or life?
20. Visit a classroom and identify five things they are doing to support healthy brain development.

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CHAPTER 4: CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE



A Girl Holding Bubbles / Photo Credit: Leo Rivas, Unsplash License

Overview

Have you ever watched a toddler exploring their world and wondered what they are thinking? Have you wondered how are they learning and what they will do next? The science of how children learn, grow, and relate to others is called developmental science, or child development. **Child development** is defined as the pattern of change that begins at conception and continues through adolescence.

Humans have probably thought about how children learn, grow, and relate to others since mothers started having babies, but formal scientific inquiry about child development has only been around for about 100 years, making it a fairly new science (Senn et al., 1975). Knowledge gained from child development science is helpful in building strong interactions with children to help them grow to their full potential. In this chapter we will

focus on conception through about age eight. This unique age span has been determined by developmental scientists as the **early childhood period**, or the period of life in which the most rapid development takes place.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe how young children's development can be conceptualized in four main areas: physical, intellectual, emotional, and social.
- Understand how children develop to support children's individual developmental progression.
- Recognize how individual and cultural differences impact development such that development is not identical for each child.
- Identify high-quality classroom settings and practices that support individual and cultural developmental needs.

Key Terms

- Atypical development
- Child development
- Culturally relevant pedagogy
- Developmentally appropriate practice in context
- Developmental domains
- Differentiation
- Early childhood period
- Emotion regulation

- Executive function
- Fine motor skills
- Gross motor skills
- Joint attention
- Metacognition
- Neurodivergent
- Open-ended questions
- Reciprocal interactions
- Separation anxiety
- Temperament
- Toxic stress
- Typical development

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4.1 HOW DEVELOPMENT UNFOLDS

Angela Blums, Ph.D.



Figure 4.1. *Untitled / Photo Credit: andreas160578, Pixabay License*

Have you ever noticed how an infant smiles at a familiar caregiver? Or, have you ever seen a child figure out how to pick up a rattle and shake it to make a delightful sound? Adults are often captivated when an infant or toddler figures many firsts in their development, such as how to stack blocks to form a tower. Adults treasure when a preschooler hugs a friend for the first time who is feeling sad. These small moments in a child's life provide

adults with glimpses into human behavior and help us to understand what particular aspects are developing within a child. These areas of development are referred to as developmental domains. **Developmental domains** are specific areas in which growth occurs. There are four main developmental domains in child development:

1. physical
2. cognitive
3. social
4. emotional

These domains are not stand-alone categories of development. They interact and overlap in important ways. Development unfolds through interactions between the child, the people around them, and their environment. The child's environment is the context of the home, school, place of worship, neighborhood, society, and all the interactions a child has with people on a regular basis. Children require certain triggers from their caregivers and their environment in order to develop. For instance, to develop language, a child needs to be listened to and spoken to by an adult. To learn how to walk, a child needs space, safety, and freedom of movement. Development unfolds both naturally and with a thoughtfully planned environment designed by adults.



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Myth vs. Fact

Myth: Infants need lots of fancy toys and products to help them learn.

Fact: The best resource that infants have to help them learn is an attentive caregiver. While many

toy companies lead caregivers to believe that battery-powered toys can help infants learn language and gain knowledge, these products can often hinder language development, and there is no evidence that they promote learning. Face-to-face interactions, singing, reading picture books aloud, and playing with household items and simple basic toys (such as blocks and balls), are best for helping infants learn (Dombro et al., 2020; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], n.d.).

Attributions

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4.2 THE ROLE OF ENVIRONMENT ON DEVELOPMENT

Angela Blums, Ph.D.

The way that children are cared for impacts how they develop. An environment filled with loving, responsive caregivers works wonders on a child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. Conversely, an environment filled with **toxic stress** will slow down healthy development of children and those adults caring for them. Signs of toxic stress include physical or emotional abuse, neglect, or witnessing of physical or emotional abuse of another person. Toxic stress, which can lead to childhood trauma, can be detrimental to the early childhood stages of development (Center on the Developing Child, n.d.). It can also impact social, emotional, and cognitive development, lower academic achievement, and lead to long term health-related issues such as cardiovascular problems. It is important to create an environment for the child that includes safe, sensitive, and supportive care.



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4.3 DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS

Angela Blums, Ph.D.

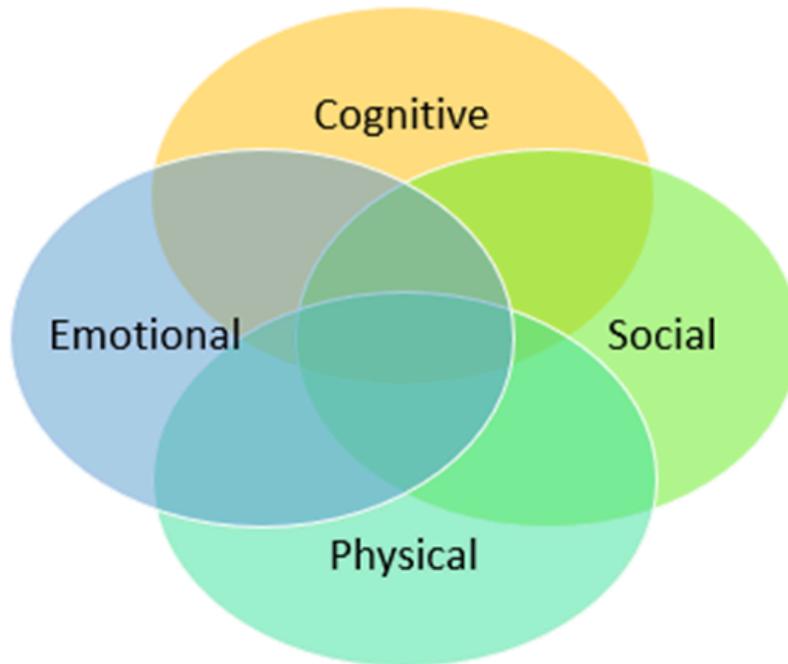


Figure 4.2. *Developmental Domains / Photo Credit: Angela Blums, CC BY 4.0*



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Although development is complex, four domains have been identified: physical, cognitive, social, and emotional. This section will introduce each of these developmental domains and explain some important features of each domain. Keep in mind that developmental domains are interrelated, so consider as you read the next sections how one aspect of development could affect another.

Physical Development

Physical development includes all things related to the body. Sometimes this domain is called biological development because it also encompasses processes that occur inside the body at the biological level. Physical development includes brain development and motor skills.

Brain Development

Infant brains begin to develop while still in utero. Because of this, it is important to support fetal brain development through proper nutrition and care of the mother. Once the baby is born, infant brains develop rapidly. Brain connections, called synapses, develop rapidly during the first few months to the first three years of life, making this period critical for healthy brain development.

During infancy, babies require responsive interactions with trusted caregivers that include verbal, expressive, face-to-face engagement (National Research Council, & Institute of Medicine Committee on Integrating the Science of Early Childhood Development, 2000; Tierney & Nelson, 2009). Additionally, and above all, they require a safe and secure home environment for healthy brain development.

Motor Skills

Children's bodies are designed to wriggle and move. Motor skills refer to a child's ability to move and coordinate motion using their bodies. Motor skills are generally organized into two categories: gross motor skills and fine motor skills. **Gross motor skills** are related to the large muscle groups in the body: walking, running, climbing, balancing, and jumping are examples of gross motor skills. **Fine motor skills** are related to small muscle groups in the body. Grasping a spoon, holding a pencil, stringing beads, and stacking blocks are examples of fine motor skills.



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Figure 4.3. Child Climbing Tree in Park / Photo Credit: Mushtag Hussain, Pexels License

In order for gross motor skills to develop successfully, infants and children must be

given opportunities to move their bodies freely, safely, and without restriction (Adolph & Robinson, 2015). This is why most pediatric physical therapists recommend against the use of so-called “baby containers” – chairs, bouncy seats, swings, and jumpers that place an infant in an upright position before their body is ready to do so on its own. These devices can hinder development. Instead, babies should play on a blanket or mat and have a few minutes of “tummy time” each day starting at birth (Adolph & Robinson, 2015). This helps to strengthen neck and shoulder muscles that will later be used in crawling. As children begin to crawl and walk, soft climbers (play structures made of foam or soft materials) can help to develop gross motor skills.

Children need opportunities to practice running, jumping, balancing, and climbing. This is why daily outdoor play is vital. Playgrounds can be great places for children to experiment with gross motor skills. Outdoor play in natural areas is also important. Consider the difference between climbing stairs or monkey bars on a playground versus climbing the branches of a strong, low, tree. Both offer opportunities for using arms and legs, but tree climbing allows children to use muscle groups in new positions and learn to balance in an irregular position (Haywood & Getchell, 2014). Tree climbing also engages their brain to plan and consider which moves to make (Allen et al., 2011). If no safe climbing trees are available, learning to walk or run on uneven ground in a field or meadow or sidewalk can also be beneficial. It is important for children to move their bodies in many different ways.

Playing outdoors on playgrounds and in nature provides children opportunities to take risks. When children climb, they not only build muscle and coordination, but also learn to overcome fears. This can lead to greater self-confidence that carries over into other areas as well (Gull et al., 2018). This is one way in which outdoor activity supports not only physical but also emotional development.

Fine motor skills begin to develop in infancy when the child first learns to grasp a toy such as a rattle or a cloth. Later, they learn to throw a ball, hold a crayon, and use scissors. Children can be given opportunities to use their hands in a variety of ways using age-appropriate materials. Young children love to practice fine motor skills using real-life items, such as buckling the clasp of a highchair strap or zipping a zipper. This has the added benefit of fostering independence, which supports emotional development. Children can coordinate their finger movements while learning a zipper, and they can also feel proud when they can zip their own jacket to go outside.

Opportunities for fine motor development are everywhere and can be as simple as picking up a leaf and ripping it into tiny pieces. Teachers can foster fine motor skills by making sure to create challenging activities based on each child’s developmental level.



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Cognitive Development

Cognitive development includes all things related to thinking and learning. The following section will discuss executive functioning, problem solving, theory of mind, self-reflection, and language acquisition.



Figure 4.4. A Young Girl Sitting on the Bed while Reading a Book / Photo Credit: cottonbro studio, Pexels License

Executive Function

One key area of cognitive development is called **executive function**. Executive function is the collection of processes that encompasses attention, working memory, and inhibition, and it develops between the ages of about three and six years (Best & Miller, 2020; Zelazo & Müller, 2010). Attention is the ability of a child to focus on something, like carefully

concentrating on a picture in a book. Working memory refers to the ability of a child to maintain several pieces of information in the mind for a short period of time. This could be recalling some items present in the picture in the book, such as a tree, a bird, and a house.

Inhibition is the ability to block out distractions, such as other background designs in the book or even the sounds of other children playing in the classroom. Development of executive function is key to building social relationships, acquiring, and maintaining learning, and eventual academic success (Zelazo & Müller, 2010). For example, if a child is learning how to add using blocks, she might first pay attention to the blocks in front of her, remember that she had three blocks on one side and one block on the other side, and inhibit the distraction of other toys on the table. All of these components come together with executive function.

Because executive function is developing between the ages of about three and six years, young children do not have the ability to pay attention to things for long periods of time. Nor do they have the ability to remember multiple pieces of information or to block out distractions. This is important when planning activities for young children. Setting the expectation that young children should sit at a table and focus on one activity will result in frustration of both children and teachers; children will communicate their lack of executive function with a lot of wriggles and movement! This is healthy, and teachers should keep this in mind when planning activities that require concentration.



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Children with **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** need extra support to develop executive function, as concentration and inhibition are particularly difficult. Children who are in chaotic environments or those who have experienced toxic stress and trauma may struggle with the development of healthy executive function.

Games and activities that practice concentration and task-switching are successful in promoting executive function (Center on the Developing Child, 2014). Such games need to be fun and not tied to punishment or reward. Deep breathing and meditation also have been shown to aid in the development of executive function for children who are struggling.

Problem Solving

When children encounter a challenge, they learn to practice problem solving. **Problem solving** involves assessing the problem, devising a plan, carrying out the plan, and reflecting on the outcome. Children may do this without actively knowing that they are carrying out these four steps. For instance, if a child is building a block tower on a soft carpet, it might be unstable and fall down. The child might think of a solution: get a tray or a large book to set on the carpet to create a flat surface. The child then gets the tray, builds the block tower, and then checks to see if it is wobbly or stable. Problem solved! Children solve many such problems each day during play.

It is helpful for teachers to facilitate problem solving by asking **open-ended questions**, or questions that do not have a yes or no answer. This type of question helps the child see the main features and problems in the situation, encourages thinking about solutions, and suggests solutions, all without giving the answer. An exchange might look like the following:



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Example

Teacher: "It looks like your block tower is falling down a lot. I wonder why?"

Child "Because the carpet is bumpy and soft."

Teacher: "How can you make a more stable base for your tower?"

Child: "I could put a tray underneath it!"

Teacher: "Want to try that and see what happens?"

This exchange of open-ended questions helps the child learn to problem solve on their own. The use of the phrase “see what happens” encourages the child to engage in the fourth step of problem solving, assessing the outcome. After all, a problem-solving strategy may not succeed, and the child might have to try something else. This is all part of the process of learning.

Theory of Mind

As young as 2 ½ years old most children start to figure out how other people are thinking and feeling. The study of this ability is referred to as theory of mind, a cognitive ability supporting social development. One of the hallmarks of **theory of mind** is the ability to pick up cues and understand the mental states of others. For example, if a child sees a friend crying, he might infer that the friend is sad. It is challenging for a young child to get out of their own head. Children see things from their own perspective and have a difficult time understanding the perspectives of others. So, if a child is happily playing and sees another child crying, it takes some time before they can understand that what they are thinking and feeling is not the same as what others are thinking and feeling. The connection between this cognitive ability and building social relationships is clear (Lecce et al., 2015).

Children with **autism** have difficulty with theory of mind, and many children with autism do not develop it at all. For this reason, autism interventions include instruction on how to read the mental states of others (Askham, 2022; Beeger et al., 2011).

Self-reflection

Self-reflection is the ability to think about one’s own thoughts. This is sometimes referred to as **metacognition**, which develops between middle childhood and adolescence. However, during early childhood there are signs of self-reflection, or thinking back on one’s thoughts. Self-reflection is helpful in problem solving and emotional development. If a child has solved a problem such as mixing the colors just right for a painting, the teacher might ask, “Why did you decide to do it this way?” or “Tell me about why you chose to mix those colors?” This helps children to think through their process and helps them remember the strategy for next time (Bebko et al., 2014). Self-reflection in early childhood is best facilitated by teachers using probing questions, such as the questions in the examples above, but older children can engage in self-reflection through journaling or planned exchanges with peers.



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Language Acquisition

Language development is a very broad and rich area of development that encompasses much more than the scope of this section. Nevertheless, this section will highlight the key points of language development in early childhood.

Children learn to understand language in infancy through responsive interactions with adults. Adults should speak with and listen to infants starting at birth, making eye contact and using a gentle tone. When infants begin to babble, adults can take turns talking and letting the baby babble. This sets up the format for later turn taking in conversation. Throughout childhood, children will usually understand more words than they can speak. As children begin to understand language, they can answer simple questions with a yes or no response by shaking their heads or using simple sign language. It has become a common practice to teach hearing infants a few common signs to facilitate communication earlier than when they begin speaking (Rymanowicz & Cox, 2020; Thompson et al, 2007). Infants with hearing impairments can be taught sign language as soon as challenges are detected.



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Books should be read and stories in any language told to children starting in infancy, as this helps develop new vocabulary and creates a connection to literature that will later be important for learning. Reading stories together also helps strengthen the relationship of the child and adult. **Joint attention** is the action of a child and a caregiver focusing on the same object or concept at the same time. This shared experience helps to form new vocabulary. Children learn new words much more quickly and efficiently with joint

attention than they ever could by viewing a video. In fact, there is evidence that suggests that television can actually hinder language development rather than help (Byeon & Hong, 2015; Chonchaiya & Pruksananonda, 2008; Zimmerman et al., 2007). Here is an example of joint attention in action.

Example

Joint Attention

Setting: Teacher Tanisha and 18-month-old Sofia are looking out the window. Teacher Tanisha sees some autumn leaves falling from the tree.

Teacher Tanisha: “Look Sofia, leaves are falling from the tree.”

[Sofia looks at the leaves.]

[Teacher Tanisha and Sofia look at each other and make eye contact.]

Sofia: Smiles and says “leaves!”

This action has three steps: adult and child focus on the same object, adult and child make eye contact, adult names the object. In this way, children add many new words to their vocabulary. The words are presented in a real-life context, and they strengthen social relationships with their caregivers.

Once children begin to speak, language use should be encouraged through open-ended questions and topics that interest the child (Bebko et al., 2014). Songs, rhymes, and books are all effective and fun ways to encourage language, but everyday conversation is also helpful. Children like to be involved in the real-life daily activities of adults, so engaging a child while doing tasks around the classroom is a good way to support language (Golubović et al., 2022; Guidepost Montessori, n.d.). Mealtimes are another opportunity for language development, as eye contact is easy while sitting at a table.

When learning to speak, children will inevitably make errors with grammar and syntax. The best way to support language development is to model the correct grammar and word order rather than correcting the child. This avoids the embarrassment that might come with being called out on making a mistake, and language modeling is simply a better way for the brain to remember how to use grammar (Leung et al., 2021). Keep in mind

that nonstandard language use at home is not necessarily incorrect, but could be due to a dialect.

An exchange might look something like this:

Example

Child: “After breakfast, I goed outside.”

Teacher: “After breakfast you went outside? How fun! What did you do outside?”

Child: “I played with Weihua out there.”

Gently modeling correct language usage is more effective than correcting children’s grammar.

By using language modeling, the teacher provides an example of when and how to use the word in a certain situation, thus helping the child remember it for next time.



Figure 4.5. *Two Girls Playing in Water / Photo Credit: Abigail Keenan, Unsplash License*

Social Development

Social development includes all things related to interacting with others. Parents, family, teachers, and peers all have special relationships with children, and those relationships are also related to one another. Teachers form relationships with parents, which benefits the child, and adults can facilitate communication between children. At the center of this is the child, who is driven to form relationships with adults and children.

Relationships with Caregivers

Infants begin to form relationships with caregivers at birth. Forming a strong relationship with a primary caregiver gives a baby a feeling of safety and security. The primary caregivers are typically the parents, relatives or other adults central to the infant's life. Eventually, infants form relationships with secondary caregivers like relatives and teachers. Healthy relationships are characterized by things like **reciprocal interactions**, sensitivity to emotions, a warm, calm, voice, and lots of positive language. These are good ways to interact with children of all ages but are particularly important with infants as toddlers. Children may form preferences to particular caregivers and be upset when one is not available. Similarly, children 9 to 18 months of age may go through **separation anxiety**, or a fear of being separated from their primary caregiver (Swanson, 2021). This is normal, and children's emotions should be respected during this time. They do not understand that their mother, father, or other caregiver will return later, which can be upsetting. Teachers can provide support by recognizing the child's emotions and providing physical comfort (if the child wants it). Using phrases like "I see you are sad that mommy has left" or "You are feeling upset right now" are helpful in supporting the child through the tough time.

Fact

Infants and young children need lots of positive attention.

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Don't hold the baby too much, you might spoil him"? Well, it was once widely believed that paying infants too much attention might "spoil" them. This has now been

shown to be untrue. In fact, the best way to create a healthy social relationship with an infant is to engage in physical touch and face-to-face communication (Berecz et al., 2020; Bigelow & Williams, 2020; Norholt, 2020).

Back and forth, reciprocal communication is important for developing a trusting, healthy bond between a child and a caregiver. Sharing hugs, playing peek-a-boo, talking about what is going on, and narrating a child's world ("We are going to change your diaper and then lay you down for a nap.") can help babies feel a sense of security and safety with their caregiver. Bonus — these interactions also promote language development! The benefits of positive interactions are not limited to infants — older children also develop healthier bonds with their caregivers when they engage in positive, back-and-forth communication (Romeo et al., 2018; Walsh, 2018).

Temperament

Temperament is a developmental characteristic that intersects social, emotional, and physical development. Because it has genetic underpinnings, it is thought to be inborn. When most people think of genetics, they think of physical traits such as eye color or hair texture. While these are genetically inherited characteristics, genetics are also involved in a child's disposition, which can later become a key part of their personality.

Temperament is an infant's regular way of reacting with their environment, and is categorized as either easy, difficult, or slow to warm up. This is measured by several factors including: smiling and laughter; regularity in eating and sleep habits; approach or withdrawal; adaptability to new situations; intensity of responsiveness; general cheerfulness or unpleasantness; distractibility or persistence, and soothability. Parents of multiple children often report how their first child's temperament differed from their second: "Jorge was so quiet and peaceful as a baby. He slept all day and never cried! Carlo on the other hand, fussed and cried all day. We thought he might never grow out of it!" It is important to know that babies of all temperaments can grow up to be happy, healthy, and balanced individuals.

Children's temperament does indeed impact their behavior as an infant and this is a good example of how children's genetic disposition can interact with their environment to help them develop. This is also an example of how different developmental domains can overlap. What is biological can also be social and emotional. The relationship between a child's temperament and a caregiver's personality is sometimes referred to as goodness of fit. If an infant has a difficult temperament, she may have frequent periods of intense crying, be difficult to soothe, and may not fall asleep easily. If she has a primary caregiver

who is ready for a challenge and sees this baby as an individual who needs love and understanding, then they have a good “goodness of fit” (Bird et al., 2006). On the other hand, if an infant has an easy temperament and a caregiver who does not share her sunny disposition, they may not have a “goodness of fit.”

That is why it is important for caregivers of multiple children to be adaptable to multiple infant temperaments. Each child is an individual, and no child is better or worse than another. Further, there is no perfect temperament. Children are who they are, and it is up to the important adults in their lives to respect that and treat all children with love and care.

Relationships with Peers

As children grow and mature, they begin to show interest in other children. At first, it may be just a 10-month-old watching other children playing on a playground. This may not seem like much but observing older children at play lays the groundwork for later social interactions. Later, children will play with toys alongside one another, but not yet interact. Adults may be eager for children to form friendships with others, but this type of play is important for children to experience before they move into play involving rules and negotiation.

A great deal of peer relationship building is in the context of play. Play is, after all, the work of childhood, and this is what children spend most of their waking time doing. During play, children learn the rules of games, how to read a peer’s emotions, and how to engage in social problem solving (Luckenbill et al., 2019). If a group of 5-year-old children are playing a game of hide and seek, younger children who are new to the game will quickly learn the rules from the others. If two children are playing with crayons and one takes the crayon from the other, the ensuing frustration will be evident. In this way, children learn to read the emotions of peers.

Perhaps the most interesting development is social problem solving. When children encounter a conflict, it can disrupt their play, and we know children do not like to have their play interrupted. For this reason, children are motivated to solve the conflict as quickly as possible in order to continue play.

Imagine two children playing in the kitchen dramatic play area. Both children want to cook, but there are only enough materials for one to stir the soup. A conflict arises, and in order to navigate this, the children decide that one will stir the soup and the other will chop the vegetables. This is an example of sophisticated negotiations and problem solving. Both children need to regulate their emotions, come up with alternative activities,

and decide who will do which activity. If they give up at any time during the process, then the game is over.

This type of problem-solving behavior in the context of play is highly complex and takes a lot of practice. Teachers can facilitate this by stepping in to help regulate emotions, brainstorm alternative activities, or help decide who will do which activity, but only if it seems that the children need help.



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Figure 4.6. Children Playing in the Beach / Photo Credit: Dhammika Heenpella, CC BY-NC 2.0

Emotional Development

Emotional development includes the development of feelings, emotion regulation, and sense of self. Emotional development is closely related to social development. They are so closely related, in fact, that some frameworks of child development refer to them as socioemotional development or social-emotional development. In this section we will discuss emotional development and regulation.



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The Development of Emotions

When babies are born, they experience basic emotions such as contentment, interest, and distress. After a few months they begin to experience fear, anger, happiness, and surprise. Later, when a sense of self develops, more emotions come along such as guilt, pride, and embarrassment. Caregivers can allow children to express emotions freely and teach them to express emotions in socially appropriate ways. One good way to do this is through modeling. Teachers can express mild frustration and model strategies to overcome it. For example, a teacher may demonstrate frustration with difficulty opening a jar, and then take some deep breaths before asking another teacher for help. This is an effective way to teach children how to manage emotions.

Another way to teach children to manage emotions is to read books that depict children overcoming difficult emotions so that children have a benchmark that they can relate to. Yet another approach is to encourage the expression of emotions through dance and art. Children may also act out emotions through pretend play. Providing children space and time to work through feelings in a pretend setting can be very helpful for the development of emotions.

Emotion Regulation

Emotion regulation refers to a child's ability to control or modify their emotions. It is closely tied to brain development. The underpinnings for emotion regulation begin in

infancy with the infant's primary caregiver (Thompson & Meyer, 2007). When a baby cries for attention and is soothed by the caregiver, this sends signals to the brain that help the child to calm down. With this repeated action of crying and receiving comfort from a caregiver, the baby's brain slowly learns the process of how to regulate emotions.

Emotion regulation takes a very long time, and more sophisticated emotion regulation occurs alongside executive function. This means that between the ages of three and five years, children are able to learn to cope with frustrations in a socially acceptable way (Raising Children Network, 2022).

Reflection

What are some activities that you could create to support child development? On which developmental domains will your activities focus?

Children with ADHD and other neurological differences can have persistent difficulty with emotion regulation, making it hard to succeed in school environments designed for typically developing children (van Stralen, 2016). These children need special support and understanding in order to work toward developing emotion coping strategies (Gomes da Silva, 2008).

Resource

Some additional resources for developmental milestones and child development are [The Washington State Early Learning and Development Guidelines](#) and the [Harvard Center for the Developing Child](#).

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4.4 TYPICAL AND ATYPICAL DEVELOPMENT

Angela Blums, Ph.D.



Figure 4.7. Lesieli Latu teaches students with a disability / Photo Credit: Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, CC BY 2.0

Most children develop in a similar way. Even when cultural backgrounds, geographic locations, and personal characteristics vary, child development is generalizable. That does not mean, however, that all children are the same. Some children develop more quickly in cognitive areas, but more slowly in social areas. Some children develop more quickly in general than others, some more slowly. Children are living, breathing beings, and some variation is normal. When a child develops in the way that we expect, we refer to this as **typical development**. There is room for a good deal of variance in typical development. For instance, babies can speak their first words anywhere from 9 to 13 months, and children begin to write their own names anywhere from 3 to 5 years (Byington & Kim, 2017; Mayo Clinic, 2023). This variance is healthy and normal.



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Some variance is unusual, and that is referred to as **atypical development**. Sometimes, atypically developing children are referred to as **neurodivergent**, which refers to how their brains function differently from typically developing individuals. Atypical development can slow down growth in other areas of a child's life. If a child cannot speak any words by 15 or 16 months, it is considered atypical development (Brown et al., 2020). The ways and speed in which children grow is measured by tools called developmental assessments. The caring adults in a child's life benefit from knowing how the child is developing, where they are struggling, and what to expect next.

Despite the name, developmental assessments are not complicated standardized tests that a child must complete. Instead, they are carried out by the teacher through observing the child at play or by playing small games and activities with the child. The teacher records the child's developmental milestones on the assessment and later shares it with the parents. If development is not on track, teachers should speak with parents and connect them with specialists who can help. Specialists will administer another type of assessment that is specially designed to diagnose developmental disabilities. Atypically developing children benefit from early intervention programs that can help them get back on track, or help them and their families learn how to adapt to their child's atypical developmental path.

Attributions

1. Figure 4.7: [Lesieli Latu teaches students with a disability at Ngele'ia Primary School in Nuku'alofa, Tonga](#) by Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is released under [CC BY 2.0](#)

4.5 DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE

Angela Blums, Ph.D.

Early Childhood Educators in the United States have a wealth of resources to draw from as they plan ways to meet the developmental needs of each of the children in their care. The [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (NAEYC) is the main professional organization for Early Childhood Educators. The NAEYC defines **developmentally appropriate practice** as “methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning” (NAEYC, 2020a, p. 5). It is the job of teachers to make sure that our practice meets children’s developmental needs. For example, there has been an unfortunate trend for modern preschools to include formal academic content taught at a level meant for older children. These practices are not developmentally appropriate. Developmentally appropriate practice dictates that any academic content should meet children’s developmental needs first (NAEYC, 2020). That means that children are given opportunities to learn academic content that are in keeping with their developmental level – such as learning through play.

For a practice to be developmentally appropriate, it must consider developmental domains and a child’s age, individual needs, and individual culture.

Developmental Domains

To consider development in planning curriculum means understanding what is appropriate at a given age or stage of development. [Developmental milestone charts](#) (Centers for Disease Control, 2023) can help with this. It is vital to know what children should be capable of at a given age of development and plan activities accordingly. For instance, we know that young children are concrete thinkers who learn best by using real, tangible items rather than representations of items. If we want a group of three-year-old children to learn about apples, we will give them real apples to smell, touch, see, and taste. In this way, they can develop a long lasting, deep concept about apples. This is developmentally appropriate. Offering them a book about apples is a useful support and vital for language development, but the book alone will never give them the conceptual

understanding about apples. Likewise, well-meaning families often expect early childhood teachers to have children complete worksheets in preschool. From what we know about child development, young children do not have the executive function to allow them to sit in a chair for long periods of time to learn from worksheets (National Center for Education Evaluation, 2022; Tomlinson, 2016). Further, their bodies are designed to wriggle and move. Sitting at a desk will not help preschoolers learn. That is why many high-quality early childhood programs focus on play-based learning.



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Individual Needs

Considering an individual child's needs means knowing what is appropriate for a given child. Teachers can use developmental assessments to determine what is appropriate for a child. Curriculum should be tailored to each child's different developmental needs (NAEYC, 2020a). Perhaps there is an art activity in the classroom in which children cut paper with scissors and glue it onto a larger sheet. If some children do not have strong scissor skills, they may rip paper instead and use glue sticks to glue it down. In this way, children's individual developmental needs are met. They still are able to practice fine motor skills with art, but the activity is not designed to limit children by ability level. The thoughtful practice of tailoring activities to meet children's individual needs is a hallmark of early childhood education.. This practice is also referred to as **differentiation**, where the teacher understands and implements the idea that "one size does not fit all."

Cultural Context

To consider culture in developmentally appropriate practice is to keep in mind the context in which the child is raised. Each family's set of rules, way of communicating, neighborhood, history, status, and environment is unique. While there are some universals, what is considered developmentally appropriate for one culture may not be for another culture. For instance, the ways adults talk with children can vary widely depending

on the culture. Some cultures rely heavily on verbal communication while others rely more on nonverbal communication.

Cultures can also vary on their norms around children's freedoms to move freely around a space. Some cultures allow children to move freely while others expect that children ask permission from an adult. Differences in these norms may mistakenly be seen as behavior issues by teachers. It is important to consider cultural context when supporting child development. For example, some cultures expect children to look adults in the eye when speaking to them, other cultures consider this disrespectful.

Reflection

Consider how NAEYC defines context in relation to developmentally appropriate practice: "Context—everything discernible about the social and cultural contexts for each child, each educator, and the program as a whole" (2020a, p. 7).

What are some examples in which cultural context might interact with child development milestones?

Social learning occurs in many contexts (family, school, etc.). How might these different contexts influence learning in different ways? How might societal inequities impact social learning?

Culturally relevant pedagogy is the practice of including ideas and artifacts that refer to a child's individual culture. This concept also extends to assessments. When measuring development using assessments, it is important to consider the cultural relevancy of the assessment. Does the assessment allow for children who speak multiple languages or those who do not have a familiarity with classroom materials? Imagine, for instance, that your assessment uses examples of American football (which is called "soccer" in the rest of the world). What happens when you have a child in your class who has just moved from India? Will her assessment be meaningful if she doesn't understand the rules of American football? Teachers can be mindful of such differences when assessing children. The best way to stay informed about cultural practices is to develop reciprocal communication and strong relationships with families. Later in this text, are guidelines for culturally responsive pedagogy.



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NAEYC Guidelines for Developmentally Appropriate Practice

NAEYC has outlined guidelines that help ECE teachers engage in developmentally appropriate practice. These guidelines are summarized below, but for a deeper look please refer to the [*Developmentally Appropriate Practice Position Statement*](#) from the NAEYC (2020a).

The guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice are:

1. Create a caring community of learners.
2. Engage in reciprocal partnerships with families and fostering community connections.
3. Observe, document, and assess children's development and learning.
4. Teach to enhance each child's development and learning.
5. Plan and implement an engaging curriculum to achieve meaningful goals.
6. Demonstrate professionalism as an early childhood educator.

These guidelines go beyond child development and reach to the larger context of teaching and learning in early childhood settings. Each of the six guidelines plays a role in creating a developmentally appropriate learning experience for children.



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Creating a caring community of learners refers to how teachers create respectful

interactions, positive relationships, and a supportive environment that focuses on the strengths that each child and family brings.

Engaging in reciprocal partnerships with families and fostering community connections refers to how teachers establish two-way communication with families. These partnerships respect varying communication styles, create multiple types of opportunities for family participation, and use families as a source of information for each child. It is important to also consider the community to which the program belongs and develop practices that honor and respect the community.

Observing, documenting, and assessing children's development and learning is how teachers measure how children are progressing in their development. This refers to watching and systematically observing children at play, keeping track of these observations using some type of system or tool, and later using that information to draw conclusions about how a child is meeting developmental goals.

Teaching to enhance each child's development and learning means that teachers use child development principles to foster learning. One main way to achieve this is through play-based learning. It also means that teachers use direct instruction in effective ways that meet children's needs and create learning experiences that are varied in format and complexity.

To achieve meaningful goals, teachers need to plan and implement an engaging curriculum. This means taking time to reflect and consider children's individual developmental goals and to create learning experiences around those goals. These goals come from the observations and assessments that have been previously carried out. Curriculum should also include all developmental domains (physical, cognitive, emotional, and social) and learning content areas (art, music, math, science, and language/literacy).

Demonstrating professionalism as an early childhood educator is achieved in many ways. One way to demonstrate professionalism is to follow NAEYC's position statement on [*Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*](#) (2020b).

Reflection

Imagine you are the teacher in a classroom of two- and three-year-old children. What developmentally appropriate considerations would you take when designing an art activity?



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4.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Angela Blums, Ph.D.

Summary

Understanding child development is a vital skill for all early childhood teachers. Knowing the key features of the developmental domains—physical, cognitive, social, and emotional is a good start. Making sure that both typically developing and atypically developing children’s needs are met is a requirement of good early childhood education. Implementing developmentally appropriate practice is critical to quality teaching. As with all things, understanding child development and its connection to developmentally appropriate practice takes time. It means seeking new knowledge and staying connected to the children in your care.

Review Questions

1. Consider the four main areas of child development. How could you describe these four areas of development to a parent? What examples would you use?
2. What benefits are there for children when they play outdoors in natural areas?
3. What types of questions can an adult use to promote children’s problem solving?
4. How can caregivers best support a healthy relationship with infants?
5. Around what age might children be able to regulate their emotions in socially acceptable ways?
6. What are some ways in which teachers in early childhood classrooms can support children in

the four developmental domains?

7. What are some classroom behaviors a teacher might notice in children from cultures or than the United States?

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CHAPTER 5: DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



inclusion
diversity
equity
education
children
early
childhood
teachers

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion / Photo Credit: Ninderjit Gill, CC BY 4.0

Overview

This chapter serves as an introductory exploration into diversity, equity, and inclusion, and highlighting their fundamental role in a teacher's educational journey. We will define and examine **diversity, equity, inclusion** education, which encompass a spectrum of educational methods aimed at addressing different aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion (Derman-Sparks et al., 2023). Understanding and implementing these concepts are essential in early childhood education as they foster a nurturing and inclusive learning environment. This environment ensures that every child feels valued, respected, and supported in their unique growth and development journey.

Developing a deeper understanding of these concepts will provide us with insight and awareness to engage in critical reflection on our teaching practices and the early learning systems we are part of, fostering a more impactful and meaningful approach. With an increased understanding of how these concepts shape our professional growth

and impact our education system, we can become anti-bias, anti-racist, and culturally responsive educators. Anti-bias, anti-racist, and culturally responsive approaches are included under the umbrella of diversity, equity, and inclusion education (Derman-Sparks et al., 2023). Achieving anti-bias and anti-racist goals necessitates a dedication to continuous adult growth and learning. Breaking down barriers and improving practices requires intentional learning and action such as listening to other teachers, families, and community perspectives which may be very different from our own. Staying current in the use of teaching practices that promote equity and inclusion is a professional commitment required of all early childhood teachers.

Terminology throughout this chapter will be from National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), [*Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education*](#) position statement (2019). The statement was developed and reviewed through a collaborative effort of a diverse group of experts in early childhood education and diversity, equity, and inclusion from across the nation. This comprehensive position statement emphasized the integral role that early childhood educators have in supporting children's cultural identity development and ensuring they have access to equitable learning experiences in early learning settings. This position statement details a multifaceted approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion providing specific recommendations for people working at programs involving early childhood education. Key terms, concepts, and recommendations, in this chapter, will come from this position statement.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Describe social identities
- Explain the cycle of socialization
- Define *bias*
- Describe what racism looks in early childhood education
- Define culturally responsive teaching
- List ways that you can engage in anti-bias education

- Identify how to include and support diverse families
- Describe critical reflection

Key Terms

- Diversity
- Bias
- Culture
- Equity
- Privilege
- Racism
- Oppression
- Inclusion

Attributions

1. Chapter opening image: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion by Ninderjit Gill, for WA Open ProfTech, © [SBCTC](#), [CC BY 4.0](#)

5.1 DIVERSITY

Ninderjit Kaur Gill



Figure 5.1. *Boy Playing on Slide in Playground / Photo Credit: Quang Nguyen Vinh, Pexels License*

As teachers, we have the incredible responsibility and honor of teaching and caring for

children in our classrooms and building intentional relationships with their families. Early childhood is a time where children are learning their numbers and letters. But it is also a time when children are developing their own personal identities and learning about social identities. These personal and social identities are influenced by the cultural beliefs and the values of their family, their classrooms, and society.

Diversity is defined by the NAEYC as:

A variation among individuals, as well as within and across groups of individuals, in terms of their backgrounds and lived experiences. These experiences are related to social identities, including race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, social and economic status, religion, ability status, and country of origin. (2019, p. 17)

Diversity is the differences among people, and it is a term that refers to all people and not just to some people (Derman-Sparks et al., 2023).

This definition of diversity shifts our focus from merely acknowledging differences to recognizing the significance these differences have had on shaping individuals' experiences. In this section, we will learn that diversity is not just appreciating and acknowledging differences, it is actively reflecting on our own experiences and identities and how they influence and impact our teaching. This definition specifically highlights the experiences that people have based on differences.

In this chapter, the variations among individuals are referred to as social identities. Social identities are categories that have been socially constructed. For example, a social identity might be a child who identifies with a specific religion or ethnic group. This term, *socially constructed*, means that these categories were established by societal norms, beliefs, and practices. These socially constructed categories carry significant implications for individuals' lives, influencing their opportunities, experiences, and interactions within society (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

How might opportunities or experiences differ for a child whose social identity includes that she uses a wheelchair? Understanding social construction allows us to recognize that many aspects of our social reality are not fixed or objective but are instead influenced by historical, cultural, and societal factors. Social construction highlights the power dynamics and inequalities inherent in social systems and emphasizes the importance of critically examining and challenging dominant narratives and structures to promote social justice and equity (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Following are definitions of some social identity groups.

- Race is a social-political construct that categorizes and ranks groups of human beings on the basis of skin color and other physical features (NAEYC, 2019).

- Ethnicity refers to “people bound by a common language, culture and spiritual traditions, and/or ancestry” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 45).
- Sex is the biological or genetic markers that distinguish male and female bodies and refers to one’s genitals, body structure, and is assigned at birth (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).
- Gender is the assigned sex given at birth that has prescribed roles and behaviors and expectations. Gender identity is the development of one’s self as a male or female in relations to others. Gender expression is the gender that a person presents to the world (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).
- Sexual orientation is whom a person is sexually attracted to (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020).
- Social and economic status refers to the financial and social conditions of a person, which determines their access to the institutions and resources of society (Derman-Sparks et al, 2020).
- Religion refers to faith and worship in a particular system of beliefs.
- Ability status includes the ability that children have to do something. It acknowledges disabilities including physical, cognitive, emotional, or neurodivergent challenges that impact a person’s abilities in some areas of daily living and learning (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020; NAEYC, 2019).

These are just the primary social identities or social groups. We could include language, citizenship/nationality, and family structure as well. The social groups we are born into or become a part of later in life are shaped by social interactions, cultural norms, and societal structures (institutions such as education and systems such as the family. These social groups influence how we are perceived by others and are one way we know how to navigate social relationships and systems.

These institutions and systems shape our perceptions of ourselves and others based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and nationality. Social identities—a child who is male and Latino, for example—play a significant role in shaping individuals’ experiences, opportunities, and access to resources within society (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

Social identity categories have been created and perpetuated by society and are influenced by factors such as culture, history, politics, and social norms (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). While individuals may have agency in how they identify within these categories, the creation and reinforcement of social identity categories primarily occurs within broader societal contexts. (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017).

We learn about social identity and what a group is by also learning about what it is

not (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Historically, many social identity categories have been considered binary. For instance, individuals were often categorized as either male or female, or as either White or a person of color. However, we now understand that this is an oversimplification. These social categories are not binary; they exist along spectrums. For example, gender identity can vary along a continuum throughout one's life.

In addition, race, as a social construct is subject to changes in societal usage and individual interpretation over time. We have children who identify as biracial and embrace multiple social groups. It is crucial to recognize that these categories are nuanced and have sometimes been used in ways that stigmatize rather than foster positive connections with one's identity. Note that in addition to social context, there can be geographical context. "White or a person of color," for example, is a binary developed in the United States and doesn't exist in other multiracial cultures.

Think about the differences between social identities and personal identities. Personal identities are the unique characteristics, traits, experiences, and attributes that define an individual as a unique person (Derman-Sparks et al, 2020). These aspects of identity are deeply personal and can include factors such as personality traits, talents, interests, values, beliefs, and life experiences. Personal identities are shaped by individual experiences, choices, and self-perceptions. They contribute to an individual's sense of self and personal identity, influencing how they see themselves and how they see and navigate the world around them. You learned about personal identities in the children's development chapter.

When we focus on personal identities it can oversimplify the impact of social identities. Belonging to a marginalized social group can include the joys of shared history, language, resilience, stories, community, and solidarity. In addition, we need to recognize the complexity and diversity of individual identities while also acknowledging the systemic barriers and inequalities that exist based on social group membership. By valuing and respecting individuals' personal and social identities while also challenging societal norms and prejudices associated with some social identities, we can work towards creating a more just and equitable classroom and society for all.

Reflection

What social identity groups do you belong to?

What are other identities that categorize and differentiate people that are not listed?

Do you think our social identities influence how we interact and engage with other people whose identities are different from ours?

Culture and the Cycle of Socialization

Culture plays a central role in shaping individuals' social identities by providing frameworks for understanding, interpreting, and expressing identity within the context of broader societal and cultural norms. Culture is closely connected to social identities and plays a significant role in shaping how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others.

Culture refers to the experiences, language, values, and beliefs that people share at a given time and place. Our cultural ways of being can be as simple and visible as what we have learned to like to eat or what we don't like to eat. Culture can also be the words we use, language we speak, how we dress, and what music we like to listen to.

Culture is also complex and invisible. It is the deeply held beliefs and values we have that influence the daily decisions we make. These beliefs can be about what eye contact should look like, or what kind of touching is acceptable. Culture also refers to relationships with our elders, the way we raise our children, and what role families should play in our lives. There is a lot under the surface that we have learned, and that we are not aware of. Those cultural ways of being become automatic.

Ultimately, culture shapes and frames how we understand, view, and interact with the world around us. Also, what we learn depends on what cultural and social groups we belong to. Culture acts as a lens through which we understand and make sense of our surroundings. Our cultural backgrounds, including the social groups we belong to, shape our perspectives, beliefs, values, and behaviors. What we learn, how we learn it, and what

knowledge is considered important or relevant are all influenced by the cultural and social contexts in which we exist.

In essence, our cultural and social identities play a crucial role in shaping our worldview and guiding our experiences and interactions within society. For example, it is possible to learn a new culture by moving to a new country or by a change in our economic status, or by having a disability. We all belong to many cultural and social groups. When we have similar culture with others, we usually get along better with or feel more comfortable with them (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020).

Reflection

Think about the people who are important in your life. What do you have in common with them? How does this commonality make you feel when you engage with people who have similar cultural ways of being as you?

Think about the people you know who are different from you. How do you feel when you engage with them? How do you feel about those who may not speak the same language as you or eat the same foods as you?

We are socialized into cultural ways of knowing and acting based on the cultural and social identity groups we are a part of. This means that we learn and adopt specific cultural norms, values, and behaviors based on the cultural and social groups we belong to. These norms and behaviors are ingrained through socialization processes that occur within society. This process is deeply rooted within social systems and structures, shaping our identities and perspectives in profound ways (Harro, 2018).

Socialization is the process where we internalize the cultural norms and ideologies of society. We have learned these norms and ideologies through the institutions we interact with, for example, education, church, peers, family, laws, media, business, and so on. Harro (2018) suggests that based on each of our social identities, we learn how to:

- think about ourselves and others.
- interact with others.
- understand what is expected of us based on a specific set of social identities we

were born into.

- know what the consequences are if we deviate from what is expected of us.

These social identities that we have been assigned to, born into, or become a part of later in life predispose us into unequal roles (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). We are socialized into these roles both subtly and overtly by our family and various institutions, including schools, media, religious institutions, and workplaces. These roles are enforced through systematic training that dictates the “appropriate and acceptable ways to be” within that identity, as outlined by Harro (2018).

In the United States, the appropriate and acceptable ways to behave come from the dominant social groups. The dominant social groups are men, White people, able-bodied neurotypical people, middle to upper class people, cisgendered, heterosexuals, English speaking, and middle-aged people. Subordinate or marginalized groups are: women; people of color (specifically historically racially oppressed groups); gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people; people with a disability; seniors and youth; and people living in poverty.

Understanding the socialization process and our connection with various groups will enhance our understanding of the values and beliefs we have internalized, as well as our perceptions of groups to which we do not belong.

Through culture we acquire knowledge of and ideas about social identities and their implications. In the context of early childhood education, NAEYC’s *Advancing Equity* definition acknowledges the impact of these categorizations and connection to dominant social identities and how we have been and are socialized. The NAEYC diversity definition underscores that terms like *diverse* and *diversity* are sometimes used as substitutes for non-White, a usage rejected by NAEYC. This rejection challenges the notion that Whiteness represents the norm against which diversity is measured (NAEYC, 2019, p.17). This specific clarification serves as a reminder of the social construction of race and other social identities, as well as the meanings attributed to them by their creators, the dominant social groups. It also highlights the harm inflicted upon individuals who do not belong to the dominant social groups and the cultural rules that those who may belong must follow.

For some children in early childhood the sex and gender roles that are expected of them is not what they identify with and how they want to express themselves. However, through the cycle of socialization, other children, families, teachers, and schools, enforce specific roles on children (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). An example of the socialization process and how it creates exclusion can be demonstrated when we examine biological sex, gender identity and expression before and immediately after a child is born.

When someone is expecting a child, they are often asked about the baby’s sex, whether

it will be a boy or a girl. Based on this information, people may begin to think about names typically associated with boys or girls, as well as consider which toys and clothes are appropriate. Before the baby is born they are already categorized. After the baby is born, interactions with the child often involve conscious or unconscious expectations regarding their gender identity, behavior and appearance. For instance, girls may be encouraged to speak softly and avoid physical play, while being complimented on their appearance in dresses. Conversely, boys may be discouraged from crying and encouraged to demonstrate physical and emotional strength. While for some children their sex assignment aligns with their gender identity and expression preferences, for others that may not be the case. Therefore the cycle of socialization can enforce cultural norms that do not allow the child to fully express themselves.

Our cultural norms and values and ways of being are already established when a child is born. These norms might include whether we expect a child to look us in the eyes when we speak to them, or expecting a child to eat with utensils and not with their hands. These rules, roles, and assumptions were created by the dominant groups and marginalized or subordinate groups were essentially exploited, disenfranchised, and discriminated against if they did follow them (Harro, 2018). Through this cycle, society has normalized the dominant groups' cultural values, beliefs, and ways of being at the expense of the subordinate groups. This leads to implicit and explicit biases regarding other social identity groups, which we will explore further to understand its influence on our interactions and expectations of children and families. Remember that personal identities may sometimes conflict with social identities, creating internal tension or discomfort for individuals. Knowing this can navigate our sense of self, fostering greater self-awareness and authenticity without minimizing the impact of societal expectations.



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Reflection

Earlier you identified which social identities you may identify with.

How did you learn to be part of that group?

What role did your family, friends, and community organizations play in this process of learning about who you were and are now? What role did your teachers play?

What identities are part of the dominant groups and which ones are not?

What do we think about social groups that we are not a part of? What messages may we be sending to children about their social identity groups based on how we were socialized about other social groups we are not a part of?

Bias

An integral part of our work with children and families is reflecting on diversity and culture, and learning about our socialization into the groups that we are part of and not a part of. Equally as important is addressing bias. We define **bias** as the attitudes that favor one group over another (NAEYC, 2019). Blindspots are hidden biases that are bits of knowledge about social groups (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). This information becomes stored in our brains because we receive messages frequently from our cultural environments about others who are not part of our social groups (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Biases are inherent in all of us and are acquired through our cultural upbringing and the process of socialization. Once embedded in our consciousness, these hidden biases can shape our interactions with members of specific social groups, yet we may remain unaware of their impact. Explicit biases are conscious, biases that we are openly aware of. These explicit biases are beliefs and stereotypes

that influence our understanding, actions, and decisions. Implicit bias affects one's understanding, actions, and decisions but is unconscious. (NAEYC, 2019).

Explicit biases can perpetuate negative stereotypes and prejudices about certain social groups. An example of explicit bias in the classroom may happen when we openly expect children from specific racial groups to be good at sports or to be quiet and shy. Implicit biases (biases we don't know we have) are automatic and will influence perceptions, judgments, and behaviors in subtle ways, even when individuals consciously work toward being unbiased. For example, if we tell a girl that they look pretty today in their new dress, we teach that girls are valued for their appearance rather than their accomplishments. Another explicit bias would be if a teacher was surprised when a child who does not speak English is able to write their name in English. This is an explicit bias because we thought if you can't speak English it would be hard to write in English.

Implicit biases may be unconscious to the offender but are often obvious to the victim and may have deep and lasting effects (Iruka et al., 2020). Implicit biases can contribute to disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and services across different social groups. This can perpetuate existing inequalities and widen the gap between different social and cultural groups. An example of systemic or institutionalized bias (implicit bias that is ingrained in the institution) in the classroom may be where the lead teachers and supervisors are White, but the assistants and support staff are people of color or English language learners. Another way that systemic bias can present itself in our classrooms would be when all but one or two books have illustrations with only White children and families in them.

Later in this chapter we will learn more about how implicit biases can lead to discriminatory actions or decisions in early childhood based on factors such as race, gender, age, or other social identities. This can result in unequal treatment for certain children or groups (Gillam, 2005). We will also examine how implicit biases can limit opportunities for advancement, growth, and success for children who are perceived as different or outside the dominant social groups. This can impact educational attainment and overall well-being (Milner, 2012).

These biases are learned from messages we receive about others from our own cultural environments through the cycle of socialization. Therefore, we also have the potential to unlearn them once we know we have them. One way we can unlearn these biases is by using an anti-bias approach, which we will talk more about later in this chapter.





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Reflection

Reflect on the ways in which your values and beliefs shape your instructional choices.

Are these values and beliefs shared by the children and families you engage with? For instance, do your expectations regarding sleeping, feeding, and potty training always align with those of the families you serve?

Consider the biases you might hold toward individuals who do not share your values and beliefs. Reflect on any biases you may have internalized about groups that are different than the ones you identify with.

Oppression and Privilege

When we reflect on which groups we belong to and learn more about ourselves and others through the cycle of socialization, we also begin to recognize how we may develop biases that influence how we interact and engage with others. Prejudice means we have prejudgments towards people from other social groups that we do not belong to. Discrimination refers to actions that are based on prejudices we have (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). When left unchecked, bias, prejudices, and discrimination can lead to privilege and oppression.

We will experience privilege and oppression based on the social identity groups we belong to. **Privilege** is the unearned advantages that result from being a member of a dominant social identity group (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). This type of privilege is deeply embedded, and it is often invisible to those who experience it without ongoing deep self-reflection about diversity and equity. An example of this privilege can be the language we

use in our programs. If your program is an English-speaking program, and if you speak English it will be easier for you to communicate. Because of your ability to speak English you have access to resources and services that others who do not speak English do not have access to. If you do not speak English and there are no other languages spoken in the program, then you may struggle with communicating with others.

Oppression is the systematic and prolonged mistreatment of a group of people that results from systemic bias based on their social identity groups (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). For example, ableism is a systemic form of oppression deeply embedded in society that devalues disabilities through structures that are based on implicit assumptions about standards of physical, intellectual, and emotional normalcy (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). If we are an able-bodied person, we might not think about making sure our classroom is set up for a child who uses a wheelchair, or a family member who uses a scooter. It may be harder to find tables for children that allow a wheelchair to slide under. If you do find one, they may be more expensive. When we have not experienced the challenges of a person with a physical disability, the changes needed to adjust our classroom do not come to us as quickly. These changes come to us when we have to make those changes because we have a child or family member who uses a wheelchair or scooter.

However, those of us who have privilege can experience challenges, and those of us who have been oppressed can experience advantages. When we become more aware of the biases we have and the privileges and systemic oppressions we have experienced, we can better understand the inherent oppression and privileges built into our system that are automatic. Increased awareness allows for a deeper understanding of the systems that perpetuate both oppression and privilege within society. As we recognize these dynamics in our own experiences and empathize with others facing similar situations, we can actively resist and adapt our teaching approaches to better address privileges and oppressions in our classrooms and education system.

The establishment of the first public school in the United States reflected the values and norms of the dominant group at the time. They were created by White colonizers to assimilate and acculturate early European settler/immigrant populations and Indigenous children (Sykes & Ostendorf, 2022). Our earlier education system also prohibited by law educating enslaved or free Black people. We have inherited an education system that had a narrow focus on what education should be. As early childhood educators we are tasked with preparing or supporting early learners for the public school system. If we take the responsibility to learn about and become more aware and conscious of whose norms and values we have learned, internalized, and in turn are teaching from in our own classrooms, we can begin to reflect on the changes we need to make.

When we reflect, assess, and re-evaluate and change how we teach children, we can

be anti-bias and anti-oppression. In order to be culturally responsive, we have to know what cultural values and beliefs we have and are teaching from. Again, diversity is not just appreciating and acknowledging differences, it is actively reflecting on our own experiences and identities and how they influence and impact how we are teaching.

Reflection

In what ways do you observe manifestations of privilege and oppression within your classroom environment?

How can we guarantee quality learning experiences for all children within an educational system influenced by biases, privilege, and oppression?

Recall a time when you engaged in discussions or collaborated with others to address unfair policies or practices and challenged biased perspectives.

NAEYC Advancing Equity Recommendation

Throughout this chapter, we draw on the [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#) (2019) statement recommendations for actionable steps and measures we can implement as we delve into the topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

With this deeper knowledge of what diversity really means, the first recommendation from the [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#) statement (NAEYC, 2019) is to examine the impact and the influence of diversity on who we are as teachers and what and how we teach. This first recommendation suggests that we recognize that we all hold some bias based on our personal background and experiences and socialization. We need to “identify where our varied social identities have provided strengths and understandings based on your experiences of both injustices and privilege” (p. 6). Knowing which values, beliefs, and cultural norms we hold that influence our teaching will help us reflect on the impact we have on children and families that do not have the same values and beliefs. In addition to identifying our biases, we also must be anti-bias and actively fight bias.

As we deepen our understanding of diversity, let’s reflect on this first recommendation (NAEYC, 2019). It urges us to explore how diversity shapes our identities as educators and

influences our teaching methods. It is essential to develop awareness and understanding of our own cultural backgrounds, personal beliefs, values, and biases. This entails reflecting on our lived experiences through the lens of our social identities (NAEYC, 2019) and considering participating in anti-bias or anti-racist training programs or conferences for educators.

Attributions

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5.2 EQUITY

Ninderjit Kaur Gill



Figure 5.2. Equity Word Cloud / Photo Credit: Ninderjit Gill, CC BY 4.0

When biases and systemic oppression go unexamined or unchecked they lead to harmful and discriminatory experiences for children from marginalized groups (Gilliam, 2005; Perszyk et al., 2019). Oppression and privilege are an example of how bias can become systemic and harm groups of people. **Equity** goes beyond “fairness” and provides us with a framework to understand the impact of our biases and oppression on children and families and how we can address them. If diversity is actively reflecting on our own experiences and identities and how they influence and impact how we are teaching, equity involves transforming the education system itself.



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The [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#) statement defines equity as “the state that would be achieved if individuals fared the same way in society regardless of race, gender, class, language, disability, or any other social or cultural characteristic” (NAEYC, 2019, p. 17). If we have been socialized into unequal roles based on our social identity groups, then we are not truly equal. Attempting to treat everyone the same is essentially not fair. We cannot have equality and fairness until we have equity where children have similar access to resources to support their learning, growth, and development. Giving everyone the same thing when they are starting from different places would not be equitable.

Structural Inequities

The United States has always had diverse social and cultural groups. This rich growth in diversity continues today. According to the Children’s Defense Fund’s “The State of America’s Children” 2020 report, 73.4 million children lived in the United States in 2018. The report’s statistics show that 50 percent were children of color: 14 percent were Black; 26 percent were Hispanic; 5 percent were Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander; and less than 1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native.

However, we have a lot of structural inequity in our country. Structural inequity is systematic and institutionalized disparities in opportunities, resources, and outcomes that are embedded in our institutions and systems. Structural inequity has become part of our education system and is rooted in the policies, practices, and norms of institutions, creating patterns of advantage or disadvantage for certain groups.

Poverty is one of the biggest threats to children’s healthy development. According to the U.S. Census, the child poverty rate more than doubled, from 5.2 percent in 2021 to 12.4 percent in 2022 (Shrider & Creamer, 2023). More children of color have been disproportionately poor, and if we look at income based on a family’s race we can see this disparity even further: \$88,200 was the median income for white families with children compared with \$40,100 for Black and \$46,400 for Hispanic families in 2017 (Children’s Defense Fund, 2020). Equity would be ensuring that people doing similar jobs regardless of race or ethnicity would get paid the same amount.

Race and Racism in Early Childhood Education

To better understand equity and structural inequities, we will specifically examine race and what racism looks like in early childhood education. The [Advancing Equity in Early](#)

[Childhood Education](#) statement (NAEYC, 2019) defines race as a social-political construct that categorizes and ranks groups of human beings on the basis of skin color and other physical features. Race does not have a biological basis, and it has significantly influenced societal structures and experiences. As we learned earlier from the definition of diversity and from the cycle of socialization, race is a social identity that confers privilege to one racial group and discriminates against others that are not part of that racial group.

Racism is defined as a belief that some races are superior or inferior to others and it operates at a systemic level through deeply embedded structural and institutional policies that have favored whiteness at the expense of other groups (NAEYC, 2019). Ultimately, racism is a powerful collection of racist policies that lead to racial inequity and are substantiated by racist ideas (Kendi, 2019).

The concept of race was historically created through social, economic, and political factors. The term *race* emerged during periods of European colonial expansion, particularly during the 17th century (Braveman & Parker Dominguez, 2021) when colonizers encountered diverse populations and that led them to categorize people based on perceived physical and cultural differences.

Throughout the history of public and early childhood education, children have experienced discriminated because of their race. Children of enslaved people were not allowed to attend schools and indigenous children were removed from their homes and sent to boarding schools. Not all children were starting with the same resources or supports; because of historical bias and oppression that exists in our institutions even today.



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Earlier in this chapter we reflected on bias, privilege, and oppression. We can see bias and oppression when we look at the data on preschool expulsion and suspension rates. Researchers have confirmed that a teacher's implicit biases about a child's race contributes to systemic oppression. In his initial study, Gilliam (2005) found that expulsion and suspension rates are higher for Black children in preschool programs than in K-12 schools. This continues to be seen in current data as well. The U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education (2014) confirmed that these rates were

disproportionately high for Black children where Black children only make up 18% of preschool enrollment, but 48% of preschool children suspended more than once. According to Gilliam (2005) and Kunesh and Noltemeyer (2019), race and implicit bias seem to be contributing factors to the higher expulsion and suspension rates for Black and non-white children, specifically boys.

The idea of race is not based on biological or genetic differences but rather on socially constructed ideas about categorization (American Medical Association, 2020). Racial differences became embedded in political and legal systems, shaping policies on slavery, segregation, and discrimination. Laws were enacted to institutionalize racial hierarchies and maintain social control. Now and over time, the concept of race is ingrained in social norms and structures. It has been perpetuated through cultural beliefs, education, and social institutions. Inequity that exists because of race and racism are things that we can actively fight against.

We also should be thinking about how our identities intersect. Intersectionality is a concept developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a critical race theorist and scholar, to describe how social identities intersect and overlap, creating unique experiences of discrimination and privilege for individuals who hold multiple marginalized identities (Crenshaw, 1989).



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By examining the influences of various social identities, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, we gain insight into how complex and mutually reinforcing social inequalities can be.



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Achievement and Opportunity

All children can achieve and have the capacity to learn and develop to their fullest potential when they have the opportunities. Due to individual and structural bias, not all children are given the same opportunities to succeed. Milner (2012) identified this as an opportunity gap. It is important to understand this distinction. Structural inequities adversely impact children who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC); it is not something inherently in them or related to their ability and capacity to learn. All children will achieve if the opportunity to do so exists or is given to them. As teachers we are responsible for creating those opportunities.

The fourth recommendation in the [*Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education*](#) statement reminds us that we as teachers need to look deeper at our own expectations, practices, and curriculums especially when outcomes vary significantly by social identities (NAEYC, 2019). Authentic observations and assessments can assist teachers in identifying how their work can be adjusted to create more equitable learning experiences and family support. For example, if a child's first language is not English and is learning English, you may have an interpreter who fluently speaks the child's language to help you assess the child's learning. Teachers need to see each child as a capable learner and develop culturally responsive curriculum and individualized learning experiences to create opportunities for growth and development based on who the child is and not who we are. We have a responsibility to set the stage so that all children have opportunities to learn, grow and develop to their fullest potential.

We have learned and inherited our biases about race, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, gender expression and identity, ability and disability, language, national origin, Indigenous heritage, religion, and other identities. To achieve better outcomes for all children, it is necessary to engage in critical reflection on our biases and our social and cultural context and how we may be contributing to systemic inequities is necessary. This is particularly important for children who are from historically and systemically marginalized and oppressed groups.

5.2.4 Advancing Equity Recommendation for Everyone

Inequities, unfair advantages (privilege) and disadvantages (discrimination and oppression), are built into our systems; they are structural. The [*Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education*](#) statement's fourth recommendation tasks us to acknowledge and seek to understand these structural inequities and their impact over time (NAEYC, 2019). As teachers we have to be sure that we do not place blame or fault on a child or their family's character or abilities. Because of historical and current systemic structural inequities based on social identity groups, children from marginalized groups have been

and are disproportionately impacted. Every single child has the potential to learn, to thrive, and to be successful in life.

Attributions

1. Figure 5.2: Equity Word Cloud by Ninderjit Gill, for WA Open ProfTech, © [SBCTC](#), [CC BY 4.0](#)

5.3 INCLUSION

Ninderjit Kaur Gill



Figure 5.3. *Untitled / Photo Credit: Office of Child Care, and Office of the Administration for Children & Families, PD*

The study of **inclusion** involves intentionally including equitable learning opportunities in our teaching, curriculum and programs, with a commitment to continuous learning. Inclusive teaching strategies engage each child and ensure they feel like they belong and are able to participate in the learning experiences with the rest of the group. The meaning of diversity and equity as they relate to inclusion intersect with each other. While diversity and equity are necessary components to understand and apply to our practice, inclusion requires intentional efforts to actively engage with diversity and plan for equity in educational practices, policies, and environments. In other words, inclusion involves taking deliberate actions to ensure that all children, regardless of their backgrounds or identities, feel welcomed, valued, and supported in early childhood settings.

Acknowledge, Discuss, and Plan

Creating welcoming and inclusive classrooms requires educators to put forth an ongoing effort. When we understand the meaning of diversity and equity within early childhood education, we feel more at ease discussing with children, the differences they observe, and taking actionable steps to address them (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020). Children notice differences such as race, language, ability, family structure, etc. and they ask questions about it (Sullivan et al., 2021). If we don't acknowledge a child's observation in a positive way, then it gives them the impression that the difference is a problem or something we can't or shouldn't talk about and may be something negative.

Reflect on the following steps when a child sees something that is different in another child or their family.

1. Don't ignore it. Our initial acknowledgement can be a simple positive affirming statement. For example, a child may ask why their friend has two dads and no moms. A simple positive acknowledgment of this observation is to affirm that the child does have two dads and how wonderful that it is that there are so many different kinds of families.
2. Continue the discussion. Share family pictures and use open-ended questions and examples that validate and affirm the differences we see in families and foster an environment of acceptance. If we feel uneasy about continuing the discussion, we should revisit it at a later time when we feel more ready.
3. Plan for integration. We can plan for a purposeful introduction or integration into curriculum and materials in the classroom. These can be books about families of color, LGBTQIA+ families, and planning lessons to learn more about different kinds of families.

Critical reflective practices that involve consideration about children's abilities, languages, culture, and temperaments will guide teachers to adjust teaching approaches to create inclusive learning environments. This type of reflective approach focuses on the uniqueness of each child, and their individual needs and social diversity. Following are brief descriptions of inclusive practices and approaches you can apply to your teaching.



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Critical Reflection

Critical reflection is required to help us assess our thinking, judgments, and actions in the classroom. Self-reflection is a strategy that teachers should use to stop, step back, pause and think about their work. Then teachers can assess and make changes or affirm what is working well. Sometimes self-reflection happens in the moment in the classroom after a planned activity, or it may happen at a time when you are not in the classroom. Critical self-reflection is a process where we stop and consider why we did what we did, how we did, and specifically to ask if there were any biases in our decision making.

Culturally and socially, many of the developmental theories that have informed our understanding of children's development, such as the theories from Piaget and Erikson, were from research by White men with children and families who spoke the same language, lived in similar homes, and with similar traditional family structures. They were part of the dominant (White) culture at that time, which was predominantly White, able-bodied, and middle to upper class. As a result, the perspectives and experiences of marginalized or nondominant groups may not have been adequately represented or considered in the development of these theories. Having the ability to reflect on information that is current and culturally responsive helps us engage with diversity, equity, and inclusion in our work with children. Learning more about growth mindset, trauma informed care such as Adverse Childhood Experiences (**ACEs**), and language development are places you can start to develop an understanding of current developmental needs and supports.

Anti-bias Approach

Earlier in this chapter, we learned what bias is. Now we will focus on how we can employ an anti-bias approach in our work. The goal of anti-bias education is to be conscious of and actively fight against biases we have about others and that exist in the institutions we work and live in. Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, and Nimmo (2023) explain the anti-bias approach in early childhood education that explicitly works to end all forms of bias and

discrimination towards children by those who care, teach, and guide them. It explicitly calls for teachers to be actively engaged in anti-bias growth and learning.

Derman-Sparks, Edwards, and Goins (2020) outline four goals of anti-bias education that will nurture the development of the whole child. They are:

- demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
- express comfort and joy with human diversity, use accurate language for human differences, and form deep, caring human connections across diverse backgrounds.
- increasingly recognize and have language to describe unfairness (injustice) and understand that unfairness hurts.
- to have the will and the skills to act, with others or against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

To meet these goals of identity, diversity, justice, and activism, we need to learn about the social, cultural, and economic context of the child, their family, and of ourselves. As we discussed earlier in this chapter, we all have biases that we learned through the cycle of socialization. We also have our own social, cultural, and economic context that influences how we work and teach. Becoming more conscious of our biases through critical reflective work helps us determine how we learned to know what we know and do what we do.

To better assess our awareness and knowledge, following are some activities.

1. Classrooms. Look around your classroom and reflect on the materials you use to teach children. What social identities are represented in your books and in your dramatic play area? What kind of pictures are up in your classroom? Who is visible and who do we not see? Ask a colleague to look around and point out blind spots, and do the same for them.
2. Books for Children: Assess your books for bias by using the "[Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books](#)" (Derman-Sparks, 2013).
3. Self-assessments: Consider completing a self-assessment about the social identity groups you belong to. How were you socialized into those identities? What did you learn about groups that you belonged to, and what did you learn about groups you did not belong to? Reflect on where you may have experienced privilege and/or discrimination (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020).
4. Books for Teachers: Read more! Start with NAEYC's [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#) position statement (2019). Specifically look over the recommendations for early childhood educators. The book *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* (Derman-Sparks et al., 2020) provides a thorough

introduction to anti-bias education in early childhood education.

5. Self-education: Continue to learn and build your knowledge and awareness by taking classes or participating in workshops on anti-bias education, diversity and equity, and inclusion. Find ways to expand your knowledge of diverse experiences and perspectives without generalizing or stereotyping about others who are different from you (NAEYC, 2019). [TED Talks](#) are an excellent way to hear powerful and empowering authentic stories about systemic oppressions and bias. There are some suggestions to review following the references at the end of this chapter.
6. Intent vs. Impact: Remember good intent does not always lead to positive impact. When you commit a biased act, be ready and willing to be accountable and to take that opportunity to learn rather than being defensive (NAEYC, 2019).
7. Book Clubs: Think about starting a book club focusing on diversity and equity with your co-workers, or with your friends and families. Or even with the children!

This is a journey that requires continuous learning for all of us. Take time to regularly reflect and revisit the anti-bias approaches listed above so you can create an equitable and inclusive early learning setting for children to thrive in. Invite your co-teachers to examine and discuss these topics with you. This collaborative work supports raising awareness of issues and developing an anti-bias approach. For more resources on anti-bias activities, see NAEYC's publication, [Anti-bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves](#) (2020).



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Anti-racist

If the textbooks and stories we are learning from and are using to teach are mostly from the dominant White culture perspective, then we have to move beyond the anti-bias approach and also be anti-racist. Children are constantly internalizing the messages conveyed in their environments. As previously discussed, BIPOC children are disproportionately impacted by our education systems. A recent study found that children

as young as five years old rated images of Black boys less favorably than images of White boys and girls, with images of Black girls falling in the middle (Perszyk et al., 2019). As teachers we are also socializing children into the dominant cultural norms and values. It is critical that we reflect on what we are teaching children that may not be visible to us.



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Dr. Shullman, President of the American Psychological Association, stated that we are living in a “racism pandemic,” which leads to a number of psychological and physical issues and historical trauma (as cited in APA, 2020). The impact of racism emphasizes the urgent need for each early childhood educator to engage in anti-racist work. This requires teachers to examine their own racial biases that may be based in their own socialization process. Anti-racist work looks different for each person and teacher in the classroom and for our teaching approaches. We all can actively fight against racism. Some educators might say that they do not see color. However, we want to avoid this color-blind approach. When we see color, we truly see children, and welcome the diversity that each child brings.

Teachers must actively engage in learning more about what it means to be an anti-racist. Dr. Kendi (2019) points out that the opposite of being a racist is not just being “not racist,” it is being an anti-racist, where we are actively fighting for racial equity. It means examining our own beliefs about what racial equity is. Through evaluation and reflection, we can dig deeper in our own socialization process and check for beliefs and ideas of others-based anti-racism.



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Working with Families

You will read more about the work we need to do with families in [Chapter 9](#). Here we will focus on understanding families as part of our classroom and the communities they live and work in. As we learn more about ourselves, we begin to realize the social and cultural systems that our families lived and worked in influenced us as children and now as adults. This same process is something we are part of for the children and families we are working with. Teachers have an opportunity to disrupt the socialization process that perpetuates the discrimination and marginalization of social identity groups.

It is important to move away from the binary classification of social identities. We have learned to value and espouse the either/or way of thinking about others, but why can't we be and/both? When we begin to shift our thinking to an and/both perspective we allow for more space to integrate the diverse needs and supports our children and families need. We can use a child's home language in the classroom and use English to support their language development. Why can't boys and girls wear dresses in our classroom and also rough and tumble and be assertive in their play?

Home Environments

In Chapter 9 we will learn more about how important home environments are for each child and how their home environments may be very different from early learning environments. Children may be living and thriving in a single parent household; a multi-generational household where other family members are an integral part of the home; or children may be homeless and living in transitional housing. This are just a few ways that diversity in family structure can look for the children in our classrooms.

Connecting with Families

Learning more about a child's family does not mean that teachers must integrate or engage with all they do for the child. But teachers can begin to consider ways to support the child based on what they are learning from their family and what we are teaching them. Think about the ways you connect with families.

- How do we get to know families of our students, and how do they raise their child at home? What are some ways to incorporate into your program the cultural ways of being of the families?
- How do we reflect or consider a child's home environment's impact on the child's way of being in our classrooms?
- What networks of support does the family have outside of the home? How can we create a supportive network within the early learning program?
- How are we creating a sense of emotional and physical safety for the family? For

example, if a family is undocumented, then the way they engage with the school will depend on the level of safety they feel with the teachers and the school. This will be something that impacts the child.

- How are we integrating the funds of knowledge that children and families already have into our classroom?

Ultimately, to create culturally responsive equitable learning opportunities we must understand the lived experiences of the family and the child outside of our classroom. One way to bring this into the classroom, for example, is for children to research a traditional dance from their family's culture and demonstrate it to the class. Or, have the class try the dance, then talk about it together. When we reflect on how a child is influenced and impacted by the environments that their families have to navigate to function and survive, we can create equitable opportunities for the child and the family because we have a better understanding of the barriers that the family is experiencing.



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Culturally Responsive Teaching

When we integrate culturally responsive teaching into practice we are moving to another level of critical reflection. We not only see how our social identities influence our decision making, we also acknowledge and find ways to teach using the cultural context of the children in our classroom. Culture is increasingly understood as inseparable from development (Rogoff, 2003). Therefore, it is important to ensure cultural continuity, where the child's home culture is reflected in the classroom and is not invisible. Many marginalized social identity groups are invisible in our classrooms and teaching materials.



Figure 5.4. *Student Teachers Read to Class / Photo Credit: Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages, CC BY-NC 4.0*

Zaretta Hammond (2014) writes about the pliability of young children’s brains. Her focus was mostly on older children, but it is a reminder of the role teachers play in setting the stage for how children see and feel about themselves and where they fit into the classroom environment. Following is a summarized list of Hammond’s three strategies to use with children.

1. Culturally responsive teaching in practice can be as simple as making learning fun with interactive games that focus on social and verbal interactions, instead of just sitting and listening.
 - a. Children learn by doing, so adding a game to the learning makes it more engaging. Teachers can facilitate group activities in which children work together to create a story or mural. Create a guessing game using felt boards when teaching about body parts. Give children felt pieces that represent different parts of the body and have them guess which part they use to smell something they cook at home.
2. Another strategy is to make it a social experience. Think about how to lead circle time. Do we allow children to share and talk during our reading of a story or teaching of a specific lesson?
 - a. Do we make time for children to talk with each other about what they are

learning? Consider asking children to share their favorite smell, family activity, food they eat together at home, or play a song that they listen to at home.

3. A third strategy is to add stories.

- a. Invite families to share or make up stories with their children about smells. Have elders come and tell stories in the classroom during circle time. Instead of reading books, listen to stories families have recorded. This also helps to see how play could be a culturally responsive strategy.

Ultimately, culturally responsive teaching occurs when we integrate teaching strategies that are centered from the children and their family's culture. This does not mean we have to know about all the cultures of our families and how they live outside of the classroom. When we are open to learning more about children and families, we will build connections and partnerships that support children's development. These connections demonstrate that we welcome all families and strive to incorporate children's cultures into the learning experiences. We can also move beyond being responsive and relevant and lean into being culturally sustaining in our approach as well.



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Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, and Nimmo (2023) define culturally sustaining care as an approach that sustains diverse communities and cultures that have and are facing systemic oppression. Culturally sustaining education maintains, supports, and nurtures the cultural identities, languages, and traditions of diverse communities. It goes beyond cultural responsiveness and inclusivity by actively sustaining and perpetuating the cultural strengths, knowledge, and practices within educational and caregiving settings. Children and their families' cultures are dynamic, evolving, and valuable sources of resilience, wisdom, and identity.



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Advancing Equity Recommendations for Everyone

There are several recommendations that can support our ability and capacity to work towards inclusion where all children feel like they belong. Recommendation Two in the [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#) statement tells us that we need to recognize the power and benefit of diversity and inclusivity and Recommendation Three asks us to take responsibility for biased actions, even if unintended, and actively work to repair harm (NAEYC, 2019, p. 6).

In our classrooms, children are learning about the world around them. Developmental theories and brain research tell us that the first eight years of a child's life is a time of exponential growth (Centers for Disease Control, 2023). Children are curious and engaged in what we share during circle time. They are active and excited when they participate in planned or spontaneous activities. During this time of active cognitive learning, children are also learning about themselves and others. Children in our classrooms are not only working towards meeting developmental milestones, but they are also being socialized by their families, teachers, and the communities they live in. They are beginning to learn about the cultural norms of their family as well as the social norms that we have in our classrooms and our society.

We are an intimate and integral part of a child's social and cultural growth and development. Whether we know it or not, we may be contributing to the deep inequities that exist for children and their families because of their social identities. As the fifth recommendation in the [Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education](#) statement mentions, we just need to be willing to be open to learning and commit to learn based on our experiences with children and their families. It is imperative and necessary for us to consider ways that we can be more inclusive in our work.



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2. Figure 5.4: [Student teachers read to class](#) by Allison Shelley/The Verbatim Agency for EDUimages is released under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#)

5.4 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Ninderjit Kaur Gill

Summary

We discussed diversity, equity, and inclusion in early learning settings. The details within these topics included societal issues, identities, bias, and cultural identity development. The information presented influences our teaching and program practices, along with ways to engage in anti-bias work. Diversity is more than just being different from someone. It requires a commitment to learn about our own diversity and how it influences our teaching. Equity is more than trying to treat everyone fairly. We have a responsibility to understand that not everyone has had the same opportunities, so we have a responsibility to ensure that all children have access. Inclusion is not just making everyone feel welcome. It requires us to take an active role in engaging and integrating children and their families' diversity into our programs intentionally.

By centering our teaching around diversity, equity, and inclusion, we are focusing on the holistic development of every child. We hope that this chapter motivates and inspires early childhood educators to learn more about the children and families in their programs and strive to work with them in a culturally responsive and sustaining way. Every interaction we engage in with children can influence their memories, cultural and social development, and ideas about how they fit into this world. We have the responsibility to ensure that every single child feels welcomed as a valuable part of the learning community. In order to ensure that children meet their fullest potential, it is vital that we continue to study, reflect, and act to address diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Review Questions

1. Define diversity, equity, and inclusion.
2. Describe why these concepts are important to know as an early childhood educator.
3. What are your social identities, and how do or did they impact your work as a teacher?
4. What is the cycle of socialization?
5. Define *bias* and *anti-bias*.
6. What are some ways that you can be anti-bias?
7. How do you see privilege and oppression in your classroom?
8. How can you create opportunities for all children to succeed?
9. What is culturally sustaining care?

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CHAPTER 6: OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT



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Overview

As an early childhood educator, you provide young children with a safe, nurturing, culturally responsive learning environment that supports individual learning needs. A key part of supporting individual learning needs includes developing skills in observation, documentation, and providing assessments. This allows you to tailor classroom activities and individual learning to the needs of the children in your classroom. Learning to conduct observations, documentation, and assessments in everyday teaching practices is vital to creating and maintaining an effective learning environment. By mastering these skills, you become capable of tailoring your teaching methods to the unique needs of each child. Chapter 6 will delve into the skills necessary for observation, documentation, and assessment as you plan individualized and group curricula.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe how the approach to child assessment has changed over time.
- Define assessment and observation.
- Explain the differences, similarities, and relationships between observation and assessment.
- Discriminate between the types of assessment.
- Describe the cycle of observation, including the iterative nature of this process.
- Describe how the educator becomes a critical component of observation.
- Describe various methods of recording observation.
- Explain how the data collected during observation and documentation is used in planning curriculum and responding to children in the classroom.

Key Terms

- Anecdotal record
- Assessment
- Authentic assessment
- Checklist
- Documentation
- Formal assessment
- Formative assessment
- Informal assessment
- Iterative
- Naturalistic observation
- Norm-referenced

- Objective
- Observation
- Portfolio
- Rating scale
- Running record
- Standardized
- Subjective
- Summative assessment
- Work sample

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6.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT IN ECE

Brenda Boyd Brown, Ph.D.

Observing children’s development and learning has a long history in the work of early childhood educators (Wortham & Hardin, 2020). Understanding developmental milestones and observing children to assess a their progress toward milestones has been at the core of early childhood education since its beginning. Eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century educational philosophers such as Pestalozzi, Rousseau, and Froebel believed the unique nature of childhood required observing the child to understand their needs and abilities.



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In the early 1900s, the child study movement initiated by G. Stanley Hall and Lawrence Frank and continued by Hall’s students Gesell, Lewis, and Terman helped solidify the scientific study of children and their ages and stages of development. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) embraced systematic child development **observation** in their original *Developmentally Appropriate Practices* (DAP) statement in 1986. Even in the [most recent version of the DAP position statement](#), which recognizes that developmental milestones may not be as universal as once thought, there remains a strong emphasis on the importance of observation in naturalistic settings to ensure an **authentic assessment** of the child’s development (NAEYC, 2020). Observation and **documentation** of children’s development are critical tools for educators of young children and are a central focus in this chapter.



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While the importance of observation has remained central in the work of early childhood education, educational reform in the 1980s brought increasing pressure for accountability and standards in education, including early childhood education (Shepard et al., 1998). This pressure led to increasingly common testing of children to “prove” the results of pedagogy. The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) increased the focus on early childhood **assessment**, starting with Head Start (Nerren, 2020; Wortham & Hardin, 2020). In response to this top-down of pressure for accountability and testing, there was an increased effort to point out the unique characteristics of early childhood, which made using testing protocols designed for elementary-aged children inappropriate, resulting in invalid and unreliable results (Shepard et al., 1998). At the same time, these efforts argued that **naturalistic observation** of young children is the most appropriate method for planning, implementing, and evaluating curriculum.



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National educational goals set forth by President Bush in his State of the Union address in 1990 aspired to ensure all children would, by the year 2000, “start school ready to learn” (para. 24). A panel of experts took on the task of determining how being “ready to learn” could be assessed. The result was “Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessment,” a report that indicates how traditional testing is inappropriate for young children but also how assessment can be a helpful tool when implemented with the developmental characteristics of young children and the purposes of assessment in mind (Shepard et al., 1998). Although this document is more than 25 years old, it is still helpful in understanding how our views of assessment in early childhood education have evolved and, perhaps more importantly, what safeguards must be in place to avoid inappropriate

use of assessment procedures. As early childhood educators, we argue that the first and most important purpose for assessing young children is to support their development and learning. One of the best ways to meet this purpose is through naturalistically observing the child.

In summary, throughout the history of early childhood education, there has been an emphasis on the importance of observation conducted naturalistically and authentically. This focus remains central to the work of early childhood educators today. Educational reform has led to increased emphasis on standards and traditional methods of assessment such as testing. Early childhood educators have recognized the importance of safeguarding young children from prioritizing testing as a method of assessment. However, accepting the systematic observation of children's growth and development provides essential information as part of the assessment process for supporting growth and development.

Reflection

Think about your experience with observation, testing, and assessment during your school years. Did you experience formal standardized tests or more informal assessment methods? What do you remember about your experience? Was it positive or negative?

If you have experience as an educator, what is your experience with observation and assessment? Have you seen it change over time? In what ways?

6.2 ASSESSMENT

Brenda Boyd Brown, Ph.D.

What is assessment and what are its characteristics? **Assessment** in educational settings is “the systematic collection, synthesis, and use of data to make educational decisions about a child or a group of children” (Stone-MacDonald et al., 2018, p. 2). This definition implies a process that includes collecting and interpreting information to plan and guide educational experiences for children. This definition is helpful because it identifies a few characteristics of assessment that are especially important in early childhood. Following is a list of these characteristics.

- Assessment is ongoing. Assessment is not a test that happens at a single point in time, providing one snapshot of a child’s development. Thus, *test* and *assessment* are not synonymous terms. A test can be a part of an assessment, but a single test differs from an assessment that is broader and lengthier than a single test.
- Assessment requires revisiting the collected information. The educator does not just collect numerous observations, never to return to them. Instead, the educator reviews the information gained through observation and other methods to create a summary or to synthesize an understanding of the child. The process of collecting information, reviewing it, and then using that synthesized result will be discussed later in the chapter.
- Assessment has a purpose. An educator uses the synthesized information to make decisions (for example, how to guide behavior, what curriculum to plan next, how to facilitate a child’s learning). Sometimes, those decisions are made long after the child has been observed, as in the case of planning future curricula. In other cases, the assessment may happen at the moment, as when the educator, while observing a child, chooses to insert themselves or some material or equipment into the child’s play for learning or development purposes. Nevertheless, whether one makes the decision immediately or in the future, assessment should always serve a specific purpose.



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Gathering assessment information or data can happen in a few ways. In early childhood education, observation will be the primary method. Observation is a critical tool in the early childhood educator's tool kit. However, the assessment may also include administering a **standardized** test (valid, reliable, and age-appropriate), interviewing an essential adult in a child's life about their development or behavior, and collecting work samples of children's writing, drawing, building, or language.



Figure 6.1. Untitled / Photo Credit: © New York State Education Department

Types of Assessment

Observation is an essential tool for assessing young children; however, there are other ways of classifying or organizing types of assessment. Being familiar with these types of assessments helps understand the assessment process. Assessments can be classified into two major categories as either **formative** or **summative**.

Formative assessment is carried out daily during the learning process and measures the child's understanding as they engage in activities. Formative assessment helps the educator see how the child responds to the curriculum provided. Is the child grasping the experience, or must it be presented differently? Formative assessments can be informal or formal, but **naturalistic observations** carried out while teaching are the norm in early childhood education. These informal formative assessments are often called **authentic assessments**.



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Formal assessment uses **standardized** tools designed to assess a specific skill or ability, often with a narrow focus. Because high-stakes decisions about education for individual children often come from results of formal, standardized tests, these tests must show evidence of high validity and reliability. For high validity and reliability, formal assessment tools must be specific and narrow regarding what is being assessed. They must also be consistent in their delivery and scoring. Formal assessment tools that measure child development are often **norm-referenced**, which means an individual child's performance is compared to a large group of children of the same chronological age (Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2008) . Formal assessment tools are often standardized. They are presented in a standard or consistent manner with the same tasks or expectations used for every child.

In contrast, **informal assessment** can be more flexible than standardized assessments. The educator can develop the informal assessment to address the children's individual needs and the learning environment—a standard format or focus is not required. Because informal assessment tools can be more flexible and individualized, they are often called authentic assessments.

Authentic assessment tools are used in early childhood classrooms as part of the child's everyday experience. As might be expected, observation naturally allows for authentic assessment as the child is unaware of being assessed, and the performance assessed occurs naturally. Thus, authentic assessment practices capture what the child does as a regular part of their classroom experience, not what a child does (or does not do) when using a more standardized assessment tool.

Summative assessment happens at the end of a learning period and evaluates the cumulative learning during that period. Summative assessment allows the educator to determine the child's understanding after exposure to an idea or experience. Summative assessments may use a standard or benchmark for comparison.

In following unbiased and ethically sound observation and documentation practices, the assessment will reflect a central focus on child development. In assessing a child's growth and development, use various assessment tools to support developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive practices. Documenting what one observes in children's daily activities provides an authentic assessment of the child. This leads to assessment and should happen without unnecessarily disrupting the child's natural learning environment.

In summary, assessment is gathering information to make educational decisions about children and their instruction. Observation is one assessment component and is not interchangeable with assessment.



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6.3 OBSERVATION

Brenda Boyd Brown, Ph.D.

What does it mean to observe? As an educator, observation means watching and listening to children to learn about them (Stetson et al., 2007). While this definition may sound simple, observing children for educational purposes is intentional and is a skill that develops over time and with practice. It is a critical skill for responsive teaching. Observing a child increases understanding of the child's current developmental level, what the child needs to support the next steps in development, and generally who they are as an individual.

Educators' methods for the observation process can be particular and unique to their circumstances. However, a general method underlying most observational processes is apparent in all observations. This section of the chapter introduces this general method or process underlying all observations in early childhood education.

The Educator Is a Critical Component of Observation

Before discussing the process educators use, it is important to understand that educators are critical in the observation process. Successful observation requires the educator to be present, intentional, and active. Being fully present in the moment of observation allows the educator to see each child's uniqueness and development. Being present as an active observer means having the ability to block out any distractions that may be present. Educators should be authentically curious during observations as they become learning and growth detectives: "the documenter is a researcher first, collecting as much information as possible to paint a picture of progress and outcomes" (Seitz, 2008, p. 90). To do this, an educator may have to initiate the help of other educators to ensure proper supervision in the classroom. They should try to clear their minds of any biases and preconceived ideas to properly focus on what they are experiencing with the children.

In addition, observers need to be knowledgeable about early childhood development. This knowledge will help the observer know what to look for and to set measurable, attainable, relevant, and culturally responsive goals for the child. By understanding child development, educators can look for evidence of an expected developmental sequence in their observations and assessments.



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Another, and perhaps most important, way in which the educator is a critical component in the observation process is their ability to manage subjectivity and bias in their observation (Jablon et al., 2007). All humans have a **subjective** perspective on the world, including how they think about children. Subjective means that personal feelings, tastes, and opinions influence one's perspective. We all come to the field of ECE with assumptions about how children are—how they should behave, their roles in the classroom, and their relationships with adults, for example. These assumptions often contain inherent bias and should be recognized as an imperfect and unhelpful way to view, observe, and document the development of children. Thus, educators must reflect upon their personal beliefs and opinions and be aware of when they are influencing the focus or expectations of an observation. Educators must be aware of how their beliefs and opinions are influencing the observations they record and interpret. This subjectivity may reflect a very profoundly held notion about child development.

For example, an educator may value independence in children and view this as an essential developmental milestone—when a four-year-old appropriately stands up for what they want or desire. This view of expected development is culturally specific. In some cultures, interdependence, or an emphasis on the good of the community rather than the individual's independence, is valued and expected at this age. An educator who values independence and sees it as the expected developmental milestone may view a child who has grown up in a culture that values interdependence as exhibiting delayed development, which is a biased perspective.

Cultural bias is not the only way our subjective beliefs or tastes can influence our observations. Jablon and others (2007) point out that our individuality may influence how we view or respond to children. Educators with a quiet or introverted temperament may not gravitate toward loud and outgoing children. They may avoid them or tend to view these children's behaviors through a negative lens. These individual teacher characteristics can also create a biased view of particular children or groups.

What is the solution to this problem of subjectivity? Rather than attempting to shed one's point of view, which is impossible, the goal becomes "striving for objectivity" (Jablon et al., 2007, p. 42). Many resources exist to help educators increase their objectivity in

observation and documentation (i.e., Head Start ECLKC, 2023; Jablon et al., 2007; Peterson & Elam, 2020). Some suggested behaviors that increase objectivity include:

- Spend time reflecting on beliefs about children. Doing so can help identify unhelpful bias in observation. A conversation with colleagues about bias may be more fruitful in identifying beliefs, but doing so requires the willingness to be vulnerable. Identifying bias requires a certain level of vulnerability. Remember, having a perspective is human. Growth as an educator requires self-reflection.
- Reflect on the cultural and familial expectations of the children in the classroom. Do they differ from the educators'?
- In recording observations, write down only what one sees without interpretation.
- Do not infer what a child thinks or feels; describe what the child does or says.
- Avoid terms that make a judgment about a behavior (i.e., mad, hyper, pretty, spoiled).
- Be specific rather than overgeneralizing. For example, rather than saying, "Joe never shares with other children," describe what Joe did *today* while being observed.

The key to reducing bias in observation and documentation is to make every effort to be as objective as possible, avoiding subjectivity in focus and documentation.

A final consideration for educators is their ethical responsibility related to observation and assessment of young children. The NAEYC *Code of Ethical Conduct* outlines the ethical responsibilities that educators must uphold, and specifies responsibilities related to observation and assessment (Feeney & Freeman, 2018). These ethical considerations include protecting confidentiality of assessment results, the appropriate use of assessment instruments, and the appropriate use of data collected through observation and assessment. Each of these considerations will be discussed next.

The early childhood educator has the responsibility to treat assessment results and observation records confidentially. Thus, observational records and results of assessments will only be shared when there is a legitimate need for it. This includes informing parents who should always have access to observation and assessment products. Assessment results may need to be shared with specialists who are planning for individualized educational plans to support the child's development. Or, assessment results may be shared with other early childhood educators who are working with a teacher in a collegial way to plan and implement developmentally appropriate experiences for the child. Beyond these uses, observational records and assessment results should be treated as confidential.

The NAEYC *Code of Ethical Conduct* also addresses the responsibility of educators to only

use assessment instruments that are appropriate for the children to be assessed. For example, young children who are dual language learners may be assessed inaccurately if assessment and observation is not conducted in their home language(s). Involving families in order to understand a child's language, prior knowledge, culture and more, are essential to learning about their knowledge and skills.

Also, educators are ethically required to only use assessment information to support the development and learning of children, to support their instruction, and to identify children who may need additional services. Assessment information should not be used in any negative way or to limit children's access to education.



Figure 6.2. Emma and Alice / Photo Credit: edenpictures, CC BY 2.0



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Reflection

Does it surprise you that educators may carry biases that influence their focus in observation or how they document observations? Have you had experiences in which you avoided a specific type of child because their temperament or behavior was uncomfortable? Can you see how that might influence what you observed or how you documented what you observed? What strategies might you use to ensure unbiased observations?

Observation as a Cycle

Carrying out observation involves several steps. An observer does not just watch the child and stop there. Instead, watching and listening are the first steps, which lead to the documentation of the observation, followed by the interpretation of the documentation. Finally, based on the interpretation of multiple documented observations, the educator makes plans for future curriculum. While it is common for educators to respond at the moment to what they have observed and interpreted (likely without documenting), here, the focus will be on how observation is collected and recorded and then reflected upon to plan future curricula.

This process can be considered a repeated cycle (see Figure 6.3). First, the educator observes, then documents, interprets, and plans a responsive curriculum. The process begins again once children engage with the curriculum, providing information about the children and how the planned curriculum works to support their interests and development. Notice there is no stopping of this cycle; it is continuous or **iterative**, feeding back onto itself.

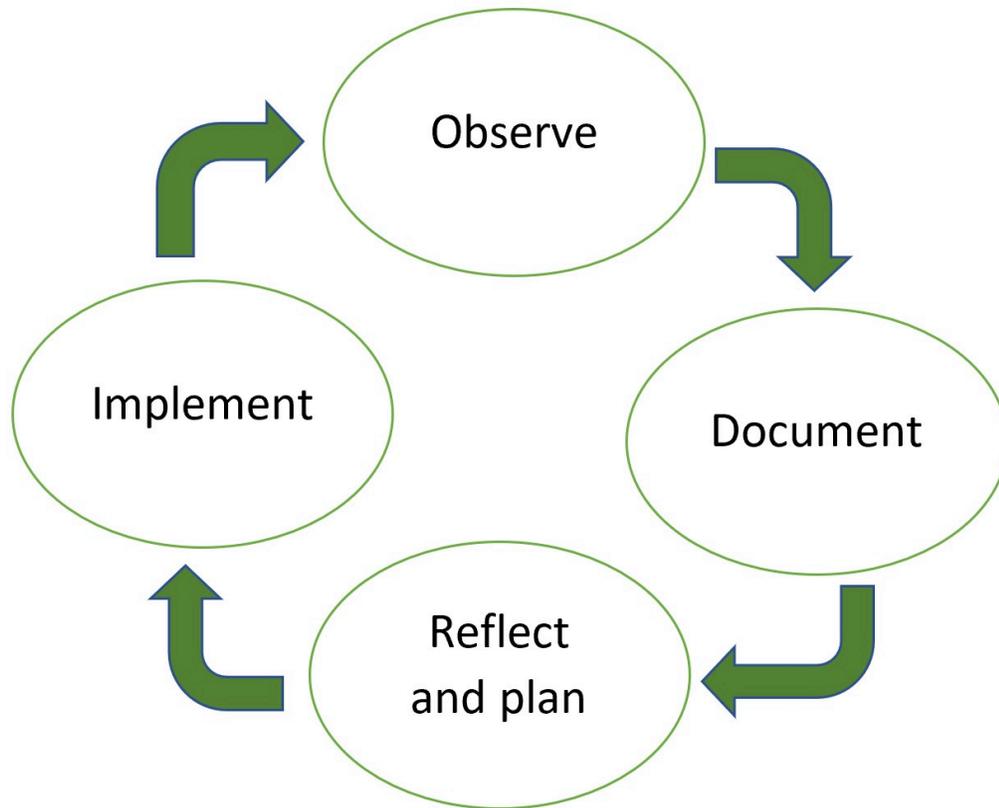


Figure 6.3. Observation Cycle / Photo Credit: Brenda Boyd, CC BY 4.0

Thorough observations consist of three parts:

Observing: gathering information about what is seen and heard through careful watching and listening.

Recording: documenting what was seen and heard in observation.

Interpreting: reflecting on what has been observed and documented.

After completing these three parts, the educator uses the information gathered. Using the information can include implementing curriculum, responding to individuals or a group of children, or creating summary reports to share with families and document learning over the school year. Thus, observation and the information gathered from it are vital to teaching responsively to meet the needs of the children in the classroom.

The following sections will describe the three parts of the observation cycle.





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What and When To Observe

Observation was defined earlier in the chapter—watching and listening to learn about children and their development (Stetson et al., 2007). The importance of objectivity in observation/documentation also was previously discussed. Therefore, in this section we focus on these two points about observation: what and when educators should observe.

What does an educator look for when observing? The key focus in observing young children is their growth and development. The educator’s knowledge of child development is essential for structuring observations. In addition to knowing developmental milestones, an early childhood educator recognizes the importance of all domains of development and learning. Observation should collect evidence of cognitive growth, physical development, social-emotional competence, and age-appropriate learning content areas (i.e., math, science, language). In short, an educator must collect evidence of growth and development in all areas. Educators should also be observing to know the individual child better. What is the child interested in, what do they struggle to succeed with, and what does the child most enjoy? These questions are equally crucial to documenting the developmental milestones achieved.

When does an educator observe? Observations can occur from the first greeting of the day until the last goodbye. Observations should be planned and unplanned while always being careful to ensure proper supervision in the classroom. It is essential to get holistic snapshots of the whole child throughout the day. Additionally, observations should happen in both educator-directed and child-directed situations (Jablon et al., 2007). It is also important to observe during structured and unstructured learning periods both indoors and outdoors. Educators can also observe relationships between children and staff, children and their families, and children engaged in play with children.

When planning for observations the educator should conduct informal and formal observations at planned and unplanned times. This way, the observer can experience authentic representations of the child’s skills, knowledge, and behaviors.



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Recording/Documentation

Once an observer has noted significant evidence of a child's development, the next step is to record or document the observation. There are many reasons why educators should document observations and many uses for the documentation collected in early childhood classrooms. Through documentation, educators can show developmental growth and be accountable to families, communities, and administrators, extend the learning for children, and become more confident in their teaching. Just as there are many reasons why educators document, there are many ways to record observations (Jablon et al., 2007).

The most common way to record developmental milestones is anecdotal notes (Bates et al., 2019). **Anecdotal notes or records** are short notes taken by educators capturing observations. They can be taken on a formal document or shortened form (such as sticky notes or index cards). These observations can be written after an event and often focus on specific developmental domains. An anecdotal note should be about one incident that illustrates some aspect of development or learning. An anecdotal record can summarize this incident rather than capture every part of the occurrence, but it should have enough detail to illustrate the specific development. Anecdotal notes are the primary method of documenting daily occurrences of importance. When taken together, they provide multiple data points for reflection and summarization of a child's development and learning. This method is essential in the educator's documentation toolkit. An example of an anecdotal record is in Figure 6.4.

Holly	October 19 2023
Mathematics	
Holly uses the scale to weigh pumpkins.	
She chooses pumpkins of differing sizes and places each one on the scale. After placing a pumpkin on the scale, she looks at the arrow on the scale and exclaims "four" or "five."	

Figure 6.4. Anecdotal Record Example / Photo Credit: Brenda Boyd, CC BY 4.0

Another method of documenting development is running records. A **running record** requires sequentially capturing the details of the child's behavior while the observation is taking place and is written in the present tense. Thus, a running record requires the observer to be out of the classroom action to capture the needed details (Jablon et al., 2007). Because a running record is time and energy-intensive and requires the observer to step out of the action, it is often reserved for those instances when an educator needs to know more about a behavior or its context before responding to it. For example, suppose a child displays adverse reactions to certain situations or acts aggressively toward other children, and the educator cannot successfully redirect them. In that case, a running record may provide details to help guide this behavior in the future. An example of a running record is in Figure 6.5.

Holly	October 29 2023 9:10 - 9:20 am
<p>Holly enters the classroom with her mother and walks immediately to her cubby. She drops her coat on the floor near her cubby and ignores her mother's request to hang the coat in her cubby. She moves quickly to the dramatic play area and enters the ongoing play with two other children. She says "I want to play baking cookies" and the other children reject this proposal, saying "We are playing vet hospital. Do you want to be the cat or the dog?" Holly accepts this alternative plan, slipping on a pair of "cat ears" on a head band, dropping to her knees and says "Meow". She lifts her right hand to her face, sticks her tongue out, and moves her head, not quite licking her hand. She moves about the dramatic play area on her knees, continuing to say "meow" repeatedly. Holly approaches another child and reaches out with her right hand, swiping at the child's leg. The other child cries out and backs away from Holly. Holly moves toward the child and again swipes at her leg with her right hand. The child continues to cry out and back away. Holly stands up, takes the ears off her head, and moves slowly to the art area. She stands by, watching children paint for 1 minute, ignoring the teacher's offer to join them. She walks slowly away from the art area and goes to her cubby. She pushes her coat out of the way and sits down in her cubby. She watches the activity in the classroom for 2 minutes. A teacher approaches her. Holly twists her body around to the right, hiding her face in her coat.</p>	

Figure 6.5. *Running Record Example / Photo Credit: Brenda Boyd, CC BY 4.0*

Another method of documentation is **work samples**. These are examples of the work produced by the child in the classroom and illustrate the child's development and learning. These can be writing samples, paintings or other art projects, or examples of fine motor work such as cutting. Work samples can also include photos of the child at play, such as a child building in the block center or engaged in a science activity. Figure 6.6 presents an example of a work sample. Note that the written documentation accompanying the sample provides an interpretation of the developmental significance of the work. A compilation of multiple work samples collected over time is called a **portfolio**. Many educators believe that portfolios are the best type of authentic assessment, displaying what a child can do and reflecting their development. These portfolios can be shared with families, providing them with cherished mementos of their child's time in the classroom. More importantly, a portfolio can be an excellent way to document growth over time. When compiling a portfolio, ensure that it does not become just a scrapbook of photos. Instead, it should cover all areas of development and learning, presenting strong evidence of growth. Portfolios can be time-consuming, so a clear plan of what to document is helpful.



Art March 27 2023

Holly uses art to capture her learning. In a measuring activity, Holly must find three objects, one longer than her shoe, one the same length, and one shorter than her shoe. She found Blueberry (Gavin's stuffed bear) was the same length as her shoe. After writing Blueberry on the data collection chart, Holly drew this picture of him.

Figure 6.6. Work Sample Example / Photo Credit: Brenda Boyd, CC BY 4.0



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Checklists and **rating scales** also document a child's development, skills, and knowledge. A checklist in its simplest form is just what it sounds like—a list of skills or developmental milestones to check off as achieved. A checklist may be organized sequentially, with the earliest emerging behaviors first on the list and more mature abilities placed later on the list. Early learning programs may create checklists for a specific classroom or to align with a curriculum. However, off-the-shelf checklists exist. Figure 6.7 presents an example of a partial checklist focused on a specific age range and a developmental domain.

Physical and Motor Development Checklist 18-24 Months

- Climbs on and off furniture without help
- Walks up and down stairs holding on
- Throws a ball
- Kicks a ball
- Uses feet to propel riding toys
- Pours, fills, and digs in the sand
- Helps with dressing themselves
- Tells caregiver when their diaper is wet

Figure 6.7. Checklist Example / Photo Credit: Brenda Boyd, CC BY 4.0

Rating scales are like checklists; however, instead of an item marked either yes or no, rating scales offer a continuum for rating a skill or behavior. Thus, a rating scale informs how frequently or how much a behavior or skill occurs.

Table 6.1 shows a blank rating scale. The form indicates the frequency with which developmental milestones occur. While checklists and rating scales are faster to complete than the narrative methods of documentation discussed, they lack rich information about a child found in narrative methods. Refrain from relying solely on checklists and rating scales; pair them with narrative documentation methods.

Behavior/ Skill	Usually	Frequently	Rarely	Never	Comments
Climbs on and off furniture without help					
Walks up and down stairs, holding on					
Throws a ball					
Kicks a ball					
Uses feet to propel riding toy					

Table 6.1 Rating Scale

Note: This table lists five behaviors or skills with boxes to check indicating how frequently the behavior occurs.

When using any of these documentation methods, remember the earlier warnings about bias creeping into observation and writing of documentation.

Reflection

Do you have experience with any of the types of documentation described here? Do you prefer one over the other? If you have not documented observations, which of these methods are you most likely to use? Why?



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Interpretation

The last part of the observation cycle is interpreting documented observations. Interpretation requires the expertise of the prepared educator who understands child development, developmentally appropriate practice, and the individuality of each child and family.

When interpreting observation data, educators must attend to many factors that influence how a child behaves, including the stage of development, child health, and cultural and individual experiences that make each child unique. Interpretation requires skill and experience and can have severe consequences for children if there is bias or inaccurate information in the documentation. Because of this serious nature, using various means to document on differing days and in several environments is essential. It is also helpful if various individuals can provide documentation and interpretation. What

one educator may observe, another may not—we all notice different things and have different perspectives.

All educators benefit from reflecting on the observations and documentation they have made in a classroom. However, many educators wonder how to find time for this practice. One recommendation is to find a time that already exists within the day. Naptime, before families arrive for the day, after families depart, during staff meetings, or curriculum planning, all are times when reflecting on observational data might be possible. Finding time to interpret observational data may be difficult, but the information gathered is often more helpful with reflection.

Interpretation and reflection may result in a summary of observations may result in complete summative assessment tools, like a checklist or a developmental continuum. This process involves synthesizing all the collected observations into an overview of the child's current developmental level across various developmental and learning domains. For example, an educator may spend time at the end of a quarter or semester reviewing the observational data collected on a child. The review and reflection result in a summary, like an average, which can identify where a child is in terms of completed developmental milestones (on a checklist) or where the child's development lies along a developmental continuum. Figure 6.8 illustrates how multiple observations can be synthesized into a summary of a child's development.

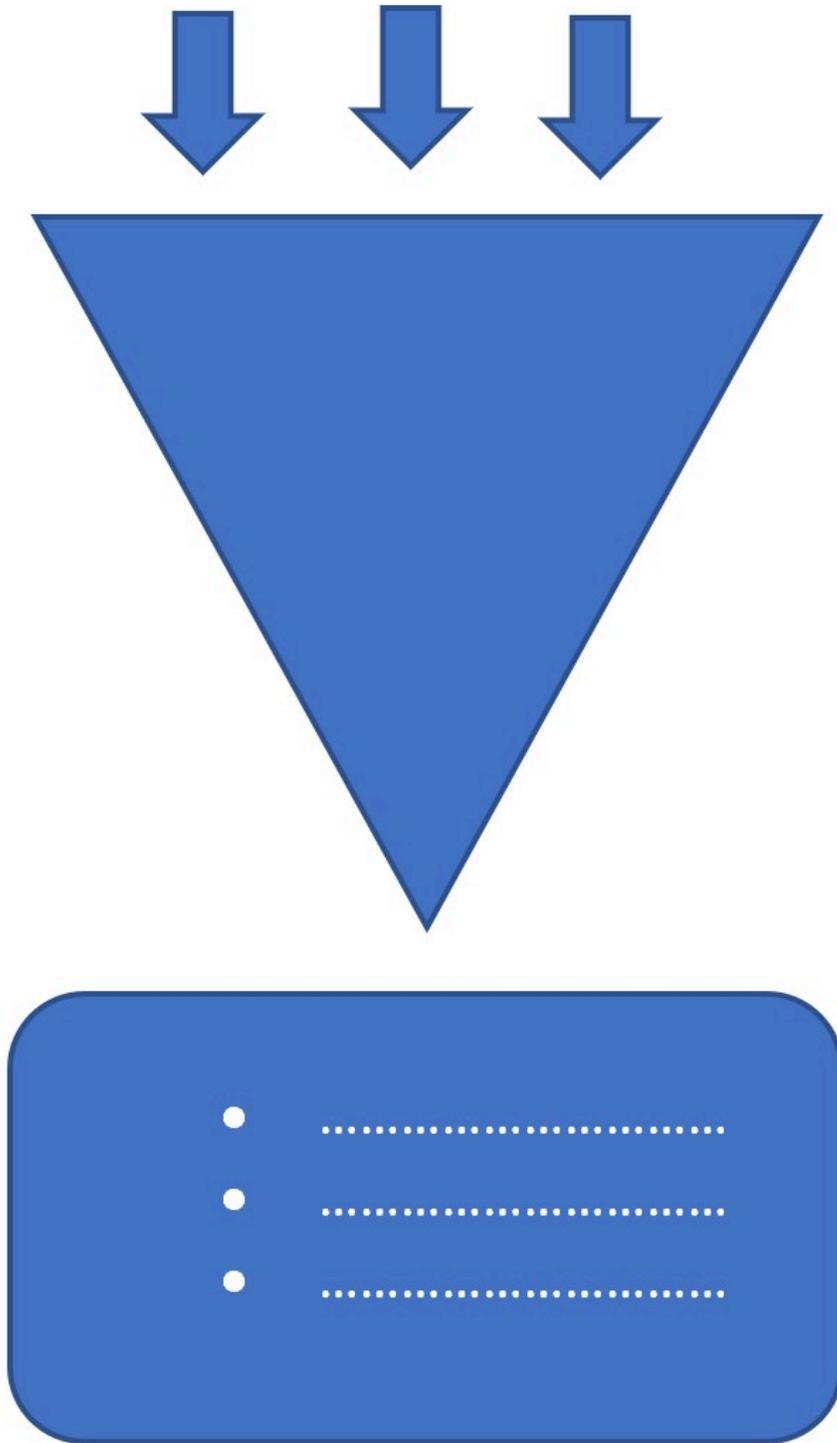


Figure 6.8. Funneling Data into a Summary / Photo Credit: Brenda Boyd, CC BY 4.0



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6.4 HOW OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT INFORM TEACHING

Brenda Boyd Brown, Ph.D.

Effective teachers understand that observation and assessment are very important in curriculum development, implementation, and teaching. Observations and assessments are essential to help inform teaching practices and guide learning activities. They are a looking glass into the child's physical abilities, interests, strengths, and learning and should be used to inform what the educator does next.

Through observation an educator can determine if the content planned for the children was absorbed, if a child is struggling developmentally in any areas, or if the teaching strategies effectively support students' learning and can provide information for sharing with families about child growth and development.

Having well-planned, intentional, developmentally appropriate daily activities gives teachers solid information about **scaffolding** children's learning and developing curriculum for their classroom. Scaffolding is providing support and guidance to children as they learn new skills and gradually removing the support as children learn the skills.

To illustrate how a teacher might use observations to impact curriculum choices for an individual child, reconsider the scenario presented in the work sampling document of Holly's engagement in a measurement activity (see Figure 6.9).

Holly uses art to capture her learning. In a measuring activity, Holly must find three objects: one longer than her shoe, one the same length, and one shorter than her shoe. She found that Blueberry (Gavin's stuffed bear) was the same length as her shoe. After writing Blueberry on the data collection chart, Holly drew this picture of him.

This behavior, observed in a natural environment as children are engaged in play, provides the teacher with a wealth of information about the child's learning, development, and interests. This observations and authentic assessment give a snapshot of what is happening in the classroom. They can give the teacher information about Holly's interests and development that could inform future activity plans for Holly and the classroom in general.

Using the narrative attached to the work sample in Figure 6.8 as an anecdotal record. Holly's teacher used this observation to plan how to scaffold her learning. Table 6.2 shows an example of a curriculum plan tied to the observation.

Identify child's interest	Holly has been using art to represent her learning and has shown some interest in mathematics concepts (i.e., non-standard measurement)
Identify curriculum or assessment content area:	Art and cognition
Part of the daily routine:	Art table during choice time
Description of planned learning experience:	Children will utilize the art media provided to create representations of groups of objects and associate that group with a numeral.
Consider children's developmental levels:	Holly showed an ability to measure objects using standard measurement tools but has not been exposed to the concepts of numerals to represent the number of objects in a group. This initial exposure may not be entirely successful, but using art media should draw Holly (and other children) into this activity.
Scaffolding strategies	Using small counting bears, teachers will model how to create a group of bears, placing some bears into a circular plastic ring. Then, select an art medium to create a picture of the group and write the number of bears. Teachers will encourage children to imitate the process, choosing their objects and the type of art media (pencil drawing, markers, paint, or chalk) to represent the group and the numeral. Number cards, showing the number of the objects and the corresponding numeral will be available to support children's understanding of the numeral-number correspondence. Talk to children about numbers and numerals and various ways to create representations of them.

Table 6.2 Holly's Curriculum Plan

When using observations for planning for children, remember that learning is a continuum of growth that occurs over time and at differing rates across the domains of development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2008). Thus, it is vital to remember that children may exhibit development at one level in one domain and be either ahead or behind that development in another. It is also critical to note that this authentic assessment is unlike a formal, standardized test, resulting in a cut-and-dried outcome. Instead, authentic assessment will provide rich information about a child and guide teaching practices. Expectations of a narrow and specific behavior from the child in response to curriculum based on observation would be inappropriate.

To summarize, observation and assessment are intricately connected to pedagogy or teaching. Observing children provides data from which an educator plans curriculum. Observation subsequently helps the educator assess the child's learning from the curriculum, providing more evidence of growth and development. It is important to ensure that observation and assessment are culturally responsive and as free from bias

as possible. The data collected in observation also assists the educator in adapting the curriculum to meet children's needs. In the scenario with Holly, the plan the teacher wrote after observing her play becomes the curriculum. Assessment will occur through another observation after the plan is executed, and the teacher can determine if the goal of playing with numerals and artistically representing them deepens and strengthens Holly's learning. Through careful observation, documentation interpretation, and reflection, teachers can plan and implement an effective curriculum so each child can thrive as they master major developmental milestones.



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Reflection

Has your idea of how assessment can inform teaching changed now that you have finished the chapter? If so, in what ways? What questions do you have about how this process can be applied to the early childhood educator?

6.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Brenda Boyd Brown, Ph.D.

Summary

Authentic, naturalistic observation has been a part of early childhood education since its inception. Increased pressure for standards and accountability in education has impacted early childhood education, but efforts to ensure assessment in ECE remains developmentally appropriate and have mainly been successful.

Observation and assessment remain essential skills for productive early childhood educators. Although risks exist if observation and documentation are not objective and unbiased, high-quality documentation of objective observation is a critical tool for responsive teaching. An educator's toolkit should contain a variety of methods of documentation and skill in reviewing, summarizing, and synthesizing observational data for periodic assessment of a child's development. The information provided by this assessment assists in the creation of responsive curricula. Assessment done in this manner results in essential information for responsive teaching that meets the needs of children.

Review Questions

1. Have observation and assessment always been a part of early childhood education?
2. How did changes in educational philosophy (such as the No Child Left Behind Act) influence the use of assessment in early childhood education?

3. What is the most crucial purpose for assessment in early childhood education, according to the authors of “Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessment”?
4. Define assessment and describe how it is used in early childhood education. Describe what a culturally responsive assessment might look like.
5. Define observation and describe how it is used in early childhood education.
6. How are assessment and observation related? Give an example of how an observation might show cultural bias.
7. Do assessment and observation mean the same thing?
8. What is formative assessment?
9. What is summative assessment, and how is it different from a formative assessment?
10. What is authentic assessment? Describe what it would look like in an early childhood classroom.
11. Provide an example of a formal assessment.
12. What is norm-referenced assessment? How is it applicable in early childhood education?
13. What is a standardized assessment?
14. Define objective and subjective documentation.
15. Provide an example of subjectively written documentation. Improve it by making it more objective.
16. Why is objectivity in documentation critical?
17. Describe the cycle of assessment. How is it iterative?
18. Describe anecdotal records or notes.
19. Describe running records. How are they different from anecdotal records? Why would you use a running record?
20. Describe work samples.
21. What is a portfolio?
22. Describe checklists and rating scales and their similarities and differences.
23. Describe the process of interpreting collected documentation. Include the idea of synthesizing various pieces of documentation into a summary.
24. Describe how assessment results can inform curriculum planning and teaching.

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CHAPTER 7: THE VALUE OF PLAY



Restaurant Play / Photo Credit: Jennifer Karshna, CC BY 4.0

Overview

Susan overheard the children in her Dragonfly preschool room playing restaurant. “That’s not what I ordered!” one child, Shandra, exclaimed. Jack replied, “You did not order from the menu. You have to get something from the menu!” They were playing restaurant. Michelle, Shay, and Tia came over and asked what was on the menu. Jack said the menu had soup, burgers, spaghetti, and chicken nuggets. Tia asked about the special of the day. Soon children decided on roles for themselves and there were three customers, a cook, and a server. The play continued with ordering, cooking, eating, and paying bills. Two more children joined the restaurant play, and one watched.

Later in the day the children from the Dragonfly classroom were outside on the playground. Kai was sitting alone playing in the sand and filling round containers. It had rained earlier in the day so the sand was wet. Shay came up to Kai and said, “Are you making pies?” Kai replied “Yes.” Shay asked, “What kind of pie? Can it be served in a restaurant?” Kai said, “Berry pie.” Then a group of children ran up to them and said, “Oh no, hot lava! You are in the hot lava!” Everyone ran to the play structure, climbed to the top, and some expressed relief that they were all safe from the lava. They looked down at the lava for a couple of minutes until Shandra announced: “The lava is cool now.” A game of chase started and the children ran around the playground until Jack stopped because he noticed a worm on the ground. This led to conversations about the worm: why it was out, where it was going, and what it eats.

Although play is a common topic, people think of many different things when they hear the word *play*, and describing it is complex. This chapter begins with a description of play and continues with information about how play supports children’s development in all domains. Then, seven common types of play are described. The last section will address how play happens in the early childhood classroom and includes information about how some children struggle when playing by themselves and/or with others.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify the three key components of play.
- List and describe six types of play.
- Analyze a play scenario and for each developmental domain (physical, cognitive, and social/emotional) illustrate one way in which children are learning.
- Identify and describe the three categories of common challenges some children experience in play.

Key Terms

- Activity
- Constructive play
- Dramatic play
- Experience
- Exploratory play
- Expressive language
- Extrinsic
- Intrinsic
- Outdoor/nature play
- Physical play
- Receptive language
- Risky play
- Sensorimotor play

Attributions

1. Chapter opening image: Restaurant Play by Jennifer Karshna, for WA Open ProfTech, © [SBCTC](#), [CC BY 4.0](#)

7.1 WHAT IS PLAY?

Jennifer Karshna, Ph.D.

Play is common in childhood, especially for young children, yet it is difficult to describe (Mardel, 2019; Piaget, 1962; Sutton-Smith, 1997). The presence of play for young children and as part of early childhood education (ECE) has persisted over time (Piaget, 1973; Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Play is also considered an aspect of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2020). Before you read further, take a moment to write down your description of play. In a few sentences or bullet points, how would you describe play? Save your notes so you can compare them with what is described in this chapter.

One reason play is difficult to describe is that it is creative and fluid. As children are playing they try things out and develop ideas. It is not planned. The children act, talk, and do. Play is also personal—the player engages based on their own knowledge, understanding, and experiences. Play is a series or set of behaviors and actions (Piaget, 1962). It involves all domains of development—social/emotional, cognitive, and physical. Play is **extrinsic**—outside of and external to a person and observable. It is also **intrinsic**—within and inside a person and not observable. This means there are aspects of play that are external and can be seen and some that are internal and difficult to see (Parton, 1932; Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990; Sutton-Smith, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978).

Children make choices about what to play with, how to use the materials (toys), and whether or not there will be others involved. They make these decisions based on who and what is in the environment. For example, when four-year-old Joey arrives and enters the classroom, Joey plays with puzzles every day. When he arrives on Wednesday, he goes directly to the puzzle shelf and pulls down a puzzle. He glances over at three peers who are building a boat with blocks. Joey looks back and forth at the puzzle and the block building several times. Hesitantly, he sets the puzzle back on the shelf and goes over to the block area and says, “I am going to build a very big ship,” and starts to build next to his peers’ boat.

In this example, Joey is originally interested in working a puzzle, but the boat building also captured his attention. He pauses before he starts the puzzle and seems to think about what he wants to do. The behavior—playing with puzzles or blocks—is observable and extrinsic. The decision making is intrinsic, an internal cognitive and social/emotional process of deciding and following through with the decision. A careful observer who has

a relationship with Joey and knows him well could comment on Joey's motivation (Erikson, 1963), interests (Dewey, 1913), and thinking (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). Although the careful observer could comment on Joey's motivation, the comments are a hypothesis. Additionally, Joey's actions may change at any moment. Play is creative and fluid—young children's actions change due to shifts in interests, developmental levels, and for various other reasons that are unseen. Therefore, play is complex, and when you think about all that is involved, you can see how it is difficult to describe.

Description of Play

Although play is complex, there are key components that can be used to describe it. Three words that have been used to describe play are: *choice*, *wonder*, and *delight* (Mardell, 2019). Even for infants and toddlers, play includes choices, such as deciding what to play, how to play it, and for how long they want to play. It also includes imagination and making up the things that may be different from reality (Luckenbill et al., 2019).

Joey made his own decision about whether to play with the puzzle or blocks. Wonder relates to curiosity—Joey is curious about what his peers are doing. The story of Joey's play continues: Joey starts building his big ship and while doing so talks with his peers. They discuss how they are using blocks to build their ships and begin to discuss trips. Joey says, "If we are going on a long trip, we will need food!" He runs to the dramatic play area and brings back plastic food. Two more children join the play, and the ships are redesigned and enlarged so that the children can get on the ship, take a trip, and eat food. One person says, "Let's go to dinosaur land!" The other children agree, and the journey begins.

The children are focused, talking, and laughing at different ideas. This second part of the story shows delight. In this example, the laughter is an obvious sign of delight; however, enjoyment and joy can be experienced in many ways, and it is not always with laughter. The example also shows that the children are using their imaginations and making up ideas.



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7.2 PLAY AND CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

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With the opportunities for choice, wonder, and delight (Mardell, 2019), play can be thought of as an **experience** rather than an **activity**. Experience and activity are not the same. Experiences involve personal connections and are defined as “something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through” (Merriam-Webster, 2005b, p. 440). The various definitions of *activity* include action and being active (Merriam-Webster, 2005a, p. 13). Although play is active, it is also personal and involves children bringing their knowledge of the world to build upon, either alone or with others during play experiences (Parten, 1932; Piaget, 1962; Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990; Smith, 2010; Sutton-Smith, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). A well-designed environment can be used by a skillful teacher for play experiences as a priority for supporting children’s learning. [Chapter 8](#) will address the environment.

Play as an experience can result in benefits for children as it creates conditions conducive to growth and development (Dewey, 1938; NAEYC, 2020; Piaget, 1973). Despite the benefits of play, academic instruction (such as learning the names of letters and numbers) is valued over play in some early learning programs (Almon & Miller, 2011). This is creating a reduction in opportunities for children to play. Because it is important for children’s development, the American Academy of Pediatrics published a report to guide doctors with information needed to talk with families about play, including writing a prescription for it (Yogman et al., 2018).

Katz (2010) wrote about “standards of experience” and described how instead of emphasizing performance standards (such as identifying letters and numbers), teachers and other early learning professionals can think about types of experiences offered for children. Rather than academic activities, children can engage in play, which allows them to pursue what is of interest to them and to do so at their own developmental level.

Play experiences create opportunities for children to engage in all areas of development and they promote creative thought and expression (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Carlson, 2011; Dewey, 1913, 1916, 1938; Isbell & Yoshizawa, 2016; Parten, 1932; Piaget, 1962, 1973; Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990; Smith, 2010; Sutton-Smith, 1997; Yogman et al., 2018). Additionally, play is valuable because it can result in practice that builds various skills (Sutton-Smith, 1997). The domains of development are cognitive, physical, social, and emotional. These areas overlap and intersect with each other, and this can be seen during

play. For the purposes of understanding how play supports each developmental domain, the domains will be described separately, but keep in mind that all developmental domains are used when children are playing.

Play is intellectual; it requires thinking. When playing, children represent their thinking symbolically through the use of physical and mental tools (Dewey, 1916; Piaget, 1962, 1973; Vygotsky, 1978). During play, children not only represent their ideas, but they also construct knowledge of the physical and social world (Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). Play requires self-regulation, which builds executive function (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Yogman et al., 2018). As described by Yogman et al. (2018), play helps children develop twenty-first century skills such as creative thinking and problem solving, and these skills use executive functioning.

Equally important to cognition are physical development and social/emotional development. As you read about in [Chapter 4](#), physical development includes fine and gross motor skills as well as movement. When children use materials and toys in play, they use fine and gross motor skills, and in some forms of play children engage in movement and physical activity. Physical development begins before birth as babies move their bodies in the womb and continues throughout childhood (Carlson, 2011). Infants engage in sensorimotor activity, such as waving a rattle and watching it. This type of play is physical and interrelated to cognition development (Dewey, 1913; Erikson, 1963; Piaget, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). Sensorimotor play continues in toddlers with increased mobility as children learn to walk and are continually in motion (Carlson, 2011). There is interest and motivation to move oneself and objects (Dewey, 1913), and at times it can take a lot of effort and/or is sustained for a length of time. This can be observed when watching a one-year-old move objects around the room such as pushing a chair or box, and the primary interest in this play is to move. Preschoolers gain coordination and increasing competence with physical activity (Carlson, 2011). As fine and gross motor skills are refined, coordination and competence are demonstrated in the way children play with toys that connect sensory materials such as play dough and clay, and writing/drawing materials. They also use large motor skills such as running, jumping, and climbing. As children get older, they have the motor ability to build with materials such as Legos and can play games like hopscotch.

Social/emotional development is also important for children. Children play with adults and with each other; therefore, they engage in social interaction. There is an intrinsic, emotional aspect to play. The previous description of play as involving choice, wonder, and delight (Mardell, 2019) provides a summary of the emotional aspects of play. Each word—*choice*, *wonder*, and *delight*—involves emotions. Children choose based on interests and motivation (Dewey, 1913). Wonder involves curiosity and is usually related to positive

emotional interest. Delight describes pleasure and joy. Imagine three children playing outside where there are rocks that are large enough to stay in place but small enough for a child to move. One child turns a rock over. The children find bugs and worms that were underneath the rock, and one exclaims, "Wow, look at that!" Another says: "He is moving, look, he is crawling really fast!" The third says: "Where is he going?" A debate starts about whether or not the bug is scared, hungry, or looking for a new home. In this example, the children decided to play with the rock and move it, were excited about what they found under it, and wondered about what the creatures were doing. Take a minute to think about your emotions when you can make choices. What do you wonder about, and how do you feel when you hear the word *delight*?



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Play involves all of the developmental domains. The play of very young children—infants—is quite different from the play of older children. These differences are a result of development and life experiences. As children get older, their play becomes more sophisticated. Developmental progression is a basis for some theories based on Piaget (1962, 1973) and Parten (1932). Play is complex, and there are many ways to examine children's play and the benefits of it. It can be helpful to use the domains as a framework for understanding play and development. Reading about the types of play brings additional clarification of play and its role in children's development and early learning.

Types of Play

As established at the beginning of this chapter, play is complex. For the purposes of studying and understanding play, it is often divided into types of play (Luckenbill et al., 2019; Smith, 2010). The categories are complex and they overlap (Smith, 2010). Nevertheless, categorizing play aids in understanding it. This section is categorized into six types: **sensorimotor**, **physical**, **exploratory**, **constructive**, **dramatic**, and **outdoor/nature play**. **Risky play**, which could be classified as its own type of play, is included with nature play because outdoor experiences create good opportunities for risk taking.

Sensorimotor play begins early in life and is common in infants and toddlers (Luckenbill et al., 2019; Piaget, 1962, 1973; Smith, 2010). In sensorimotor play, children engage with physical movement and input from the senses. The play actions can include materials, the child's own body, other people, and sensory action and exploration. Actions may be repetitive. They also can build and expand from the repetitions (Piaget, 1962).

Infants and toddlers often engage in exploratory play, although older children will explore new materials (Smith, 2010). When engaged in exploratory play, children are learning about the materials they explore. Think about when you get a new item, such as a new car, computer, sewing machine, or type of yarn. You explore by taking time to get to know the new features and how it feels to use the new item. Similarly, in exploratory play, children get to know the materials. Exploratory play may be referred to as practice play (Piaget, 1962) or functional play (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990). In this chapter, the term *exploratory* is used because it is descriptive of what children do when engaged in this type of play. Some of these forms of play transform over time with school-aged children. For example, a child may put a large block in their mouth but later learn to stack the block onto another block.



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When children have an understanding of materials, they can use them in a purposeful manner. If they are not familiar with the materials, they explore and learn how the materials work rather than intentionally creating with the materials. Constructive play can be described as using open-ended materials to create things (Luckenbill, et al., 2019; Smith, 2010). Think about children playing with blocks. They use the blocks with purpose to build roads, ships, airplanes, castles, beds, etc. Through exploratory play, they learned they can stack the blocks and this knowledge leads to purposeful use of the materials. Or, for example, children exploring with sticks may include waving and breaking sticks. Some sticks are not as easy to wave or break. Those sticks might be used to build or stir.



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Figure 7.1. Untitled / Photo Credit: mrjohn5, Pixabay License

Constructive play can lead to and be used with dramatic play. Dramatic play is known by other names such as pretend and fantasy play. In dramatic play, children take on roles and act out scenarios. In imitation, for example, the child acting as a firefighter can be a part of dramatic play (Erikson, 1963; Piaget, 1962; TEDxTalks, 2013). Children may build a fire station with blocks and other materials, perhaps sticks as hoses, and once built, the play emerges into dramatic play because they become firefighters.



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When dramatic play involves others, it is socio-dramatic play (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990). Socio-dramatic play most often begins when children are three. Toddlers usually engage in dramatic play alone. Older children, even beyond preschool years, engage in socio-dramatic play, although it is not inappropriate for them to play alone, in any type of play.

Parten (1932) identified six ways children participate in socio-dramatic play, which can be called engagement strategies. The six engagement strategies are on a continuum ranging from not involved to active participation. The engagement strategies are: unoccupied, solitary, onlooker, parallel, associative, cooperative. Unoccupied play is not playing or doing anything in particular; solitary is playing alone; onlooker is watching others play, usually showing interest but not getting involved; parallel is playing next to another but not together; associative is playing next to, at times talking and/or looking at the other person, but not playing the same thing; and cooperative is children playing together, doing the same thing, and creating one storyline.



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Unoccupied and solitary can be classified under dramatic play. Onlooker, parallel, associative, and cooperative fit into socio-dramatic play. Furthermore, Parten's study (1932) revealed that the engagement strategies can be considered as progressive stages because the findings indicated that older preschoolers used cooperative play, but younger children did not. My observations as a preschool teacher for more than 20 years, as an on-site trainer for early childhood programs, and as a college instructor have been consistent with Parten's findings that the stages show a developmental continuum. Children will engage in "earlier" stages, but until developmentally ready to do so, they do not use later

stages such as cooperative play. Socio-dramatic play can be fascinating, informative, and complex to observe, as well as useful in the teaching and learning process.



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An example of constructive play used in conjunction with dramatic/socio-dramatic play may illustrate the complexity and value of play as part of the teaching and learning. A child may be involved in a socio-dramatic play situation but primarily engaging in constructive play, such as in building a boat or an airplane for others to use in the cooperative play story line. Nevertheless, the social involvement is significant because the child is participating with others and must construct in accordance with the play topic. Each child who is playing must follow the storyline and contribute, which requires knowledge, language skills to comprehend and add to the storyline, and self-regulation.

For example, if the play topic is taking a trip and traveling on an airplane, it would not be appropriate to construct a boat. If a child has built boats and has no experience with airplanes but is interested in playing with the others, an airplane must be constructed. A boat will not work for air travel. The child must now expand thinking and self-regulate to stay on task to build an airplane. The child may or may not have information about airplanes. Lack of knowledge and/or other skills creates opportunities for learning as well as demonstrates the sophistication and complexity of children's play.

This example illustrates that there are implicit rules in socio-dramatic play (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). It also brings to light Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (1978). The ZPD is a range of functioning and/or completing a task. The range moves from needing assistance to complete the task to doing it independently. A child can function at a higher level with assistance from others. In this case, if the builder has minimal information about airplanes and has never been on one, the peers can provide the needed information for constructing the plane that includes the inside accommodations for travelers.

Additionally, according to Vygotsky's theory (1978), preschool children function at their highest level when engaged in socio-dramatic play. Socio-dramatic play requires self-regulation and executive functioning (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978). It is also

important to note that children's interests can provide motivation for trying new things (Dewey, 1913).



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Children also engage in physical play. Physical play is active and robust in which children are engaged in gross motor movement (Smith, 2010; Pellegrini, 2011). Children of all ages engage in physical play, but it looks different in infants and usually involves actions such as kicking legs and waving arms (Pellegrini, 2011). Physical play has also been referred to as big body play (Carlson, 2011); although adults can be uncomfortable with this type of play, it is beneficial for children's physical development.

Rough and tumble play is a form of physical play that is done with others (Carlson, 2011; Smith, 2010). Rough and tumble play is different from fighting. In rough and tumble play, the goal is to play together rather than to harm or work against one another (Carlson, 2011). It occurs at all ages. It may be hard to imagine infants in rough and tumble play, but the examples given by Luckenbill et al. (2019) provide a good illustration: "infants crawling over other infants" and "pulling opposite each other on a length of fabric" (p. 9).



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Physical play often occurs outdoors. Outdoor and nature play has been gaining attention in recent years. Children's outdoor experiences, especially with nature, have been decreasing, which may be contributing to developmental issues (Louv, 2005). In this chapter, outdoor and nature play are considered as one category. Nature is present outdoors, including places such as sidewalks, manufactured playgrounds, or concrete surfaces such as parking lots, which seem to be devoid of natural elements. Weather, worms, insects, leaves, trees, weeds, etc. are part of nature, and these are just a few

examples of things that can be found in most outdoor environments that children visit on a regular basis.



Figure 7.2. *Elementary Students Play on Playground / Photo Credit: Allison Shelley for EDUimages, CC BY-NC 4.0*

One way to think about outdoor/nature play is through thinking about outdoor spaces in early childhood programs as outdoor learning environments (OLE) (Cooper, 2015; Falk, 2018; [Nature Explore Program](#)). The OLE affords opportunities that are different from what is found indoors. It is not surprising that children's play is different outdoors (Engelen et al., 2018). Nature provides loose parts (Nicholson, 1971,) such as sticks, rocks, and logs that can be moved around and used in many different ways. Children tend to be active in the OLE because there is more space for running and other large motor activities such as playing on playground equipment or using natural elements. A log or tree, if permitted, can promote physical play, including climbing. Additionally, early childhood teachers allow more physical activity outdoors (Storli & Sandseter, 2019).

The OLE also affords opportunities for risky play. Risky play is children taking on risks. This often causes adults concerns over safety even though children have the capability to negotiate risks (Keeler, 2020). Children may see a risky situation and do one of the following: engage, change it so it is less risky, or choose not to engage (Lavrysen et al., 2017). A child may see a large rock and choose to try to climb it, get a block to stand on to assist with climbing, or do nothing with the rock. Engaging with risk, with or

without changing it, is beneficial for children's physical, social/emotional, and cognitive development (Bento & Costa, 2018; Keeler, 2020; Lavrysen et al., 2017; McClain & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2016).



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The six categories of play provide a framework for understanding play. All types of play are a part of DAP (NAEYC, 2020). Each play type has been described separately but is not exclusive. The types of play can be combined and often overlap when children are playing.

Attributions

1. Figure 7.1: [Untitled](#) by [mrjohn5](#) is released under [Pixabay License](#)
2. Figure 7.2: [Elementary students play on playground](#) by Allison Shelley for EDUimages is released under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#)

7.3 PLAY IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM

Jennifer Karshna, Ph.D.

Play and its value for children was discussed earlier in this chapter. Also, explained was the importance of developmentally appropriate classrooms containing physical spaces with daily schedules that incorporate blocks of time for play (NAEYC, 2020). This includes time for indoor and outdoor play. A well-designed environment can be used by a skillful teacher to prioritize play experiences as a way for supporting children's learning. It is a teacher's responsibility and a core teaching practice to support children's learning from play. This includes observing and intervening to facilitate and extend children's actions, interactions, and thinking. A few key aspects regarding the environment that relate to play are described in this section.

Indoors, children need time to get involved and fully engage in play, with a minimum of 45 minutes needed (Hanscom, 2016). In a well-run classroom, children can engage in free play for up to one and a half hours. This gives children time to choose what they want to do and fully engage in play (Koepp et al., 2022). It also allows for the opportunity for children to create through constructive play and to use the creation in dramatic play. Imagine how disappointing it would be to create an elaborate castle but not have time to dress up and play in it! Additionally, children need the materials and space to create the castle. Lack of open-ended materials and not enough space can result in missed opportunities for creative play, which also means they are not benefiting from such experiences.



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As previously mentioned, the outdoor learning environment (OLE) provides opportunities for differing types of play, especially vigorous physical activity (Engelen et al., 2018) and

risky play (Keeler, 2020; Storli & Sandseter, 2019). Outside time is typically not considered recess and a break from learning because young children are learning all the time. Instead of recess, play and engagement in the OLE can be considered additional opportunities and enhancement of indoor learning (Mustapa et al., 2015).

Weather is often given as a reason for not playing outdoors. Not going outside when it is raining or snowing can contribute to missed opportunities. Although at first it can appear as a daunting task to get children to put on outdoor gear such raincoats, hats, mittens, and boots, it becomes part of the routine and presents opportunities for practicing fine motor and self-help skills. The rain that is often present here in the Pacific Northwest is a wonderful resource for play! Water makes mud, which can be used in making pies and soups, and especially for children who enjoy sensory activities and pretend play.



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Allowing children to use the environment, especially outdoors, is also a challenge for teachers (Cheng et al., 2023). This can relate to weather, such as playing in puddles, as well as with using items from the environment. Loose parts such as sticks, rocks, and wood chips can be added to soups and pies (perhaps made with water and mud) and can be used in other ways. Children use items in the environment for dramatic play. One teacher described the children using wood chips as food for playing restaurant, specifically Happy Meals at the McDonald's drive-through. The outdoor playhouse was the building; children served the wood chips to other children (and teachers) as they walked or rode bikes to the drive through (M. Naw, personal communication, January 15, 2021). Another teacher described how the children organized themselves to re-enact the story "Three Billy Goats Gruff" using a log as a bridge for the troll (T. Sy, personal communication, December 28, 2020). Both teachers said the children played these storylines many times, and each time the play included more than one child and took place outdoors. Additionally, stationary items such as large rocks and logs can be used for physical and risky play.



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The early childhood classroom, indoors and out, should be an environment that is rich with opportunities for play. **Chapter 8** will address the environment. As you read the chapter, think about how environmental design creates opportunities for the different types of play.

Issues and Challenges with Play

Although children all over the world play (TEDxTalks, 2013), some face challenges in doing so. Take a moment to think about what play involves, especially constructive and dramatic/socio-dramatic play. To construct, children need to know about the materials and how to put them together, have the physical development to work with the materials, use creative thinking, and stay on task. To engage in dramatic play, they need to have a topic to play (cooking, airplane, boat, family, etc.), use creative thinking, and if socio-dramatic, they need to be able to follow the storyline, self-regulate, and sometimes they need the skills needed to enter a group. An additional type of play that has been gaining attention is risky play that involves understanding one's own skills and the emotional willingness to try something challenging (Keeler, 2020). This list of skills and abilities is a general list. You can imagine what it takes to engage in play and how some children face challenges.

Some of the common challenges and issues children face with play can be grouped into three categories: materials, language, and other. These categories were created to explain the challenges. The descriptions in each category are not comprehensive. The purpose is to give the reader a general idea of reasons children may struggle with play, especially in an early childhood classroom.

Often children use materials and toys when they play. As you have read, during exploratory play, children explore and gain an understanding of materials, and in constructive play the materials are used purposefully. As infants and toddlers, they look at, move around, and try to work the materials. One issue that can arise is when infants and toddlers do not take initiative to explore with materials.

Sometimes older children have difficulty using materials. This may be because they

have limited experience with the materials; therefore, they need time to engage in exploratory play. Or, a child may need support to learn to use the materials purposefully. Most children gain a sense of using materials through exploratory play, but some do not. An example is a four-year-old who would touch pieces together, but never connect or build. The child did this with any type of toy that had connecting pieces. “Play” with the materials lasted about two minutes, and then this child would throw the toys. This frustrated peers. Often, this child would engage in inappropriate behaviors to gain attention. The situation was resolved when the teachers took time to play with this child and demonstrate how to work the materials. With the knowledge of what to do with the materials, this child could purposefully engage. This child needed the support of the teachers to gain an understanding of and skills for using the materials.

Language is the second category of challenges children may have with play. Challenges with language may not be as easy to see as the challenges with materials. When children play with peers, in constructive or socio-dramatic play, they communicate and most often do so through words. Children need to be able to talk to and understand what peers are saying. **Expressive language** is talking so a person knows what is said being and saying it in a manner that makes sense. **Receptive language** is understanding what is being said. Both expressive and receptive language are a part of play with others, especially socio-dramatic play (Hà, 2022).

Children usually start to engage in cooperative play at about three years (Parten, 1932) and have the speech and language to communicate effectively. Some children do not have this level of speech and language. If a child struggles with saying words, doing so in a way that others can understand, and/or following what is being said, it makes it difficult and frustrating for the child. Children can be very accepting of one another, but the child who is struggling knows that peers are not understanding what is being said or they feel confused by what is going on. This is one of the more challenging areas for teachers because it can be difficult to intervene. When adults enter, children’s play often changes (Rymanowicz, 2015). There is a fine line between interrupting and changing the play versus supporting it and a child who may be struggling. It is not within the scope of this chapter to address interventions; rather, the point is to bring awareness that children can struggle with play and that teachers’ support is needed.

In addition to materials and language, it is important to include physical challenges, such as sitting in a wheelchair with limited access to the play area, not being able to see or hear, or other motor challenges that need creative solutions. A child may not fit into an area or may have coordination difficulties and knock over what is being built. Some interventions for physical challenges can be addressed with environmental design. As you read [Chapter 8](#), you can keep in mind the physical challenges in play You may start to

see the significance of intentionally designed environments and the complexities teachers face in doing so.

The other category also includes not playing for various reasons such as: wandering, flitting about rather than sustaining play, staying in the onlooker stage (Parten, 1932) rather than eventually joining, and being rejected from play. This is a list of common challenges, but it is not comprehensive. With each of these reasons, it is beneficial to have teacher support targeted to help the child gain the needed skills. Once again, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully address challenges in play and how to foster and support children; rather, this chapter will give you an idea of play in an early childhood classroom.

Rejection is worth a special mention because it happens and it can be overlooked in a busy early childhood classroom, especially at full-day programs in which children are there for eight or more hours. In kindergarten through third grade classrooms where children go outside for recess and often play with peers, it can easily go unnoticed. Play, especially cooperative play (Parten, 1932), takes a lot of work. It can be quite difficult when there are more players, which means more roles and more ideas. It also means more personalities and more negotiation. A well-known author, Vivian Gussin Paley, wrote about children's play and pondered inclusion, and specifically stated, "the rejected children know who they are, whether or not they tell us" (1993, p. 15). Here is an example of a mother reporting that her child was upset about a peer moving to a new school. Her child rarely interacted with the one who moved, so she asked why he was so concerned. His reply: "Because he is the mean kid, just like me. We both have no friends to play with." This underscores the importance of teacher observation, assessment, and support during children's play.



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Rejection and the other challenges children face with play are a concern. Not only is it sad to hear about rejection, but the result is also—as with any other reason a child does not play—that a child is not fully participating in the classroom. Play is a part of the curriculum (NAEYC, 2020), and all children need classrooms that allow for full participation and engagement.

7.4 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Jennifer Karshna, Ph.D.

Summary

Play is a key activity for young children and it supports development in all domains. There are differing types of play, some of which are more sophisticated than others, such as cooperative play. Most children progress through different stages and types of play, including exploratory to constructive. However, some children need support because they face challenges. Children's play may be entertaining and amusing, but an understanding of it allows teachers to see the value and role of it in the early childhood classroom. Supporting children's learning through play is a core teaching practice and includes observing and intervening to extend children's engagement. A well-designed environment allows for play and is the topic of the next chapter.

Review Questions

1. What are the three key components of play?
2. What are the six types of play?
3. Give an example of each type of the six types of play.
4. In the opening scenario, what is one example of children engaging in social interactions?
5. In the opening scenario, what is one example of children using language and literacy?
6. In the opening scenario, what is one example of children using physical skills? (Consider fine motor skills such as writing and putting together small pieces, as well as gross motor skills.)

7. What are two specific challenges some children may experience during play?
8. Imagine you are a teacher in a preschool classroom. A prospective parent walks in during free play while on tour of the school. She asks: "I can see children are just playing. When does the teacher do the learning activities?" How would you answer this question?

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CHAPTER 8: EARLY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS



Opening of a Childcare Facility / Photo Credit: U.S. Army Corp of Engineers Europe District, CC BY 2.0

Overview

Imagine you are visiting a preschool classroom at a childcare center that serves children birth through five years. You arrive at 8:30 a.m., and someone in the office tells you to go down the hall to the classroom labeled “Rainbows.” As you walk down the corridor, you notice there is nothing on the walls, and you hear adult voices, some of which sound stressed or in a hurry.

At the preschool classroom, you see some children sitting on a large rug, some playing with toys, and three children who are with adults dropping them off at the center. One teacher is sitting with the children on the rug and looking around the room, periodically calling children’s names to put the toys down and join their friends on the rug. Another

teacher is at a table and appears to be setting up a painting activity. No one seems to notice you are there. The children who are being dropped off find a place to hang up their coats and put their belongings. However, one is crying and saying, “Mommy, don’t go. I don’t want you to leave.” You hear the teacher setting up the activity say: “The art project is set up. Let’s skip circle time.” The teacher on the rug looks confused and comments: “But I have a story picked out.”

As you are standing in the entrance trying to figure out what to do, you look around. There is a bulletin board labeled “Parent Information” with outdated flyers. You also see a poster labeled “Daily Schedule” with “Center Time” listed from 8:30-9:00.

In the room you see bulletin boards with what appears to be sun-faded cartoon-type pictures, each with a border that does not match the items on the board. You see two paintings that appear to be done by children, both of which have corners bent and are hung crookedly under the bulletin boards. The furniture is child-sized and there are shelves lining the walls. Some shelves have material over them so you cannot see what is on the shelf.

The air is stuffy and smells stale. Some children leave the rug and go to the art project. Two of the children in the entryway finished putting away their belongings, said goodbye to the adult dropping them off, and are looking into the classroom. The other is still crying. The mother says, “I am sorry, I need to go to work now. I will be back this afternoon and we can go to the park.” As the mother walks out the door, the child cries a little louder, but no one seems to notice.

How would you feel in this environment? How do you think the children feel? Think about the teachers—what are their feelings and thoughts about their working environment and supporting young children’s development? In Chapter 8 you will read about how the ECE classroom should be designed to support children’s learning and is welcoming for all of those who use it.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe how the early learning environment fits into the teaching and learning process.
- Identify the key elements of a well-designed indoor early learning environment.

- Identify key elements of a well-designed outdoor early learning environment.
- Describe a developmentally appropriate schedule and routine for infant/toddlers and preschool classrooms.

Key Terms

- Interest area
- Loose parts
- Manufactured items
- Moveable items
- Natural items
- Outdoor learning environment (OLE)
- Physical environment
- Social environment
- Stationary items
- Temporal environment

Attributions

1. Chapter opening image: [USACE, K-Town community celebrate opening of child care facility](#) by [U.S. Army Corp of Engineers Europe District](#) is released under [CC BY 2.0](#)

8.1 TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOM

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There are different types of early childhood education (ECE) programs. Center-based, family homes, and Head Start are a few types of ECE programs, each of which promotes learning and development for young children. Although each of these programs promotes children's learning and development, the setting, hours of operation, and other factors are different. Each of the settings is similar in that there are indoor and outdoor areas in which children spend their time. An outdoor space with both manufactured (play structures) and natural elements can be referred to as the **outdoor learning environment (OLE)** (Cooper, 2015).

Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) describes learning environments as “nurturing spaces that support the development of all young children” (n.d., para.1), which is all physical spaces in which children spend time, including those used for caregiving such as diapering and providing meals and snacks. A well-designed learning environment is a welcoming place for all children and adults in which they can focus, engage, learn, and grow (Carter & Curtis, 2014).

Environments affect our mood, our ability to form relationships, our effectiveness in work and play, and our health (Bullard, 2013; Carter & Curtis, 2014). If a child enters care as an infant, the total time spent in an early learning environment may far exceed the time spent in elementary or secondary school combined (Isbell & Exelby, 2001). Therefore, the learning environment is an essential element to a quality ECE program and can have a tremendous influence on children's development.

When considering the ECE classroom, many people think of the **physical environment**, but there are two additional parts to consider. First is the **temporal environment**, which relates to time, such as the daily schedule. The other is the atmosphere, sometimes referred to as the **social environment**. Each of these works together to create a learning environment that is equitable and inviting for all children and conducive to their development in all domains (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2022). (See [Chapter 4](#) for more information on developmental domains.)

The teaching and learning process is complex and exciting for all ages! The phrase “teaching and learning process” is used because the acts of teaching and of learning are

closely linked. The teacher is intentional about teaching something, while at the same time learning about the students. Additionally, learning occurs from peers and others in the environment (Vygotsky, 1978). In the ECE environment children explore, interact, and engage with materials. Teachers carefully observe and scaffold to promote learning in a manner that fits with each child's developmental level, culture, and the context in which they live (Bullard, 2013; Head Start ECLKC, n.d.; Kaplan, 2014; NAEYC, 2022).



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In a well-designed ECE environment, there are teaching and learning opportunities throughout the day—from the time children arrive until when they leave for home. The interactions with adults and peers, engagement with materials, participation in teacher-led activities, and daily experiences provide teaching and learning opportunities. Young children are observant and continually learning. They are also curious and seek to understand the world. Therefore, opportunities for growth and learning are provided by a welcoming atmosphere with responsive adults, a purposeful schedule, and intentional room arrangement.

One example of a well-designed environment is the process of arrival. A teacher greeting children and adults creates a welcoming atmosphere and promotes language and social/emotional development. Talking with the family member who is dropping the child off contributes to building a positive relationship between teachers and families and is an opportunity to discuss any pertinent information that may impact a child's day. When toddlers and older children put away their belongings, hang up their coat, etc. they are learning self-help skills, sequencing (example: put things away before trying to take off coat). If their names are on a cubby or where they hang their coat, they are learning literacy skills. In many programs, after finishing greetings, taking care of belongings, and saying goodbye, children wash their hands, which is more self-help and sequencing and possibly literacy if the handwashing steps are displayed. When these tasks are done, children join their peers in doing whatever happens first. Most often it will be free play, a group time, or breakfast.



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As you read about in [Chapter 7](#), children learn from play, so you are familiar with the many opportunities for teaching and learning during free play. Children also learn during group times and mealtimes. Large and small group times are for preschool aged children and older. They can include stories, large motor activities, songs, games, all of which should be purposefully designed to promote learning and/or practice skills (Bullard, 2013). Mealtimes are more than just eating. At mealtimes children develop self-help skills, socialize, and practice language skills by listening, and if old enough, talking.

The ECE environment is rich with opportunities for teaching and learning. The three key parts—physical, social, and temporal—work together to provide a space that welcomes and promotes learning. All ECE program models (for example, Creative Curriculum and Montessori) include planning and consideration for the environment. The next section will address design of the physical indoor learning environment.

8.2 INDOOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

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The indoor learning environment reflects the teacher’s thoughts about children, how they learn and play in the environment, and the values of the program and the community. Additionally, children should see themselves reflected in the environment through the materials, photos, artwork, and other items within the classroom (Bullard, 2013; Carter & Curtis, 2014). Questions to consider are: Do they see pictures of their families? Are there books with children that look like them? Are there places to feel safe and places they can explore and be loud? Are the materials accessible with just the right amount of challenge without being too difficult to use? When the children see themselves reflected in the environment and the atmosphere, and when the room arrangement and the materials are thoughtfully prepared, this allows children to engage and play. They are likely to experience a sense of belonging and community (Carter & Curtis, 2014; McKee & Friedlander, 2017; NAEYC, 2022).

This section of the chapter will describe aspects of designing an indoor learning environment. Keep in mind that learning environments are designed with knowledge of child development, therefore environments for infants/toddlers, preschoolers, and K-3 are different from one another. This chapter will address the general guiding principles for designing environments for young children, as an overview. Other sources can provide detailed information regarding environments for each age group.



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The key elements in a well-designed indoor environment are: 1. Room arrangement is conducive to play and all the activities in the daily schedule. 2. Materials are appropriate for the developmental level of the children and allow for all children to use them including

those who have disabilities. 3. Materials and other items (items displayed on walls and elsewhere) are culturally diverse and do not perpetuate stereotypes (Bullard, 2013; Carter & Curtis, 2014; Head Start ECLKC, n.d.; NAEYC, 2022).

The design and layout of the indoor environment can have an impact on children's learning and behavior as well as on the teacher's ability to do their jobs effectively. Effective indoor environments support children's interactions and play with clear organization around space, materials, and people. When a classroom is set up effectively, children have the freedom to move around safely, engage in the interest areas, and socialize. These environments also help both children and adults feel invited and welcomed.



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Each space within a classroom should be defined with boundaries that are made clear. In addition, the teacher should be able to see children easily to supervise and interact with them (Gartrell, 2014; National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning, 2012). Thoughtful room arrangement helps to keep order to the space, reduces the possibility of crowding in any given area, and can support children in their choice making. This can be achieved by using existing walls or furniture such as toy shelves. An area rug or a cloth draped from the ceiling can give the illusion of separation.

Create spaces for children to engage in quiet play such as puzzles or books. Books should help children see themselves and to understand people with cultures and lives different from their own. Spaces for quiet play can be made cozy with carpet, pillows, or child-sized couches which also absorb sound. Also provide space for indoor active play, paying close attention to movement patterns so as not to interrupt the different types of play in a classroom.

Interest Areas

Interest areas, sometimes referred to as *learning centers* or *activity zones*, are spaces in a learning environment that have a targeted purpose. Typical interest areas include art, blocks, dramatic play, math (manipulative, table toys), sensory, science, language arts

(literacy), and library (quiet corner, books). Interest areas should be open to children during free play. Children will explore interest areas on their own or with peers. During free play, teachers observe, assess, and interact with children to support their learning in all domains, and doing so promotes positive behavior (Bullard, 2013; Gartrell, 2014). Interest areas should be equipped with materials that support children’s natural tendency to play and learn and provide opportunities to take social/emotional, cognitive, and physical risks (NAEYC, 2022). Descriptions of common interest areas found in early learning environments are listed below.



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Art: Encouraging children’s creative thinking is essential throughout the early years. Art is a tool for thinking and inquiry, allowing children to make their theories and ideas visible, take new perspectives, represent, and explore emotions, and to study the properties of the physical world. Art, which also can be referred to as creative expression, should be open-ended, child-directed, and process-oriented. Open-ended activities and materials allow children to explore and to express their ideas. Art areas can help children to develop coordination and fine motor skills, which are needed for emergent writing. Materials may include paint, paint brushes, easels, collage materials, scissors, clay and playdough, colored paper, magazines, popsicle sticks, cotton balls, and a large selection of loose parts. Art areas are best supported with plenty of light and are near handwashing sinks and easy-to-clean floors.



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Blocks: Blocks are wonderful, open-ended learning materials with no right or wrong way to represent children’s ideas. Many skills and concepts are developed and enhanced

through block play. Children think critically, explore, manipulate, experiment, represent, problem solve, and make decisions in the block area. The block area is best located in an area of the room where the noise level can be louder and away from traffic, so structures are not disturbed. This area can include wooden, cardboard, or foam blocks as well as small figures and architectural items that will promote creative building. This is where children can learn about sizes and shapes, spatial relationships, and math concepts as well as how to make decisions and solve problems.



Figure 8.1. Green and Brown Wooden Blocks / Photo Credit: Marcus Spiske, Pexels License

Dramatic Play: In this area, children's thoughts become visible through play. According to

Roskos, Christie, and Richgels, “children may operate at more advanced cognitive levels than they do in non-pretend situations, including staying on task for extended lengths of time” (as cited in Hatcher, 2005, para. 6). This area provides opportunities for children to pretend and use their imagination, role play, and act out real and imaginary experiences in a playful context. Although housekeeping is a common theme for the dramatic play area, other themes can be explored such as grocery stores, doctor offices, restaurants, and veterinary clinics. Through this type of play, children practice social skills, learn to solve problems, and work cooperatively.

Language and Literacy/Writing Center: Literacy skills are critical in laying the foundation for current and future success in oral and written language. Literacy skills often play a crucial role in learning content in other areas. The space should be well lit with comfortable seating and tables with paper and writing utensils. Puppets and props are also ideal for this area. Many teachers choose to create unique writing centers in literacy areas where children can explore print materials as well as create their own. Children who learn multiple languages or who have challenges such as hearing or vision loss may have a different literacy progression. Teachers can be aware of including audio activities and activities and materials for students of all abilities.

Library (quiet corner, books): Library areas support children in a lifelong habit that promotes literacy and an appreciation for the written word. The space should be a comfortable area where children are encouraged to read books. Teachers can create an area that includes a variety of books that support diversity, culture, and life. Literacy and library areas can be next to each other but should be separate because children may prefer not to have distractions when reading alone. Through the literacy and library interest areas in the classroom, children will begin to recognize the connection between spoken language and the written word.

Math (manipulatives): This space can also be referred to as *manipulatives*. In this area children build knowledge about math concepts such as understanding numbers and number operations (e.g. addition, subtraction, division), shape/spatial relations, and measurement. The ideal location has accessible materials, shelves near tables, and is in a medium traffic area. To promote engagement, rotate toys and keep the area organized. In addition to math manipulatives such as geo blocks, shapes, counting items, dice, and beads, include measurement tools such as graphing paper, scales, calculators, bins of loose parts, counting and matching games, and puzzles. Rotate items, keeping them accessible to children and organized with labeled bins.



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Music and Movement: Music and movement helps children synthesize experiences, transition into new activities, calm down, share culture, build self-esteem, and build a sense of community. There are also academic benefits to music and movement such as boosting memory, improving spatial-perception, and cognitive development. When setting up the music and movement area, the location should be away from where quiet activities are located. Also, it is best to reduce clutter so children have space to move. Include a variety of authentic instruments.

Sensory: When children are engaged in sensory related activities, they are:

- developing questions throughout the sensory experience'
- investigating by touching, smelling, rubbing, etc.;
- collecting data through their senses;
- learning to communicate their findings/experiences;
- participating in scientific inquiry.

When it comes to the sensory environment there are a few critical elements to think about. Make sure sensory tables are near a sink so children wash their hands before and after interacting with materials in the sensory table. An easy-to-clean floor is best; however, if the floor is not easy to clean, having access to a tarp that can be placed on the floor will also work. Children may have allergies, so carefully consider what to add to the sensory area.

Science: Children are scientists! They are naturally curious and biologically primed to learn about the world around them. They use information they gain through their everyday experiences to develop theories about how the world works. The science area should support “what if” statements, be enticing and inviting, and have adequate workspace. Choose a quiet area of the class that is uninterrupted so children can work and concentrate. This is a good place to include elements such as leaves, sticks, rocks, pinecones, magnets, kaleidoscopes, oil and water bottles, seashells, magnifying glasses, flashlights, and color wands to peak children’s interests.

Selection and Placement of Materials

Setting up the physical environment includes the selection and placement of materials. Materials that are selected for classroom environments need to be culturally relevant, developmentally appropriate for the age of the children using the classroom, and accessible to all children using the classroom, including neurodivergent children and children with disabilities. (Bullard, 2013; Head Start ECLKC, n.d.; McKee & Friedlander, 2017; NAEYC, 2022). Teachers also need to consider how the materials will be organized and accessed by the children. Read the following tips and keep these in mind when choosing appropriate materials for early learning classrooms.

- Organizing the materials should take into consideration the developmental level of the children in the classroom.
- Put materials in appropriate places (art materials in the art center, books in the library) but allow for the crossing of materials during play from one area into another.
- Provide enough materials for all children to be engaged in the activity.
- Rotate materials to promote children's interests.
- Include personal storage areas (such as cubbies) for both children and teachers.
- Remove materials that are broken, or worn out, or that have missing pieces.

Label shelves with print and pictures that indicate where materials are to be placed. This will help children to become more self-sufficient during clean up. It also contributes to literacy development. Some teachers will use color coding of materials to keep organized.



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Environmental Aesthetics

When designing a space, creating an attractive and pleasing environment includes thinking about the aesthetics of the space (Carter & Curtis, 2014). When creating an early

learning space that will foster learning, inspire creativity, and support social relationships, consider environmental characteristics such as lighting, color, crowding, noise levels, and clutter. Questions you can ask yourself about the environment: Does the space look inviting? Is the area clean? Are the age-appropriate materials at the children's level free of clutter?

A poorly organized space with too much clutter will prevent a classroom from functioning effectively. One way to assess the level of clutter is to take pictures of the space while standing, sitting in a child chair, and sitting on the floor. If you would not want to show a parent or coworker the photo because the space looks untidy, then there may be an issue with clutter or disorganization.

Overcrowding and noise levels in a classroom add to student and teacher stress and have a negative impact on learning. Sometimes less in a space is best. Fewer items keep children from being overwhelmed by too many choices. Rugs, hanging tapestries, and other noise absorbing items reduce noise levels and distraction. Lighting is something to consider in the physical environment. Ideally, natural light is preferred. Large fluorescent lighting often found in early childhood classrooms can interact with the brain and can cause problems like headaches and irritability. When additional light is needed, lamps, string lights, or similar items can be used. However, placement of such materials must be safe and follow regulations. The director of the program should be able to provide guidance regarding setting up additional lighting.



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Children are likely to feel more comfortable in an environment that contains similar elements to those in homes (Obaki, 2017). Soft furnishings, nontoxic plants, natural or soft lighting, decorative touches such as area rugs, family photos of children and staff, and neutral paint colors help to create a space that everyone in the environment can enjoy.

This section addressed the elements of a well-designed indoor environment. The topics addressed in this section included creating a welcoming, inclusive environment based on the children's developmental levels, room arrangement, materials section, and aesthetics. The next section will be about the outdoor learning environment (OLE).

Attributions

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8.3 OUTDOOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

Jennifer Karshna, Ph.D.

A high quality, developmentally appropriate ECE classroom has spaces for indoor and outdoor play (Bullard, 2013). A fully outdoor program is one in which children are outside all of the time and often such programs are in natural settings such as wooded areas. For the purposes of this chapter, OLE design will refer to programs that use indoor and outdoor spaces rather than those that are fully outdoors.

The outdoor space will be referred to as the OLE (outdoor learning environment). It is referred to as such because young children are always learning, including when they are outdoors! The OLE is an extension of what happens inside and it provides different learning opportunities than the indoor environment (Karshna, 2021). Children develop language and literacy, math, social, and problem solving skills in the OLE, just as they do inside the classroom, when the OLE is created and used with intention and purpose. Children’s learning in the OLE is enhanced if the teacher is aware and intentional in supporting development in these areas while outside with the children.



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Additionally, the OLE provides opportunities that are different from indoors (Kleppe, 2018). The OLE has more space for gross motor/physical activity, differing sensory experiences (think of the feeling of different temperatures and the wind, or of sounds such as birds), more opportunity for risk-taking, and the experiences that lead to developing an appreciation for the natural world (Beery & Jørgensen, 2018; Bento & Costa, 2018).

In many programs, the outdoor space design is predetermined by where things such as a manufactured play structure or natural elements such as trees are placed. Nevertheless,

teachers can make enhancements to the OLE in order to increase children’s learning. Key elements of a well-designed OLE are: (a) a combination of **manufactured** and **natural items**, (b) a combination of **stationary** and **moveable** items, (c) boundaries and visibility for safety, and (d) ensuring opportunities for risk-taking and physical activity.



Figure 8.2. Untitled / Photo Credit: Administration for Children and Families, Office of Childcare, PD

A combination of manufactured and natural items contributes to children’s learning (Olsen & Smith, 2017). This pertains to programs that use indoor and outdoor spaces and likely would not work in a fully outdoor program. Manufactured items are things such as climbing structures, wheeled toys, balance beams, buckets, shovels, play stove and sink, and anything that is made. This includes items made of wood as well as plastic and other materials. Natural items are those found in nature: sticks, rocks, trees, puddles, etc. Including both manufactured and natural items can lead to a variation of children’s play and engagement in the OLE (Kleppe, 2018; Olsen & Smith, 2017; Zamani, 2016).



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Another combination that is beneficial in OLE design is including both stationary and movable items (Goodenough et al., 2021; Olsen & Smith, 2017). Stationary items are things that cannot be moved such as a play structure, rock, or tree. Moveable items are

portable. People can move them from one place to another. Moveable items are often referred to as **loose parts** (Nicholson, 1971). Both fixed and moveable items can be either manufactured (made) or natural. Although many natural moveable items can be present in the OLE, teachers may remove them with the intention of promoting safety. One example is the use of sticks. Some adults are uncomfortable with children using sticks because they feel someone could get hurt. An injury could occur; however, children can also play safely with items such as sticks and rocks, especially if they are three years and older and do not mouth things. As needed, teachers can provide supervision and guidance for use of sticks and rocks, and they should assess the appropriateness for the age level. Big rocks and sticks that do not fit into toddlers' mouths are likely safe for use. They may or may not be able to move them; however, they may find them interesting and use them for something such as climbing.



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Supervision and safety are important both indoors and out. Teachers need to arrange the indoor environment so they can see children. Visibility is important outdoors as well; however, it may be a bit more challenging outside. Setting boundaries of where children can play is a safety strategy that can help with visual supervision. Many ECE programs have self-contained OLEs with fences surrounding them, so there is a boundary around the perimeter. Such boundaries may help with visibility, and teachers can also decide where to stand, strategically placing themselves so that all areas of the OLE are visible. If that is not possible, teachers can move around so that the areas in which children are playing are visible. Supervision and safety are very important and should never be overlooked. However, it is also teachers' responsibility to interact and support children's learning. For this reason, teachers work as best they can to for an OLE design that supports both supervision and teaching (McClintic & Petty, 2015).

Allowing children's risk-taking and physical activity are aspects of how teachers support learning and development in the OLE. Play and engagement in the OLE provides opportunities for both risk-taking and physical activity. However, teachers can assess the environment and often enhance what is already there. For example, a large stick/small log can be moved, which would likely require a lot of physical effort for children, especially

very young ones. A larger log might serve as a balance beam. Such items can be brought into the OLE without requiring a major redesign. These are a couple of examples to illustrate the point of OLE design and including opportunities for risk-taking and physical activity. The key is to keep in mind that children tend to engage in more risk-taking and physical activity in the OLE and because of this the teacher can take advantage of this and ensure there are many opportunities for children to do so.

This section addressed some of the key elements in a well-designed OLE, which are combinations of manufactured and natural items, a combination of stationary and movable items, boundaries and safety, and ensuring there are opportunities for risk-taking and physical activity. Each OLE is unique, as are the children and teachers who use it. The purpose of this section was to provide information about using the OLE for teaching and learning and to share ideas that may spark thinking about ways to enhance OLEs as an extension of and different from the indoor learning environment. The next section will address the temporal environment.

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8.4 THE TEMPORAL ENVIRONMENT: DAILY SCHEDULES AND ROUTINES

Jennifer Karshna, Ph.D.

The temporal environment refers to time. This includes the daily schedule (the times of day things happen), transitions, and the sequence in which these things occur. A well-planned temporal environment creates the conditions for children to focus on engaging in activities and interacting with their peers and teachers. Adults can spend time interacting with children and supporting their learning. Additionally, it provides any visitors, such as observers or practicum students,, with a sense of when things happen in the classroom.

A consistent daily schedule provides predictability. Children and adults know what will happen and when to expect transitions. Predictability reduces behavior issues (Gartrell, 2014). Predictability also contributes to children's feelings of safety, especially for those who experience chaotic lives outside of the ECE program (Gartrell, 2014; Schwartz-Henderson, 2016). Routines and predictability also are essential for those children who have autism, ADHD, and other conditions.

In the opening scenario for Chapter 8, the teachers' discussion about holding group time or the art activity indicates that this classroom does not follow a well-planned, daily schedule. The teachers are not sure what to do! Because the teachers are uncertain about the next activity, they become preoccupied with planning in front of the children. Additionally, the children may be confused or may not feel safe.

An effective classroom schedule is responsive to the ages and developmental levels of the children and works within the program requirements and constraints (Bullard, 2013). Program constraints are limitations or boundaries within which programs must operate. It refers to things such as when outdoor space is available for each classroom or other requirements such as being served meals at a specific time. These can be physical (the square footage available for an outdoor space) or abstract (the times that children are arriving or sleeping), and they have direct effects on the classroom schedule. The daily schedule consists of the activities and transitions that happen throughout the day. Activities include things such as free play, small group, large group, self-care/bathroom/diapering, clean up, meals, and outdoor play. In-between the activities are transitions.



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Transitions are changes or shifts from one activity to another. One example is going from breakfast to free play. Another example is going from inside to outside. Transitions tend to be a difficult time of day for children (Gartrell, 2014). It is critical to pay attention to the importance of planning for transitions. Sometimes transitions are overlooked when setting up the daily schedule. However, planning transitions can reduce behavior issues (Hemmeter et al., 2008) and can be quite helpful for the teachers and other adults, such as volunteers and practicum students. They can see the transitions in the daily written schedule. Keep in mind that it works best to minimize the number of transitions in the daily schedule.

Infants, toddlers and preschoolers require different daily schedules. Infants and toddlers need a more individualized schedule with no planned group times. Preschool daily schedules should include short group times, and the total number of large group activities should be minimal (Bullard, 2013). Preschool group time can be effective if it is purposeful and active; however, it keep in mind that young children's attention spans are short (Gartrell, 2014). It is recommended to keep group activity to 10-15 minutes (New Jersey Early Childhood Education, 2019).



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An additional consideration with daily schedules is the ratio of teacher-directed to child-initiated activities. Teacher-directed activities are those in which the teacher decides what the children will do. Group times are teacher-directed activities. Mealtimes and self-care such as handwashing or bathroom/diapering are also teacher-directed times because the adult is choosing what is happening. Child-initiated activities are those that the children choose what to do. Common child-initiated activities on the daily schedule are free play

and outdoor time. The ratio should be more child-initiated activity than teacher-directed activity (NAEYC, 2022).

Daily schedules should be written and posted for both children and adults to see. Because children do not read, a picture schedule is needed. The picture schedule often has a calming effect on children, especially those that may have disabilities or engage in challenging behavior (Gartrell, 2014; Jiron et al., 2018). Although there may be a picture schedule posted for all children to see, it may be beneficial for some children to have a smaller picture schedule. There are many ideas for creating picture schedules. An internet search will likely bring up valuable ideas that can be used to create a picture schedule that works for the classroom and/or meets individual children's needs.



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Because there are many things, such as mealtimes and self-care, that cannot be skipped and usually need to be done at specific times, it takes careful planning to develop a daily schedule. An effective daily schedule promotes engagement and reducing behavioral issues (Bullard, 2013; Gartrell, 2014). Planning a developmentally appropriate, effective schedule is well-worth the effort—the days tend to move along smoothly and everyone in the classroom (children, teachers, volunteers, families) benefits because they can enjoy the delightful and interesting experience of being in an early childhood classroom.

8.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

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Summary

The three elements of ECE environments—physical, temporal, and social—are integrated to allow for teaching and learning in a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere. Let's consider the opening scenario and how it would be different if the teachers were intentional about planning for and using the environment. Imagine walking into the child care center and being greeted with "Good morning, I heard you were visiting the program. Welcome to the preschool classroom. It is arrival time so the children are putting away their belongings, saying goodbye to their family member(s), washing their hands, and joining their peers who are playing. You are welcome to look around and observe."

You enter the classroom and hear children greeting one another and see them finding something to do. A group of three children seem excited to see a friend and say, "Estelle is here! Let's ask Estelle if we should build a castle like we did yesterday." You notice children's artwork on the walls and photos of children, at their eye level. The room is arranged in areas with similar items such as blocks in one area, shelves are neat and organized, and you notice a painting activity set up in the art area. You look over to the cubby area where a child is crying.

You hear the teacher talking in a soothing voice saying, "It is hard to say goodbye, but your mother will pick you up later. You can play with your friends, have lunch, and your mother comes when we are outside after naptime. Remember yesterday when you put together the fire truck puzzle? Would you like to start today by doing a puzzle or looking at a book?" The child looks up reluctantly and says, "Can my mom help me with the puzzle?" The teacher asks the mother about this, who says there is time to stay for a few minutes. The mother and child walk into the classroom.

How does this environment compare to the one in the opening scenario? Can you see the difference in the physical, temporal, and social aspects of the environment? In this environment, how would you feel as a visitor? As a teacher?

An effective ECE environment is well thought out, planned for developmental levels of children,

and includes the indoor and outdoor spaces. It also includes an effective daily schedule. Such environments are places that are nurturing, joyful, and promote learning and well-being for both children and adults.

Review Questions

1. How would you describe the role of the ECE environment as part of the teaching and learning process?
2. What are the key elements of a well-designed indoor learning environment?
3. What are three interest areas that are commonly included in the ECE classroom?
4. Provide a brief description for each of the three interest areas identified above.
5. What is one way teachers can avoid clutter in the indoor learning environment?
6. What are the elements of a well-designed OLE?
7. Many ECE programs include group times in the daily schedule. For which age group of children are group times most appropriate?
8. Describe the difference between teacher-directed and child-initiated activities.

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CHAPTER 9: FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS



A Person Walking Down the Street With a Backpack / Photo Credit: Braden Collum, Unsplash License

Overview

Have you heard the saying, “The family is a child’s first and best teacher”? The most crucial years of learning take place at home, before a child is old enough to enter school (Dewey, 2018). We also know that teaching and learning in a school setting cannot compare to the impact that parents and families impart every day through words and examples (modeling and coaching) at home. Additionally, the saying carries with it our professional obligation to honor, value, and include the families with whom we work in early childhood education.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) states the following through their program, [Power to the Profession](#):

“We need to be clear that recognizing families as the experts on their children and supporting them in their role as their children’s ‘first and most important’ teachers does

not undermine the professional responsibilities of early childhood educators. Rather, it underscores the breadth and depth of professional knowledge early childhood educators need to carry out their formal responsibilities to fully support each child's cognitive, social, emotional, physical, language, and literacy development." (Allvin, 2018, para. 2)

In your role as an early childhood professional, you will have a variety of responsibilities. In addition to teaching and sharing knowledge; you are a caregiver, mentor, nurturer, and sometimes even the first significant non-family influence in a child's life. With that in mind, it is important to recognize that building strong relationships with families is a core part of an early childhood educator's role. This starts with communicating openly and working closely with parents to ensure a cohesive approach to the child's development. It is also essential to become a team with your colleagues, and focus on each and every individual child's success in school and in life.

This chapter provides insight into family partnerships and how **responsive** and respectful relationships with families impact the child, family, teacher, and ECE program. The content of the chapter is presented using a positive, **strengths-based** approach to support children as they grow, develop, and learn. Using a strengths-based approach centers our lens on looking for and identifying a family's strengths as a starting point for our work in **partnership** with the family.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define family.
- Discuss various influences that affect the family.
- Explain strategies for building respectful relationships with families.
- Summarize the importance of professionalism in our work with children and families.
- Outline meaningful ways to engage with families.
- Create a plan to address conflict with families.
- List community resources to engage and support families.

Key Terms

- Barrier
- Community
- Connection
- Culturally responsive
- Equitable
- Equity
- Family
- Family engagement
- Family involvement
- Mutual
- Partnership
- Reciprocal
- Relationship
- Responsive
- Strategy
- Strengths-based
- Stressors
- Unintended consequence

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are important considerations for success for the child and family and provide critical information about how to design and deliver program content. It will also guide how we work with families in creating goals and even choosing learning materials.



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The foundation for family **connections** is developed by first creating a shared definition of family. We know that all children are part of a family, but “family” does not fit a single idea or concept of what a family is. Families are made in many ways, in different sizes and compositions. Some examples include single-parent families, two-parent families, and extended families with more than one generation living together. Families are also blended, stepfamilies, biracial/multi-racial families, families from the LGBTQ+ **community**, straight families, families that have immigrated to the United States, transnational families that live in two countries, and families who migrate to follow work availability. Children may have been born into a family or may become part of a family through foster care, adoption, or kinship arrangements.

Some children in our programs live in more than one home and are members of more than one family. We also need to be aware that not all the families we serve have stable residences. There are many unhoused families with young children in our communities.

Reflection

Take a moment to reflect and describe your family or a family that you know well.

1. *Categorize* the family experience.

- It was a larger family.
- It was a smaller family.

- It was a medium-sized family.

2. Apply your knowledge.

- What is your concept of small, medium, and large families?
- Do you think there could be a difference between your view of family size and that of your classmates?
- How did you count or include members of your family?
- How do you think your answers and those of your classmates are influenced by race, ethnicity, and culture?
- What do you need to take away from this reflection to implement into your practice with children and families?

Stresses of Family Life

We all face the stresses of daily life, including finding work, paying bills, **relationships** with friends and family, taking care of our health, etc. However, parents with young children face even greater burdens. They are often at the beginning of their careers and make less money in addition to having to pay all the costs related to child-rearing. We know from research and parent reports that in the United States there is a lack of affordable, quality childcare and financial subsidies to help with costs (Improving Child Care Access, 2024; Washington Department of Commerce, 2019), leading to more young families living in poverty. Families often need greater access to healthcare for themselves, their children, and often their own parents, which is lacking in many communities. Many families may work in positions where family leave is not available. Other families struggle with the additional responsibilities if their child has special needs or is struggling academically.

Working with therapists and teachers can feel like a second job for many families. Families often report that due to their lower income, little to no paid time off work, and higher costs, they feel like they have no safety net (Lankachandra et al., 2022). One injury, illness, car repair, or other such expense would be devastating. Overall, family life is stressful and leaves many families feeling overwhelmed much of the time. Family stress can also lead to relationship challenges for the adults of the family, which only compounds the stress that the children feel.

Influences on Families

Think back for a moment to what you know and have learned about child development philosophers and theorists. According to Bronfenbrenner, an ecological systems theorist, everything in a child's environment affects how they grow and develop (as cited in Guy-Evans, 2024). Bronfenbrenner noted the importance of the child's microsystem (the small, immediate environment in which the child lives) of home and school. The more encouraging and nurturing the relationship between the people in these two places are, the greater the benefit the child will receive from each environment. In turn, this can positively influence how strong and successful the child will likely grow to be.

Relationships between the adults in the family are a significant influence on children, and so are the relationships the family has with the people with whom the child spends time.

Reflection

What does "relationship" mean to you as an early learning professional?

How will you work to build a strong relationship with the children and families you serve?

Racism

In [Chapter 5](#) you learned about diversity, equity, inclusion, and the sense of belonging as it pertains to the field of early learning. Let's revisit racism and the impact on families, parents, and children. Families of color often struggle to have **equitable** access to meaningful work, high-quality childcare, and appropriate medical care. Racism can also have an impact on how a parent interacts with their children (Center on the Developing Child, n.d.).

Dealing with racism during daily experiences can place an unfair burden on people of color. Microaggressions can be intentional or unintentional, and delivered as verbal, behavioral or environmental insults. The impact of microaggressions is delivery of a message that is hostile, derogatory in nature, or that embodies negative attitudes that are

aimed toward stigmatized or culturally marginalized groups (Sue, 2010). Microaggressions then compound to cause exhaustion and depression. This impacts children's development (Essien & Wood, 2024). These daily experiences of racism have a cumulative effect and can erode emotional, physical, and even spiritual resources for the parent. Race-related stress may decrease the likelihood that the parent engages in self-care, which may result in reduced emotional availability for the children (American Psychological Association [APA], 2019). This is particularly likely for families whose race-related stress is significant and/or involves traumatic experiences.



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In general, stressors vary across families, but some of the more common stressors for families include:

- being unhoused
- the inability to find work
- recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic
- making minimum wage and having financial issues
- working multiple jobs
- conflicts with extended family
- death and/or grief
- physical illness of self or child
- family estrangement
- arguments
- missed commitments

In addition to general stressors, there are other stressors related to race and racism. While racism is a major and consistent and compounding stressor, there are other stressors related to racism. The pressure from all of the general stressors can be overwhelming when you include racism. Some potential reactions to racial stress and trauma to be aware of in your work with children and families include:

- insecure feelings or feelings of shame and lack of confidence
- triggers or reminders of traumatic events
- lack of trust
- difficulty controlling emotions

For many, there is a frantic nature to parenting, with the compounding effect of all the stressors, responsibilities, and demands on parental time. Families can feel overwhelmed and unsupported. Some families face an extraordinary level of parental guilt over not being able to handle all these stressors with ease. Some families struggle with concerns about the judgments of others. This stress can result in parents not taking care of themselves or in parents engaging in unhealthy behaviors as they try to cope with their problems (drinking, recreational drugs, etc.) (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). The result of all these situational factors and systemic factors is that many families are struggling to get by while caring for their children. Did you know that having a positive cultural identity and being involved in advocacy efforts are considered protective factors against racism (APA, 2019)? A protective factor is the presence of something that can help to reduce the effects of the stressors discussed in this section.

Understanding the negative effects of racism on families is part of what we can and should do in **responsive** with all families to build strong programs. Understanding the presence of stressors and protective factors may help us to help our families deal more effectively with overall stress as well as traumatic events. This is true for working with families as well as working for the health of the whole **community**.

Attributions

1. Figure 9.1: Word Cloud of terms related to Family by Ardene Niemer, for WA Open ProfTech, © [SBCTC](#), [CC BY 4.0](#)

9.2 FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS WITH PROGRAMS, SCHOOLS, AND TEACHERS

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.

“It’s our responsibility to design a system that helps all children and families to thrive.”
Ross Hunter, Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families (2018, para. 3)

When families are actively engaged in their children’s education, it leads to positive outcomes for students (Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017). By strengthening communication between parents, teachers, and students, we can improve academic performance, promote good behavior, and create a welcoming school environment. Educators work together with families to ensure that every child has the support and resources they need to succeed.

A family’s involvement in their child’s school and communication with their educators is crucial to understanding the child’s personality and learning style (Alvin, H2018). Parents can provide invaluable insights to you as the child’s teacher, supporting the teacher to be more effective in their work. Parents are an indispensable asset to the instructional program, and their engagement can make all the difference in their child’s education.

Family Expectations and Culture

All families care about their children and their children’s success in school. However, there are often cultural differences and expectations at play. Families have shared that in many cultures around the world, teachers are held in high regard and respected as experts in their field (Walker, 2019). In some cultures, teachers have a higher status and are believed to always be right in what they say and how they teach. It is critical that we remember that for many families it would be seen as disrespectful to question a teacher or get involved in their classroom teaching in any way. Therefore, remember that for many families, it would be uncommon for the family to visit their children’s schools or talk with or ask questions of their teachers. This is a primary reason that immigrant families often find their new role as the teacher’s “partner” confusing (Breiseth et al., 2015).

The reasons why some families may not engage with a school or program in traditional involvement activities vary. Some families may feel teachers know better than the family about how to educate their children. Culturally defined roles of parenting and teaching

may differ for families who were raised in other countries, or in various U.S. communities with more defined educational roles. Still other families may have work or family responsibilities that make engaging with volunteer or other family-teacher conferences difficult or impossible (IRIS Center, n.d.).

The connections and relationships that an ECE professional builds with families will support the children in understanding the importance of rapport, especially when it comes to interactions that could be tense or emotional. An example of a tool that can be used to enhance opportunities to build relationships with teachers is use of the ASQ (Ages and Stages Questionnaire) to discuss child development and developmental milestones (Muthusamy et al., 2022). The way in which an ECE professional might interact with a family member in this shared discussion, carried out in a caring way, is highly important to the work of an ECE professional.

Reflection

Communicating with families and building relationships can be intimidating. What worries do you have about interacting with different families as part of your support of young children?

Many cultures are relationship-oriented, and for them, it is important to take time to develop trust before sharing information or discussing concerns or challenges. Some refugee parents have suggested that the development of informal relationships with their children's teachers should be in place before the teacher shares any developmental or behavioral challenges that the child is experiencing (Warsi, 2017).

Families have expectations and fears when they send their children to school, which are often influenced by their own educational experiences, cultural expectations, and beliefs. Keep in mind that "parent involvement" has been defined largely by dominant culture American-born K-12 educators, administrators, and researchers (Calzada et al., 2015).

In general, this parent involvement includes things like volunteering, communicating with the school, participating in school activities, and helping with homework. The reasons why some families may not engage with a school or program in traditional involvement activities vary (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). Some families may feel teachers know better than the family about how to educate their children. Culturally defined roles of parenting

and teaching may differ for families who were raised in other countries, or in various U.S. communities with more defined educational roles. Still other families may have work or family responsibilities that make engaging with volunteer opportunities or teacher conferences difficult or impossible.



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Family fears may also arise when a parent has not had a successful experience in school (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017). This parent may have struggled academically or socially, or may have been bullied, or found eligible for special education services. These parents may believe that their child’s experience will mirror their own and be fearful or hesitant about their child attending school. Parents also fear school violence and may have stress and anxiety about school safety. “Some parents may have had challenging experiences trying to get involved in their child’s school. They might have experienced racism or exclusion by teachers or other parents. Some parents may have had challenging experiences trying to get involved in their child’s school. They might have experienced racism or exclusion by teachers or other parents.

Families face **stressors** that are significant and often systemic in our culture. There are no simple solutions. However, awareness of the challenges and **barriers** that families face can help educators create effective relationships with parents because they understand the realities of daily life for many families. As educators it is important also to respect that each family has its own culture and that over time, teachers come to understand it is a professional obligation to have respect for all families and realize the rich diversity within those families (NAEYC, n.d.) .

Understanding and respect for families is the foundation on which to build a **partnership**. This partnership approach will support teachers and programs to individualize their approach for connecting with families, free from ideas of what an “ideal family” should look like. This will provide equitable access and service for all families.

Reflection

If you were asked to create a bumper sticker for a car or a banner for the side of a bus to convey a key concept that has stood out to you so far in your reading of this chapter, what would your message say?



Figure 9.2. Four Children Standing on Dirt During Daytime / Photo Credit: Ben Wicks, Unsplash License

Connecting with Families by Building Relationships: Valuing who families are and what they bring





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For teachers, building and maintaining positive relationships with families will free time to focus more on teaching children (American Federation of Teachers [AFT], 2010). When an educator has more positive contact with parents, they learn more about the child's needs and their home environment. This information can be used to enhance strategies to better meet the child's needs. For the children, seeing positive and supportive relationships between their teacher(s) and family supports their well-being, safety, and social development.

Finally, when parents are involved and have a positive relationship with their child's teacher, they will tend to view the educator in a more positive way, and this improves the teacher's morale and motivation to be the best teacher for this child.

Why should you connect with families? What's in it for the educator? There are many benefits of positive, healthy **connections** with families. These include (but are not limited to) increased positive behaviors of the children, improved child health, academic and social skills, increased parenting skills and positive parent-child interactions, and family satisfaction with the early learning program in general (AFT, 2010).

Families come to us and to ECE programs with prior knowledge, and this knowledge should be valued. Luis Moll refers to this as "funds of knowledge." Moll's concept of funds of knowledge is based on a simple premise: people are competent and have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge (González et al., 2005).

Think of this in terms of a savings account, and each new experience and each new piece of knowledge is a deposit into the account. These funds can remain deposited and grow or be accessed and shared for the benefit of the child and family.

Each family brings something different to the classroom, and understanding that all families contribute in different ways helps us be respectful and **responsive** in working with families. Not all families can, or prefer to attend parent/teacher conferences, and not all families are able to do nightly homework with children. Having teachers who understand this allows families to contribute in a way that values the knowledge and the capacity they have (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017).

Parent knowledge may look like a parent sharing knowledge and insight about their child with the teacher. It might look like a parent using their skills at home to support the child and family. It might also be a parent who builds strong attitudes in their child about

school and learning. It might be a parent who wants to share how to weave, paint, or plant a vegetable garden. We need to respect and value this unique knowledge parents bring in order to holistically know and understand the child and build a **reciprocal** partnership with the family.

In her work with Moll and Amanti, Norma González (2005) shared that children bring with them the funds of knowledge from their homes and communities that can be used for concept and skill development. There are ten categories of funds of knowledge that teachers should consider in developing classroom practices. With this information, teachers would be less likely to underestimate or constrain what children are learning. Using the funds of knowledge, teachers can focus on supporting students to find meaning connected to their home lives and background, which can be represented in the activities and materials provided in the classroom.

The ten categories of funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) include:

1. home language
2. family values and traditions
3. caregiving
4. friends and family
5. family outings
6. household chores
7. educational activities
8. favorite TV shows
9. family occupations
10. scientific knowledge

There are many examples of building positive relationships between families and ECE professionals in the Head Start model of early learning programs (Head Start ECLKC, n.d.) . Program structure is another area to consider for change to increase family engagement and positive relationships. Examples include home visiting, cooperative designs in programs (i.e. Co-Ops), parenting support groups, etc.

We know from engaging with the content included in this section and this chapter as a whole that teachers have strengths and expectations, and families have strengths and expectations. What if they do not match? For the success and support of the children, it is essential to work to build bridges together so that children are safe and healthy and can learn optimally. Working together with the family, it is our goal to create a safe, rich, and supportive environment for learning.

Strengths-Based Relationships

Approaching our work from a position of strength will help us scaffold learning for children and families by identifying opportunities and possibilities for growth. This is called a **strengths-based** approach (Dweck, 2016) . With this approach, the educator meets the child and/or family where they are and builds! It is important to focus on what the child *can* do and the possibilities, and not what they are not yet able to do, or the perceived deficits.

Conversely, a deficit approach begins with identifying “problems, issues, and difficulties.” The deficit approach emphasizes or focuses on the child’s perceived weakness. It also blames the child or attributes the child’s challenges to the so-called failures or bad choices of their family or community. By leading with problems, it is more likely that educators will get stuck and only see the negatives and are likely not being open to the innate potential of the child and family (Kasprisin, 2015).

Think about the following three strategies to build and strengthen your connection for optimal strengths-based relationships:

- Your partnership should be based on reciprocity. The school, family, and **community** each have overlapping responsibilities for the child’s learning. Each person involved in the partnership needs the help of the others to build a reciprocal relationship that is supported by both formal and informal attitudes and actions. All parties working together with overlapping responsibilities make it more likely that the child will thrive.

Effective partnerships are developed within a democratic process. Recognize the diversity of participants within our classrooms (different races, cultures, interests, and abilities). Then prepare to resolve conflicts using a respectful and positive approach that includes open conversation and compromise and sometimes benefits from mediation and negotiation to reach shared goals. Opportunities for partnership should be plentiful and varied. A mix of possibilities might include the following options.

- Have parents come to school to share interests.
- Invite parents to come to see what children are doing regularly.
- Offer opportunities to volunteer in the classroom.
- Provide information and resources for family support.
- Create a “place at the table” for decision making.
- Attend parenting education events with topics chosen by the parents.

- Become a part of their community or learning about their community.
- Provide strategies and tools that support children to learn at home and in the community.

Remember, to do these things, you will need to know about the families. Ask families if and how they want to be involved. Ask them what a meaningful experience would look like for them and when might be the best time for them to be involved.

Do not make assumptions about how a family could help you, but identify their strengths and offer appropriate opportunities. For example, just because you need a bulletin board completed does not mean a parent would find the volunteer opportunity of cutting out a border meaningful. At the same time, donning gloves and giving cleaning tools to clean an empty room may not be respectful or inclusive to a parent who wants to volunteer in the classroom to spend more time with their child. An inventory of actions and activities that families could choose from is one way to approach the list of tasks that need to be accomplished.

To gather information about families, consider engaging them in a robust interview, an orientation to the program, questionnaires, and surveys. Remember that not all families may feel comfortable reading and writing in English, so be sure to arrange for translators or engage with other strategies based on individual family needs (Breiseth, 2020). Invite families to engage with the program through newsletters, flyers, or an actual invitation from the children in the classroom. Be creative! Engage the children in the process as appropriate, remember the cultural considerations your families identify with while you are building your partnerships and focus on creating positive, strengths-based relationships. Everyone will benefit, but in the end, it is about the benefit for the children.

Building a sense of community goes beyond a simple partnership with families. In a classroom, we are connected by the common interest or purpose of quality education and services for young children. This is our community of learners. To enhance the educational experience of the young children, work to make each child and family feel valued and connected and that they belong.



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Reflection

When working with families, be sure to plan ahead. This reflection will help to identify where to start with building relationships with families:

Step One: Prioritize the suggestions from the list above (item 3 shares eight initial strategies/suggestions) and identify your priorities for engaging families in your program or classroom.

Step Two: Add your own ideas to the list to ensure the opportunities are plentiful and varied in the approach, are **culturally responsive**, and are respectful of the families.

Attributions

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9.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONALISM IN ECE AS RELATED TO FAMILIES

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.

The NAEYC document *Power to the Profession (P2P) Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession* (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020) offers guidance that supports ECE professionals in striving to build this profession. P2P guides educators to engage in professionalism in a way that elevates the knowledge and skills of families and communities. NAEYC expects that ECE professionals respect the professional and ethical obligation to develop relationship with all families and the communities served, paying particular attention to those families from diverse cultures, languages, and experiences who are often marginalized.



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To do this, it is essential to create opportunities with families that value their experiences, views, beliefs, and current world views. When we actively integrate this knowledge of our families in the curriculum and the classroom, it ensures that we are more able to respect, learn about, understand, and embrace families' cultures and communities; and supports us in building stronger partnership and connections with families and communities with the end goal of supporting all children.

According to NAEYC's P2P (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020), the guidelines for early childhood educators that relate to our connections with families include: (a) identify and participate as members of the early childhood profession; (b) serve as informed advocates for young children, for the families of the children in their care, and for the early childhood profession, and (c) have professional communication skills that effectively support their relationship and work with young children, families, and colleagues.

Building a sense of community goes beyond a simple partnership with families. In a classroom, we are connected by the common interest or purpose of quality education and services for young children. This is our community of learners. To enhance the educational experience of the young children, we work to make each child and family feel valued, and connected, and that they belong.

Here are some questions to get you started:

Sometimes teachers, providers, and ECE professionals are challenged with cultural differences between themselves and the families, viewing cultural differences as challenges to overcome when working with families. To address this belief, focus on the potential resources available in the community.

Following are some questions to ask yourself before talking with families. It is essential to your success in building relationships with families that are positive and supportive:

- What are your beliefs and practices related to working with culturally and ethnically diverse children and families?
- What resources do you need to support your growth in learning about what culture is, and how to work with diverse families?
- In addition to learning from the families in your program, where in your community will you find support and resources to learn to build positive and strong relationships?

Here are some examples of questions you might ask families. Make time and space to discuss cultural differences in a positive, respectful way.

- Tell me about your cultural beliefs related to parenting.
- How do you approach child independence in daily routines?
- Do you have family beliefs and practices about displaying photos of the children and families?
- Would you be willing to work with me to create classroom labels, dictations, and signs reflecting the children's first languages?
- Is there anything you would like to share with us about touch and personal space?
- How can we best communicate with you about your child?

What questions would you add to the list as a teacher or as a parent?

Reflection

Working with families within an anti-bias approach is not just doing “occasional activities about diversity and fairness topics. To be effective, anti-bias [and antiracism] education works as an underpinning perspective... including our interactions with children, families, and coworkers” (Mackey, 2023, para. 6). Anti-bias education places a positive value on differences with a goal to treat all people with respect, and without prejudice or bias.

Reflect on what you believe would be the benefit of building a strong relationship with a child's family. Reflect on a strong relationship with a family that has a different cultural or ethnic background from yourself.



Figure 9.3. Mother and Baby Girl Reading a Book / Photo Credit: William Fortunato, Pexels License

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and Working

with Families

“Knowledge from families is essential to developmentally appropriate practice.”

Rhian Evans Allvin (2018, para. 5)

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is an early childhood teaching approach from NAEYC that states “each and every child, birth through age 8, has the right to equitable learning opportunities... that fully support their optimal development and learning across all domains and content areas” (NAEYC, 2020, p. 1). In a DAP approach, the teacher supports the child’s development (socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively) based on their knowledge of each child. This knowledge is used to make appropriate decisions about classroom materials, appropriate interactions, and learning experiences that are most likely to be effective and support the development and learning of the group and each individual child.



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The DAP position statement from NAEYC also guides expectations for our work with families. DAP Guideline #2 is Engaging in Reciprocal Partnerships with Families and Fostering Community connections.

This DAP guideline states that developmentally appropriate practice requires deep knowledge about each child, including the context within which each child is living. Educators acquire much of this knowledge through respectful, reciprocal relationships with children’s families. Across all ages, families’ expertise about their own children is sought out and valued. (NAEYC, 2020, p. 18)

The DAP statement also discusses the expectation for early childhood professionals to “take responsibility for forming and maintaining strong relationships with families and communities” (NAEYC, 2020, p. 18). It is believed that these professional relationships act to support the individual needs and experiences that each child requires for success in the classroom and in life. Additionally, it is through respectful and reciprocal relationship with families that programs and teachers build a foundation of collaboration, **mutual** respect, and shared responsibility that will help families achieve their goals. This is a

critical consideration that helps to build opportunities for regular communication and interactions with the family and provides a structure for families to share preferences and concerns about their child(ren).

When building partnership with families that are responsive, respectful, and reciprocal, remember that this begins with strengths and abilities, seeing possibilities and opportunities before we identify difficulties and challenges that a child or family is facing.

This chapter will close by discussing resources for children and families. When you intentionally involve families in school programs, each family is a source of information about their child. Know your community to be better able to provide appropriate resources related to the family's priorities and concerns.

Reflection

1. How has your thinking changed about the role of families and how you connect with them in your classroom?
2. What is your first goal related to connecting with families as you move forward in your professional practice?

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9.4 ENGAGING FAMILIES IN MEANINGFUL WAYS

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.



Figure 9.4. Children Playing During a Lesson / Photo Credit: Pavel Danilyuk, Pexels License

Connecting with Families to Create a Sense of Community

The connection between a child's home and early learning program is an important connection for the growth and well-being of the child. In a quality program, the family and program would function as a partnership, sharing and planning together. This requires the family to be fully engaged with the program.

In a high-quality early learning program, connecting with families in a meaningful way involves a cooperative and asset-based approach where early childhood professionals, families, and children work together to establish positive and purposeful connections. It is a partnership between both families and the program staff that requires the recognition and appreciation of each other's roles and abilities. **Family engagement** emphasizes the development of culturally and linguistically responsive relationships with the child's significant family members.

Building Community

To build community with families and function in effective and meaningful ways, educators must communicate effectively and inclusively (Epstein et al., 2002). Inclusive communication refers to an approach aimed at establishing communication using all available means to understand and to be understood. We need to broaden the options for communication to ensure that the family receives and understands our messages and that we receive and understand what they want us to know about them or their child.

To be inclusive, be aware of the challenges to communication that children or their families face. There are families who speak languages other than English and who have hearing, vision, or reading challenges or disabilities. Some families may not have access to a car to come to school, and some families may not have a computer or internet account to send and receive email. Effective and inclusive educators also understand that there is diversity in culture and language use as well. People communicate differently, and a variety of strategies may be needed to help smooth communication.

Some examples of thoughtful strategies for inclusive communication to use with families include:

- Ask families how they would like to receive information from you—whether it is best to email, call, text, or meet in person.
- Ask what time of day is best and try to connect at that time.
- Be flexible! If one communication method does not work, try another.
- Be patient and allow time to respond or react. Try counting silently to allow for

processing, finishing a sentence, or answering your question.

- Engage as many senses as appropriate—hearing, sight, and touch.
- Limit background noise and music.
- Look and speak directly to the child or parent. Face the person and do not cover your face so that they can read the cues on your face or read your lips.
- Make sure only one person is speaking at a time—do not talk over another.
- Speak slowly and clearly with shorter sentences, but do not talk down to the child or parent.
- Use visual supports (picture schedules, photos of daily routines, social stories) gestures, and body language along with words.
- Use interpreters if a family is not comfortable speaking the same language as the teacher. (Do not put a child in the position of translating, but ask for a family member, friend, or community resource to translate the information.)



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To build an effective community, it is essential to focus on equity. Equity is the extermination of privilege, oppression, inequalities, and disadvantage through fair and impartial treatment. Equity is not equal or one-size-fits-all. Equity is working with each child and family to individualize and differentiate strengths and areas for growth to create a plan that gives each what is needed to grow and thrive (NAEYC, 2019). In this intentional and meaningful engagement, equity-based opportunities can also help family members to be effective advocates for their child(ren). In considering equity in your approach, remember to use translation, interpretation, working with cultural groups as partners, and recognizing the importance of building (and even rebuilding) trust with families who face discrimination and bias. For family engagement to be meaningful, it must be equitable.

Family-teacher conferences and family events are common strategies for partnering with families in classrooms and programs. We need to remember that the main and essential factor in family engagement is to build strong, positive, and effective relationships with families that can help children and families thrive. Family-teacher

conferences also support the first NAEYC principle of family engagement: “Programs invite families to participate in decision making and goal setting for their child” (NAEYC, n.d., para. 4). These planned and intentional times to meet are opportunities to share information about the child’s experiences, development, and learning. It is also the time to plan what can be done at home and at school to support the child’s continuing progress.

Following are some suggestions for planning and preparing for conferences and events:

- Accommodate different languages.
- Discuss different experiences.
- Learn about and consider cultural norms.
- Plan for varied schedules.
- Share different kinds of information.
- Let the family speak because they come to us with knowledge about their child and family.

Reflection

- How will you begin to create a meaningful and effective plan for communication for your children and their families?
- What do you need to know and consider to partner with families to build a sense of community?



Figure 9.5. *Two Toddlers Playing Letter Cubes / Photo Credit: Marisa Howenstein, Unsplash License*

Family Involvement vs. Family Engagement

Take another look at the definitions for **family involvement** and family engagement, and notice how they are the same and how they are different:

Family involvement is parent participation in educational systems and learning activities that foster a child's well-being. It involves conscious and intentional attempts to provide information to families and to encourage them to participate in their child's learning. This strategy simply involves families in education in some way. The **unintended consequence** of this approach can be that parents are seen basically as helpers who follow the teacher's directions. They are not seen as valuable partners in their child's education.

Family engagement is a more holistic and intentional approach in which the responsibility for supporting the child's learning falls on the parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, friends, and the community; all play a critical function in continuing and reciprocal engagement. Family engagement involves the teacher building relationships with families, learning from the families how they would prefer to be involved in their child's learning, and working with families to understand and plan how they choose to be engaged. This would include desired times and methods for sharing information about

the child's experiences. Family engagement offers a variety of approaches and activities that can be offered at home, in the community, or in the classroom or program.

In the pursuit of quality, strive for intentional family engagement. While doing this work, consider family-sensitive environments. The concept of being in a family sensitive relationship implies that the teachers, providers, and other early learning professionals will exhibit positive and respectful attitudes towards families. The foundation for supporting and building positive parent and child outcomes is knowledge about each individual family, their strengths, the experiences in their lives, and the values and beliefs that influence their decisions, along with responsive practices with families. Included within this context is a specific focus on supporting families by acting as a resource to empower them to promote their child(ren)'s healthy development. These relationships with families also focus on reciprocal information sharing and empowerment of families by building mutual respect.



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Appreciating what families bring to the program is a significant construct of family engagement. Because families are the experts on their children, each parent/family has specific expertise to contribute. Parents know how a child interacts with others and how the child responds to new people and situations. Parents know what a child is interested in and likes to play with. Parents also know about and can share how a child expresses his or her wants and needs. Families also bring to the program their individual pride in raising their children along with an understanding of the challenges that are inherent in the job of parenting. Parents come into a program with their own specific needs for support and information. An important element of relationship-building process with families is to identify and build upon the strengths of the individuals involved. This will demonstrate respect, show appreciation, and value for the contributions of the family in support of the child.

Reflection

List how you will support, mentor, and coach families in these areas:

- family overall health, safety, and welfare;
- families as lifelong learners;
- family engagement to support the child's school readiness;
- positive relationships between parents and their children;
- family connections to their community;
- families acting as advocates for themselves and their children.

Equity



Figure 9.6. *Equity and Equality / Photo Credit: Nisha0909, CC BY-SA 4.0*

We talked early in the chapter about stressors families face. Equity and equality are also considered stressors that we need to understand and consider as we engage in our work with families.

Did you know that equality and equity, have different definitions and meanings? The differences show as we engage in our work with children and families (Ferlazzo, 2023). Embracing equity means that we engage in fair and impartial approaches to disregard privilege, oppression, inequalities, and disadvantage. Equity, is not equal or one-size-fits-all. Equity, is working with each child and family to individualize and differentiate strengths and areas for growth to create a plan that gives each what is needed to grow and thrive. In this intentional and meaningful engagement, equity-based opportunities can also serve to help family members to be effective advocates for their child(ren). In considering equity, in your approach, remember translation and interpretation, work with cultural groups as partners, and recognize the importance of building (and even rebuilding) trust with families who face discrimination and bias. For family engagement to be meaningful, it must be equitable.

On the other hand, equality IS one-size-fits-all. It is equal and gives everyone the same thing. While seemingly well-meaning, equality misses the mark in meeting the individual and unique needs of children and/or their families. To assist in your understanding of the difference between equality and equity you are encouraged to reflect on the following image:

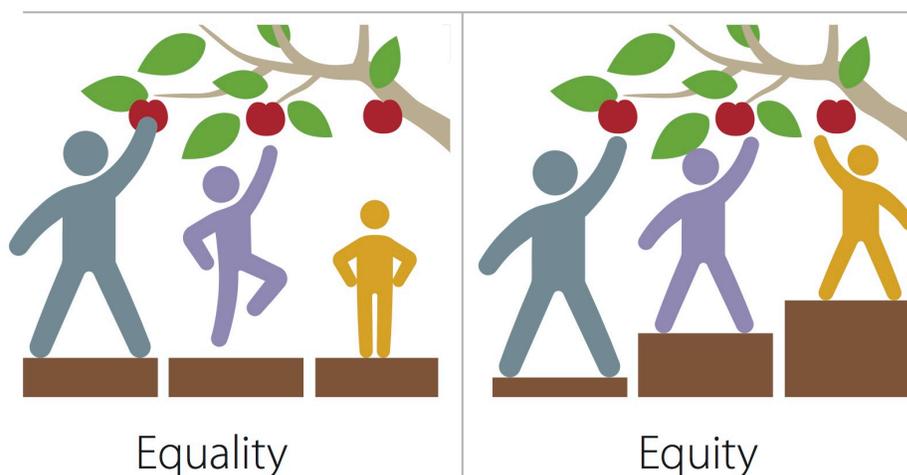


Figure 9.7. *Equity vs Equality / Photo Credit: MPCA Photos, CC BY-NC 2.0*

The first panel shows three individuals, each standing on the same size (equal) boxes and reaching for fruit on the tree branch. In this image, all three have the same size box, But not all individuals can reach the fruit. In the second panel equity each individual is provided with the size box they require to reach the fruit. We need to remember the

importance of equity in providing all of our services to children and families so that they can get what they need in order to thrive and succeed!

Let's apply that concept of equity specifically for an ECE program family-teacher conferences and family events are common strategies for engaging families in classrooms and programs. Remember that the main and essential factor in family engagement is to build strong, positive, and effective relationships with families that can help children and families thrive. Family-teacher conferences also support the first NAEYC principle of family engagement: "Programs invite families to participate in decision making and goal setting for their child" (NAEYC, n.d., para. 4). These planned and intentional times to meet are opportunities to share information about the child's experiences, development, and learning. It is also the time to plan what can be done at home and at school to support the child's continuing progress. Inviting families into engagement, decision making, and goal setting for their child from an equity standpoint means that resources may be used differently for each family and each child – from the time the educator spends with the family, to the additional cost required for interpretation or possibly the cost of a ride-share if the family cannot visit the school at the time needed for the conference.

Let's go a step farther is the concept of justice. Justice is not just about meeting requirements. It demands proactive and transformative measures to create equitable structures and systems that sustain justice. Only by taking these steps can we ensure fairness and equality for all. Taking that step towards justice begins to address systemic attitudes and changes.

Reflection

Think about creating equitable opportunities for family engagement in your program or classroom.

- How will you begin to create a meaningful engagement and communication plan to support the children and their families that you serve?
- How will you respond to families equitably?
- What do you need to know and consider to engage families fully in their child's education?

Overcoming Conflicts

“You and I are in a relationship which I value and want to keep. Yet each of us is a separate person with our own unique values and needs and the right to meet those needs. So that we will better know and understand what each of us values and needs, let us always be open and honest in our communication.” Thomas Gordon, an American philosopher and psychologist, 1964/1978 (as cited in Adams, 2021, para. 6) When it comes to children, there are no two parties more invested than parents and teachers. Unfortunately, these emotions can cause tensions to run high when there are many sources of potential conflict in the school setting. Regardless of your good intentions and how carefully you plan, conflicts might arise as you and the families you serve work to build relationships and create your communication plans and strategies. Most commonly, conflicts are the result of a lack of understanding of one (or all) of the following: background, culture, language, and/or beliefs (Mosier & Nunamaker, 2019). When conflicts arise, remember two general goals:

1. End the disagreement.
2. Preserve the relationship.



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Minor Avenue
CHILDREN'S HOUSE

Parent Handbook
Infant-Preschool
2020-2021

Figure 9.8. Partial Cover of Children's House, Parent Handbook / Photo Credit: © Minor Avenue

Regardless of your goal, good communication will be a key strategy and is the best approach for a positive outcome. Following the conflict resolution, it will be important for you and possibly your team at the program or center to meet and review policies, rules, and assumptions that have been in place. Discuss program expectations for families with your administrator and other staff. Be open to assessing what is necessary, what is in place because “it’s how we’ve always done it,” what is a preferred practice or approach, and what is your own personal taste.

- What societal changes have occurred over the past 10 or 15 years that you feel have influenced the field of early childhood education?
- Jani’s parents send you an email to say they will not attend the conference on Thursday because they are unable to attend every school event or volunteer for every activity. They further state that it is the job of the teacher (you) to teach Jani.
- What is your solution/response?
- Do you need resources or support? Who will you ask?

When rules and expectations are kept realistic, and to a minimum, the opportunity for conflict is also minimized. This will lead to a more collaborative environment and allow for communication that improves and increases family engagement. Stay positive and remember that reciprocal relationships are more likely to involve the co-creation of a mutually healthy versus those in which one role tries to set the framework with extensive rules and consequences and expects the other to go along with their plan. For example, consider involving your families in developing or updating policies. This will show families that you respect them and appreciate their presence, as well as convey a sense of respect and belonging. This also will most likely encourage more acceptance of the policies and expectations that have been developed together.

Reflection

- Think about a community activity that you have been involved in and enjoyed. What prompted you to participate?
- How can you apply this insight to your work and create family engagement options?

Think about creating equitable opportunities for family engagement in your program or classroom.

- How will you begin to create a meaningful engagement and communication plan to support the children and their families that you serve?
- How will you respond to families equitably?
- What do you need to know and consider to engage families fully in their child's education?

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9.5 CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS TO CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.

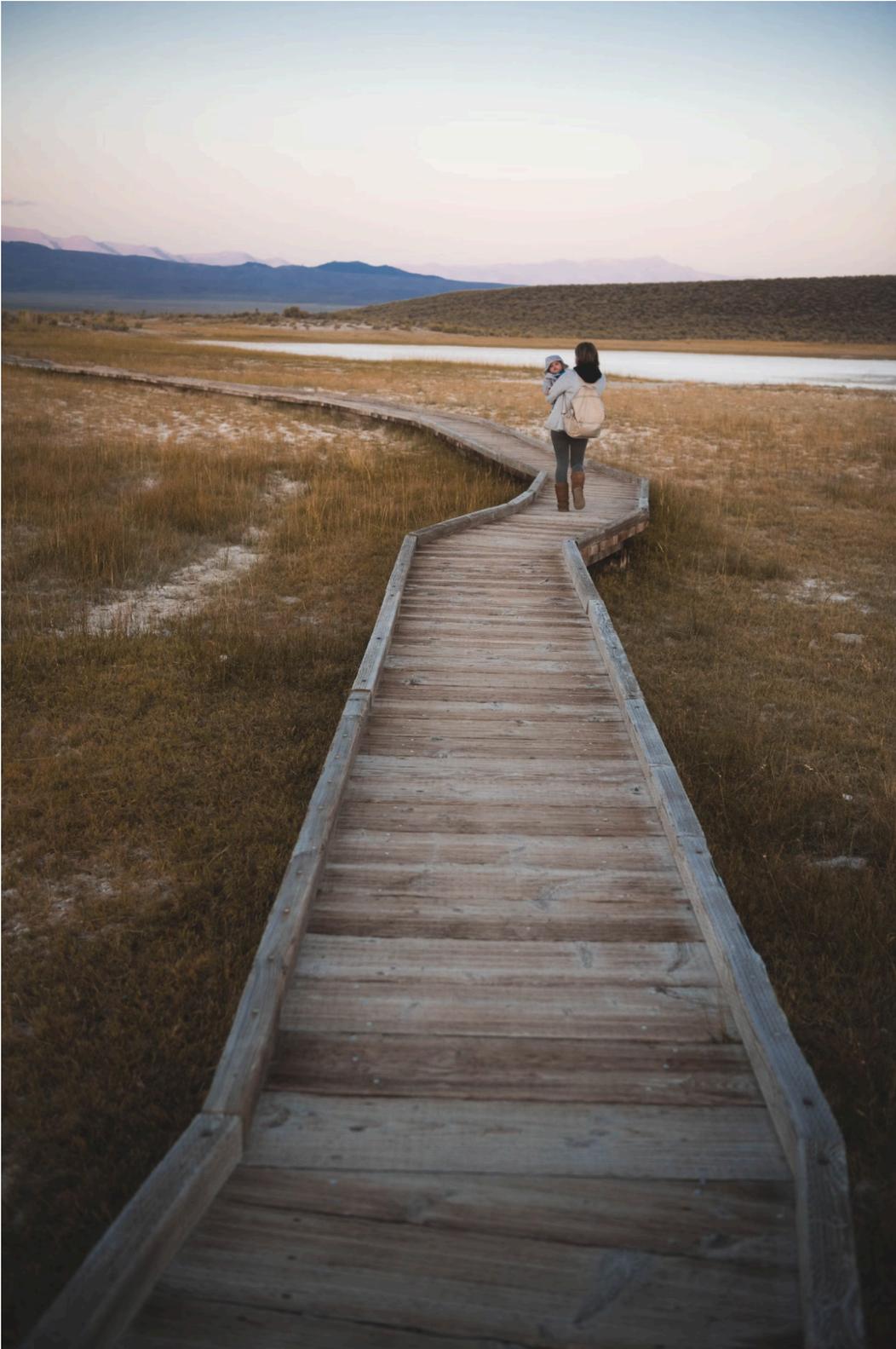


Figure 9.9. *Woman Holding Baby While Walking on Dock / Photo Credit: Marcelo Silva, Unsplash License*

Identifying Barriers

There are many benefits that are gained for a **family** and child when the family is engaged and connected with the teacher and/or the school. At the same time, we also know that there are **barriers to family engagement**, and many parents cannot or do not become engaged or connected in their child's schooling experiences. These barriers can be on the part of the school or the family.



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Some barriers result from limited resources but can also stem from the beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes of families and school staff. Some common examples stem from a lack of teacher time because of other responsibilities and teachers seeing family engagements just another task to complete (Baker et al., 2016). There are also teachers who do not understand or seek to understand a parent's communication style or work to build those relationships. This mismatch may be the result of cultural or language differences, teachers' misperceptions of the parents' abilities, limited family resources such as time or lack of transportation, parents' lack of comfort, and not feeling welcome at school. Some parents may have had negative school experiences that cloud their ability to make positive **connections**, or they may be unfamiliar with American culture and expectations around family engagement in schools. There also may be a belief from families that teachers only connect with "bad news." This one-way communication system does not allow for opportunities to share information.

Teacher Perspective

From the teacher's perspective, some teachers may not feel respected by a parent or may feel that a family has challenged their authority or questioned decisions (Arce, 2019). Mobility in urban areas can also challenge connections due to the more frequent movement of families. Finally, many families may simply not see the value of being

engaged with their child's education and do not believe they could have any meaningful role in their child's schooling.

Each one of these barriers can be mediated through building an invested interest on both sides, clear and intentional communication, relationship development, and an attitude of partnership. There are barriers, however, that present a more complicated challenge. It is important to begin thinking about building a collection of resources or a resource file that you can offer to families when barriers are identified and/or disclosed. It is important to learn about safety and structure for children and families and how to offer nonjudgmental support.



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Challenges to Making Connections

Parents and teachers benefit when families are involved in their child's education. However, there are barriers that prevent this. These barriers include limited resources, time constraints, cultural and language differences, and negative past experiences, and more. There is a template for a resource list at the end of this text.

- **Dysregulated children and/or dysregulated adults:** The term dysregulation is used to describe a limited, or lack of, ability to manage emotional responses to different situations and keep this control within socially acceptable limits and expectations. This can include sadness, anger, irritability, and frustration. We know that a parent who has emotional dysregulation will also most likely struggle to teach their child how to regulate. Dysregulation can also be the result of early childhood trauma, child neglect, or traumatic brain injury (McLean, 2018). A person might also be biologically susceptible to react emotionally, which can be triggered by ongoing but low levels of negativity or invalidation in their life circumstances.
- **Families who are impacted by domestic violence, substance use disorder, mental health challenges, and other difficulties.** Recent statistics show that up to 12% of children under five years old live with at least one parent with an alcohol or

substance use disorder (Lipari & Van Horn, 2017). When a parent has a substance use disorder, it can have negative effects on their children and on overall family functioning. Families with a parent who has a substance use disorder pose an increased risk to the children for experiencing other challenges, such as mental illness, poverty, domestic violence, academic problems, abuse, and neglect.

Remember that in early learning and education, it is the responsibility of the educator to be a mandated reporter. According to Wash. Rev. Code § 26.44.030 (1965) in Washington state, this means that teachers are legally obligated to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate state child protection agency. The Washington State Division for Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) states that educators are required to report incidents where there is a reasonable suspicion that abuse or neglect has occurred or there is a substantial risk that abuse or neglect may occur, but the educator must not investigate on their own (n.d.).

Educators should include a clear and detailed conversation about this mandate in the staff and parent orientation processes. The goal is to create a culture of safety where teachers operate with shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices with the intent of zero harm to children. Remember to review the goal of partnership and working together in family engagement and communicate to families that you are not “out to get them.”

There can be tough decisions about inclusion in the ECE program. Inclusion can be defined as children with and without disabilities learning alongside each other, integrated into the same classrooms, and all receiving an appropriate, high-quality education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act, originally called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), mandates that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment – to the maximum extent appropriate. There are many benefits to inclusion, such as resources to support individualized and differentiated learning, teachers having the support of other teachers and specialists, children learning with other children their age, and children learning to accept and value differences. The decision regarding inclusion needs to be made case-by-case to be successful for the child and family. All children have different needs and there are a variety of ways to meet those needs.



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Reflection

What does inclusion mean to you?

Consider the following in working with the family to make the inclusion decision:

1. How is your learning environment structured for inclusion?
2. Can the child learn and make progress in a group setting?
3. Can the teacher provide appropriate instruction so that all children can understand and be engaged?
4. Can the child tolerate an inclusive classroom without being overstimulated or overwhelmed?
5. Does the list of pros outweigh the list of cons for the child's best benefit?

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9.6 COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.

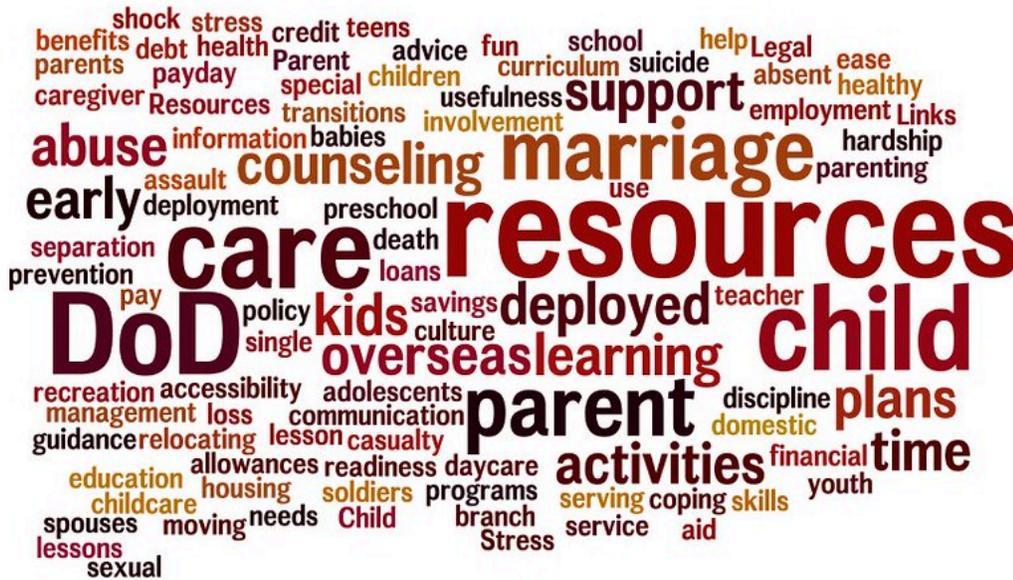


Figure 9.10. Word Cloud of Terms / Photo Credit: Anne Adrian, CC BY 2.0

Identifying Needs

We have mentioned that families need **community** support. There are a wide variety of ways that communities can support families and their local school districts. Many school districts form committees to reach out to local businesses for support (Epstein et al., 2002). For some, this might look like donations for school events, but it can also be used in other ways. For example, if there is a school district that has the children of a large factory or business in their catchment area and few parents are coming to the school to volunteer or to attend events and conferences, the school might work with the factory on how to make it possible for parents to be at the schools more often without fear of losing their jobs.

Some factories could close one day for conferences, allow paid time off, or allow parents to request release time from work for when they want or need to be at school events.

There have also been businesses that have events like a “Lunch and Learn,” in which the business brings in a qualified community member to talk about how to prepare your child for kindergarten, how to engage in enrichment activities on the weekends, how to find quality childcare in the area, etc.

In identifying needs and supports we can look to Urie Broffebrenner and the theory of ecological systems. Broffebrenner’s theory states that “human development unfolds in a nested set of systems involving cultural, social, economic, and political elements, not merely psychological ones. These systems and their interactions can nurture or stifle optimal development” (Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, n.d.). Taking this approach, we can help families create a visual model of their existing supports and then identify gaps where support is needed. Your model might look something like this:



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Figure 9.11. Eco Map / Photo Credit: Hannah Adams CC BY 4.0

Community Supports for Families

Communities can also help families by providing new crosswalks with traffic lights on busy streets for families who need to walk to school or maybe organizing walking school bus groups in neighborhoods for those who live too close for bus service. There are also public health departments that can arrange for vaccine days or dental health check days in schools. Social service workers can be available to help families who may need to apply for nutrition assistance or state medical insurance or help to pay utility bills, etc. When families, communities, businesses, and schools work together; children benefit and the community thrives. The possibilities are endless when there is a willingness for community entities to communicate and brainstorm ways to support children and families.

As part of your ongoing work with families, building partnerships, and engaging them in

their child's education, you may become aware of resources that the family could benefit from. What are the resources available in your community or beyond that you could share contact information about with families?

Consider these broad categories to build a resource list for your use with children and their families.

1. Basic family needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. Where are your community food and/or clothing banks? Where could you refer a family for housing support?

2. Cultural and language support for families. Our classrooms represent children and families from multiple languages and multiple cultures. It is important to identify those in your community whom you can turn to for information and support, such as the library. Are there interpreters and translators available? Is there a community organization that focuses on specific and individual cultures for support?

3. Developmental support and referrals. Teachers monitor child development as part of an ongoing curriculum and assessment cycle. When you identify possible concerns, or a parent shares concerns with you, where can you refer for assessment?

4. Resources for medical needs and challenges. Families sometimes do not know where to access medical help or insurance. What are the health care services and supports available nearby?



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Now that you have explored the importance of family partnerships, what strengths do you bring to building relationships with families? List those here:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



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9.7 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.

Summary

A positive relationship with families, along with a program that is committed to family engagement, is vital to a child's success in school and life. This includes parents, teachers, schools, and the community, and is uniquely important in the earliest years of a child's education. We know that children need support and guidance as they are developing skills across all domains: motor, social, emotional, physical, and cognitive, both at home and school. Our work has also demonstrated the essential need for educators to build relationships with families. These strong and nurtured relationships will support parents in growing their understanding of how they can support their child's learning from the classroom and in their home.

Parent engagement and positive relationships between home and school support improvement in children's health, well-being, and cognitive, academic, and social skills. There is also a positive influence that works to decrease challenging behaviors in children. Family engagement has also been shown to increase parent satisfaction with early childhood services.

We have all heard the saying that it takes a village to raise a child. This includes the continued support from that village to boost success as the child enters school. When there is a strong partnership between family, school, and community, the child will benefit from a multi-faceted approach for success. Additionally, when early care and education programs encourage parental participation in learning activities, provide opportunities to advocate and guide policies, and form partnership with local organizations, there are lifelong benefits to children, families, programs, and communities.

A shared understanding and commitment between families and educators will create the conditions where a love of learning can develop in our youngest students. Children gain the benefit of success advocates when their families and community members are involved in their learning. Advocacy supports children in improving their skills in all areas and gaining advocates that promote

their success, thus supporting their social, emotional, and cognitive skills and enhancing their ability to feel more confident at school and in life.

Reflection

In this chapter, you learned about families, making connections with families, and some of the struggles and challenges families face. It is important to share resources for support for families and colleagues. Think about creating a resource list or file so that you can easily share information with a family or a colleague. As you are developing this list, think about these categories, and add information (name, contact information, services offered) from your local organizations and entities as appropriate:

- basic family needs
 - housing
 - childcare
 - food
 - legal issues
- cultural and language supports
- child development referrals and supports
- medical concerns
- mental health supports
- parenting supports
- other categories of choice and identified need

Review Questions

1. What constitutes a family?
2. What external and/or internal influences affect the family and how it functions?
3. Why is it important to build strong and supportive relationships with families?
4. What are some strategies you can use to build relationships with families?
5. What is family engagement as opposed to simply involving families in the child's program?
6. List four ways you can engage meaningfully with a family.
7. What does it mean to be an ECE professional?
8. Why must we maintain professionalism and professional boundaries when we work with children and families?
9. What can you do to address conflict if it arises with a family?
10. Explain the importance of professionalism and being a professional in early learning.
11. What are funds of knowledge, and how can you maximize families' contributions to the program?
12. What is the difference between equity and equality, and why should we focus on equity?
13. What should you do if conflict arises in your work with a family?
14. Why is it important to identify community resources to share with families?
15. List two ways you might share resource information with families.

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CHAPTER 10: BEYOND BEHAVIORS



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Overview

This chapter provides insight into child behavior and what intentional and positive guidance is within a developmentally appropriate context. The content of this chapter is presented in a positive or strengths-based approach to support children as they grow, develop, and learn. This approach centers on our lens looking for and identifying a child's strengths as a starting point for our work (Dweck, 2016).

The foundation for a strengths-based approach begins with building a shared definition of what guidance is, as well as what it is not. This chapter examines the basis of behaviors both seen and unseen. It is also important to delve into some background and information about neurodiversity and trauma, and how this relates to and impacts behavior. The chapter will also address how emotions, psychological state, and social relationships influence child behavior. The final focus area is communication with families along with mutual perspectives in guidance and the role of reflective practice.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define behavior: What behavior is and is not.
- Explain the role of relationships in influencing a child's behavior.
- Create a plan for communication with families– sharing and reflecting mutual perspectives.
- Describe the social and emotional connections to behavior, including:
 - social emotional foundations of early learning
 - classroom climate
 - guiding social behaviors
 - trauma and behavior: The role of neurodiversity in behavior and the relationship between trauma and behavior

“Children need to know that we love and care for them regardless of what happens on a day to day basis”

Adam L. Holland & Kathryn A. Ohle (2020, para. 16)

Key Terms

- Affect
- Challenging behavior
- Communication
- Compliance
- Effect
- Emotional development
- Executive function

- Guidance
- Outcome
- Planned ignoring
- Self-regulation
- Social development
- Strengths-based approach

“Adults who are respectful of children are not just modeling a skill or behavior, they are meeting the emotional needs of those children, thereby helping to create the psychological conditions for children to treat others respectfully.”

~Alfie Kohn (1997, para. 6)

Attributions

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10.1 WHAT IS BEHAVIOR?

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, *behavior* is a noun, and used to describe “the way in which someone conducts oneself or behaves,” “the manner of conducting oneself,” as in “anything that an organism (like a child) does involving action and response to stimulation,” and “the response of an individual, group, or species to its environment,” and finally, “the way in which something functions or operates” (2024).

In [Chapter 4](#), temperament was discussed. It is a child’s regular way of reacting with their environment, and it is a developmental characteristic that intersects social, emotional, and physical development. Because it has genetic underpinnings, behavior includes not only the way in which one acts or conducts oneself, but especially how one acts or interacts toward others. Likewise, behavior is the way a person acts in response to a particular situation. Behavior has two purposes:

- to get something or
- to avoid something

Children learn all behaviors. They learn from watching others and from the reactions they get in response to behavior. As behavior is learned, it can also be unlearned. When we stop and ask the question, “Why is this behavior occurring?” we can identify the opportunity to teach new, more appropriate behaviors as replacement.

All behavior is **communication**. This communication happens every moment of every day. This important function is a signal that a child may not have the words or skills to tell you what they need, so they communicate with behavior (Morin, n.d.). Sometimes a child does not even know what they need! When we understand and acknowledge this communication that is the basis of unwanted behavior, or what might be called misbehavior, we can work to change that communication into a form that is socially acceptable, safe, and healthy.



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online here:

<https://openwa.pressbooks.pub/earlychildedu1/?p=656#h5p-136>

Behavior is observable. It is what we see and what we can hear, such as a child throwing a block, standing up, speaking, whispering, yelling, or arguing with a classmate. On the reverse side, behavior is how a feeling is expressed, not what the child is feeling. An example of expressing a feeling is that a child may show anger by rolling her eyes, making a face, yelling, or crossing his arms, and turning away from the adult. These are observable actions and are more descriptive than just stating that the child looks anxious.

Behavior is measurable. This means that the early care and education professional can define and describe the behavior in objective, concrete, fact-based terms. The adult can easily identify the behavior when it occurs, including when the behavior begins, ends, and how often it occurs. An example of this is taken from circle time and a child who is “interrupting all the time”. This behavior is not measurable because it is not specific. However, stating that “Holly yells, ‘teacher!’ four times during circle time” is specific, and we can measure and track the data each day at circle time. Using this operational definition of objective data, anyone observing in the classroom would be able to identify specifically which behavior the teacher is working to change.

Behavior does not occur in isolation (Delahooke, 2019). The process of behavior has three parts:

1. the action or event that comes first (the trigger)
2. the resulting behavior(s)
3. the consequences of or reaction to the behavior

Behaviors are visible. This visibility is in terms of desired and undesired behaviors. Think for a moment in terms of behavior being like a tree and its root system. Above the ground we see and observe the behavior. What we do not see is the part of the tree and its root system that is below the ground. It is the same with behavior. We see the actions and manifestations of the behavior. We do not see the underlying characteristics of feelings, thinking, and attitude(s).

Behavior falls under the domain of social and **emotional development**. Children are born with the want and need to connect with those around them. When parents and teachers along with other caregivers create positive relationships with children beginning at birth and continuing through the early years, they support and are responsive to their

diverse cultures and languages. Children who have strong social and emotional skills are more likely to feel safe and secure in life. These children also have the skills to create a base for strong and positive relationships. Those relationships are observed in how children experience the world, how they express themselves, manage their emotions, and establish strong and meaningful relationships with others.

“Where did we ever get the crazy idea that to make children do better, first we have to make them feel worse?”

Jane Nelsen et al. (2001, p. 49)

Observable (seen) and Unobservable (unseen) Behavior

Let’s begin this section with a visual. In the following photo is a tree on the side of a cliff. Above the ground, the leaves and branches represent what is seen or observable related to behavior(s).

Below the ground, the roots represent what is not seen and therefore unobservable, related to behavior(s).

It’s important to remember the concept of observable vs. unobservable as related to behaviors because it is not always possible to see the root cause of the behaviors. This chapter will help early childhood educators to be better prepared for many kinds of behaviors in the classroom and home.



Figure 10.1. Exposed gnarly roots in Fall River Park / Photo Credit: Martin LaBar, CC BY-NC 2.0

Behaviors are an **outcome** (or result) that can be observed. Above-the-ground behaviors, the behaviors that can be observed—what children say and do— might include indicators adapted from Mona Delahooke’s work *Beyond Behaviors* (2019):

- saying nice things to others or nothing at all
- asking the person to borrow their belonging before using it

- follow directions the first time
- working quietly while others finish their work
- keeping hands and feet to self
- raising hand and waiting quietly
- respecting others
- being agreeable
- calling other students bad names
- taking other students' belongings without asking
- arguing or refusing to comply with adult requests or directions
- disturbing others while they are working
- punching or kicking others
- blurting out answers
- bullying others
- arguing

A child's behavior may not be communicating what it seems outwardly. Every behavior has a motivation or purpose. While we cannot assume that we know the motivation for the behavior, we can observe the results of the motivations. Those observations must be objective, factual, and descriptive to assist in identification of the motivation. Any of the following motivations can be the reason for behavior (Delahooke, 2019):

- I feel angry.
- I feel frustrated.
- I feel scared.
- I feel happy.
- I feel loved.
- I feel proud.
- I feel lonely.
- I feel worried.
- I feel embarrassed.
- I feel sad.
- I feel sick.
- I am tired.
- I am hungry.
- Am I safe?
- Do I belong?
- Am I respected?

- Am I understood?
- Am I accepted?
- Do I matter?
- Am I loved?
- Can I do things by myself?

Also under the surface are motivations and reasons for behavior that are not seen (Delahooke, 2019):

- social skills
- basic needs
- physical safety
- need to belong
- security
- hunger
- thoughts
- sadness
- **executive functioning**
- ADHD
- autism
- environmental stressors
- attention
- sleep
- attachment
- need for connection
- racism
- discrimination
- need for attention
- sensory needs
- emotions
- self-esteem
- developmental level
- fear
- anger
- power

The tree and root provides a visual model of the theory behind childhood behavior. In

considering this model, there are many things that influence the way that children act and react. These influences include the child's skills, knowledge, experience, social role or values, self-image, traits, and motives. Under the surface in the root system; it is essential to consider the importance of the unseen forces that can shape and influence behaviors.

As adults, we need to take the time to understand behavior and the motivations or causes of behavior. True behavior "problems" or challenges are those that are continuous and that get in the child's way of social relationships, communication, and learning. These misunderstood behaviors can potentially cause harm to the child, the family, other children, and other adults.



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Figure 10.2. *Intent Vs. Impact / Photo Credit: Alex Green, Pexels License*

Have you heard of the distinction between intent and impact? Intent refers to the motives driving our actions or conversations, originating from our thoughts and emotions. On

the other hand, impact relates to how others feel in response to our words or deeds. It encompasses the emotional reaction they experience. Recognizing this difference can facilitate better communication. By expressing our intent, we can help both children and adults understand our perspective (ADL Education, 2022). And by considering the impact of our actions and words, we can avoid unintentional harm. It's essential to keep in mind both intent and impact when interacting with others. It can truly make a significant difference in the communication process.

Reflection

All behaviors are communication, All behaviors have meaning and purpose, and are both seen and unseen. Think in terms of the tree presented above.

- The leaves and branches are seen, and we can observe changes and growth.
- The roots are below ground, hidden, and not easy to see or observe, yet they are a vital part of the whole tree.
- The same can be said for behavior.
- Some aspects are easily seen or observed, while the invisible characteristics are equally important to determining motivation and change.

Now, draw your own image of a tree and list behaviors you have seen or experienced on the leaves, branches, and roots of the tree.

Attributions

1. Figure 10.1: [Exposed gnarly roots in Fall River Park](#) by [Martin LaBar](#) is released under [CC BY-NC 2.0](#)
2. Figure 10.2: [image](#) released under the [Pexels License](#)

10.2 THE ROLE OF RELATIONSHIPS: HOW RELATIONSHIPS AND BEHAVIORS CONNECT

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.



Figure 10.3. *Playing Jenga With Six Year Old / Photo Credit: Michał Parzuchowski, CC0 1.0*

With an understanding of how behavior is defined, this section of the chapter will explore and reflect on the connection between relationships and behavior. Did you know that relationships with others may influence behavior either positively or negatively?

Look closely for a moment at this photo of the young boy playing Jenga. As he moves and/or removes the blocks, the structure becomes unbalanced and even unpredictable. A child's behavior and the relationships in his or her life can mirror this game of Jenga.

According to the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC) at Harvard University (2004/2009), young children experience their world as an environment of relationships, and these relationships **affect** practically every aspect of their development.

Stated simply, relationships are the active ingredients of the environment's influence on healthy human development. They incorporate the qualities that best promote competence and well-being. These include individualized responsiveness, mutual action-and-interaction, an emotional connection to another human being (a parent, peer, grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbor, teacher, coach) or any other person who has an important impact on the child's early development. Relationships engage children in the human community in ways that help them define who they are, what they can become, and how and why they are important to other people (p. 1).

When children have secure and stable relationships with caring adults, they tend to be more proficient in developing warm and positive relationships with others. They are also "more excited about learning, more positive about coming to school, more self-confident" (NSCDC, 2004/2009, p. 2), and have stronger skills getting along with others.

The relationships children have with other children also inform and influence their behavior (Bandura, 1977). Young children learn from each other how to share, how to participate in shared interactions such as, taking turns, the reciprocal acts of giving and receiving, how to respect and accept the needs and wants of others, and how to manage their own impulses.

Simply being around other children, however, is not enough to build the skills for positive behaviors. The development of friendships is critical. In friendships, children learn and play more competently in the relationships created and nurtured with their friends. This is in contrast to when they are struggling with the social challenges that may occur when interacting with casual acquaintances or unfamiliar peers. Positive relationships and positive behaviors all add to healthy brain development and depend on the relationships with individuals in the child's close community as well as in the family (NSCDC, 2004/2009).



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It is within that context of family that we must remember that "everything we think, say, and do is processed through our own cultural backgrounds" and our individual lens (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2019-2020, para. 1). Recognizing the diversity that exists in our communities, schools, and classrooms will help educators be more aware of influences on

children's behaviors. It will help educators develop realistic expectations and interventions regarding behaviors.

Let's begin developing this understanding of culture by looking critically at ourselves. This includes a close inspection of our beliefs, our values, and our practices. When thinking about behavior specifically, it is important to identify our cultural expectations for:

- independence vs. interdependence
- standing out in a group vs. being modest or less visible
- promoting self vs. group focus
- personal property vs. shared

Knowledge of ourselves then becomes the foundation to scaffold and build an understanding of how the cultures of the families we work with impact their children's behavior. We can only learn about the cultures of others through conversations and interactions with them. This knowledge comes directly from the families and is very personal and individual to the family.

Your culture and the cultures of the children enrolled are the starting point for being culturally responsive. Therefore, it is important to remember that:

Every school and early childhood education program has a culture, too. The cultures of most American schools are based on White European American values. As the makeup of the U.S. population becomes more diverse, there is more cultural dissonance—which impacts children's behavior. (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2019-2020, para. 17)

Think about culture in terms of classroom practice. Children may not understand the classroom rules you have set because they do not speak the language used at school. Did you know that some languages have no words for *I*, *me*, or *mine* (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2019-2020)? Because the way you respond to children's behavior and conflict is bound to your own culture, it is common to get the wrong idea about a child's words or behaviors. When you observe a child's behavior that appears to be noncompliant, ask yourself if that behavior could be culturally influenced. Honest and open conversations with the family will help you understand and respect their cultural beliefs and practices regarding education and child development.

Educators engaging in informed practice will influence equity in their approaches and expectations. This guides early childhood educators to support all children to succeed in their classrooms and programs. With growing diversity in the U.S. population, children will find themselves more frequently in classroom environments that may not match or reflect their home culture. It is our goal as educators to support children to feel included and

understood, versus being “confused, isolated, alienated, conflicted, and less competent because what they’ve learned so far in their home culture simply doesn’t apply” (Kaiser & Raminsky, 2019-2020, para. 20).

Relationships and Responsive Teaching

In terms of relationships, when you as the teacher are responsive to the children’s culture, you are better able to form genuine and caring relationships with the children and their families. You can scaffold on this to build on what the child already knows and can do and identify their next steps for learning. This information will help you choose and implement appropriate activities and strategies that honor children’s cultures as well as life experiences. This allows for teaching children what they need to know and do to be successful in the world today (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2019-2020).

The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) outlines the fundamental importance of positive relationships. When adults invest time and effort in teaching proactively prior to behavior “events,” children are more successful in achieving improved behavior change, even in situations that might lead to escalating **challenging behavior**. The key is communicating non-contingent affection and unquestioned valuing of children. The bottom line is that success is dependent on building a positive relationship first. Adults need to invest the time and attention with children as a precedent to the optimum use of sound behavior change strategies (Joseph & Strain, 2010).

The first step is to invest the time in relationship building, and the second is to understand that as your relationships with the child become stronger, so does your potential influence on their behavior. Children will “cue in” on the presence of you as a meaningful and caring adult and will attend differentially and selectively to what you say and do, continuing to seek out ways to ensure even more positive attention from the adult (Lally et al., 1988).

Joseph and Strain (2010) share these strategies to build relationships with children:

- Carefully analyze each **compliance** task (e.g., “time to go paint”) and, where possible, shifting that compliance task to a choice for children (e.g., “Do you want to paint or do puzzles?”).
- Carefully consider if some forms of challenging behavior (e.g., loud voice) can be ignored. This is not “**planned ignoring**” for behavior designed to elicit attention but ignoring in the sense of making wise and limited choices about when to pick battles over behavior.

- Self-monitoring one's own behaviors and setting behavioral goals accordingly. Some teachers have easily done this by using wrist golf counters to self-record or by moving a plastic chip from one pocket to the next. A strategically posted visual reminder can help teachers remember to make numerous relationship deposits. (p. 3)



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There will be times that it is important to give feedback to children that is in the form of corrections and reminders. This will not hinder your relationship building. The important take-away is that positive interactions need to happen in a greater number and frequency. As you learn to do this, keep a tally of how many times you remind a child about an unwanted behavior. Then, try to find at least twice the number of positive things to comment on and tally those also (Joseph & Strain, 2010).

When children do not receive positive feedback, they are less likely to enter the positive cycle of motivation and learning. The conclusion here is that when children have positive interactions with teachers and other adults, they have fewer instances of challenging behavior. When children feel safe and understood they can use those positive interactions to help build positive relationships. This will build motivation and stimulate within the brain a cycle of repetition focused on motivation and learning.

Attributions

1. Figure 10.3: [Playing jenga with my 6 year old](#) by [Michał Parzuchowski](#) is released under [CC0 1.0](#)

10.3 SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS TO BEHAVIOR

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.



Figure 10.4. *Children Working Cooperatively / Photo Credit: Illustrator LdreiT, CC BY-SA 2.0*

As children grow and learn to be in the world, they learn the skills needed to take turns, help their friends, play together, and cooperate with others. Generally, around the same time, children are learning about their own feelings and emotions (Bovey & Strain, 2005).

Children are born with the need and desire to connect with those around them through (**social development**). When teachers and care providers work to build strong, positive relationships with children from birth through the early years, and value their diverse cultures and languages, children are more likely to feel safe and secure. This, in turn, helps to lay a strong foundation for healthy social and **emotional development**.

This process has an affect on how children experience the world, express themselves, manage their emotions, and establish positive relationships with the (emotional

development) of others. Emotional awareness is the ability to recognize and identify our own feelings and actions along with the feelings and actions of other people and understand how our own feelings and actions affect ourselves and others (Twombly et.al., 2018).

The following Venn diagram illustrates the independence and overlap of social development and emotional development; although they are often referred to as a single developmental domain (Head Start ECLKC, 2021a), it is essential to understand the difference between the two areas:

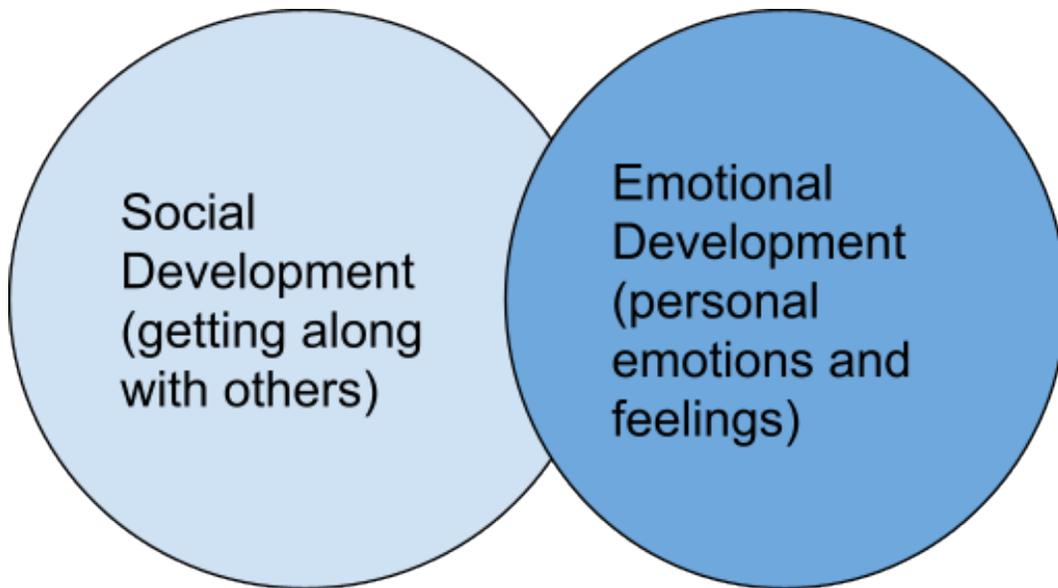


Figure 10.5. Author-created Venn Diagram Showing Social and Emotional Development / Photo Credit: Ardene Niemer, CC BY 4.0

Table 10.1 provides some examples of social and emotional milestones as they relate to behavior: Please refer to the milestones shared at [CDC](#), [UNICEF](#), [March of Dimes](#), [Head Start ECLKC](#), or other research-based milestone documents for more detailed information. Keep in mind that there can be variations in behavioral milestones, as was mentioned in discussions about developmental milestones.

Age	Examples of social and emotional milestones for neurotypical children
Birth to 2 months	May briefly calm himself (may bring hands to mouth and suck on hand). Tries to make eye contact with caregiver. Begins to smile at people.
6 months	Reacts positively to familiar faces and begins to be wary of strangers. Likes to play with others, especially parents and other caregivers. Responds to own name.
9 months	May show early signs of separation anxiety and may cry more often when separated from caregivers and be clingy with familiar adults. May become attached to specific toys or other comfort items. Child understands “no.” Copies sounds and gestures of others.
12 months	May show fear in new situations. Repeats sounds or actions to get attention. May show signs of independence and resist a caregiver’s attempt to help. Begins to follow simple directions.
18 months	May need help coping with temper tantrums. May begin to explore alone but with parent close by. Engages in simple pretend or modeling behavior, such as feeding a doll or talking on the phone. Demonstrates joint attention; for example, the child points to an airplane in the sky and looks at caregiver to make sure the caregiver sees it too.
2 years	Copies others, especially adults and older children. Shows more and more independence and may show defiant behavior. Mainly plays alongside other children (parallel play) but is beginning to include other children in play. Follows simple instructions.
3 years	May start to understand the idea of “mine” and “his” or “hers.” May feel uneasy or anxious with major changes in routine. May begin to learn how to take turns in games and follows directions with two or three steps. Names a friend and may show concern for a friend who is sad or upset.
Age	Examples of social and emotional milestones
4 years	Cooperates with other children and may prefer to play with other children than by herself. Often cannot tell what is real and what is make-believe. Enjoys new things and activities.
5 years	May want to please caregivers and peers. Is aware of gender. May start recognizing what is real and what is make-believe.
6-7 years	Measure his performance against others. Continue to develop her social skills by playing with other children in a variety of situations. Be able to communicate with others without adult help. Start to feel sensitive about how other children feel about him.

Table 10.1 Behavioral Milestones

Social development and emotional development include development in skills related to social interaction, emotional awareness, and **self-regulation**. Following are some important reminders as you consider social and emotional development for young children.

Social interaction is focused on the relationships we share with others. In our work with

young children it is important to remember that this includes the child's relationships with adults as well as peers. As children develop socially, they learn to take turns, help their friends, play together, share, and cooperate with others.

Emotional awareness includes the ability to recognize and understand our own feelings and emotions. It is important to learn to recognize our own actions and reactions as well as those of other people. Our own feelings and actions can directly affect not only ourselves, but others as well.

Self-regulation is defined as the ability to express thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in socially appropriate ways. Learning to calm down when angry or excited and persisting at difficult tasks are examples of self-regulation.

Children who are socially and emotionally healthy tend to demonstrate, and continue to develop, several important behaviors and skills (Blimes, 2012; McClellan & Katz, 2001). According to Blimes, McClellan and Katz, socially and emotionally healthy children:

- are usually in a positive mood
- listen and follow directions
- have close relationships with caregivers and peers
- recognize, label, and manage their own emotions
- understand others' emotions and show empathy
- express wishes and preferences clearly
- gain access to ongoing play and group activities
- show an ability to play, negotiate, and compromise with others

Social and emotional development are both related to behavior and include the areas of social interaction, emotional awareness, and self-regulation. Social interaction spotlights the relationships children share with others and includes relationships with adults and other children. As children develop socially, they learn the skills needed to take turns, help their classmates, play together, and cooperate with others.

Remember, social and emotional development are both related to behavior and include the areas of social interaction, emotional awareness, and self-regulation. Social interaction spotlights the relationships children share with others and includes relationships with adults and other children. As children develop socially, they learn the skills needed to take turns, help their classmates, play together, and cooperate with others.



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Reflection

1. Define social development in your own words.
2. Now define emotional development.
3. How are they each different, and where do they overlap?

Create this reflection in a Venn Diagram.

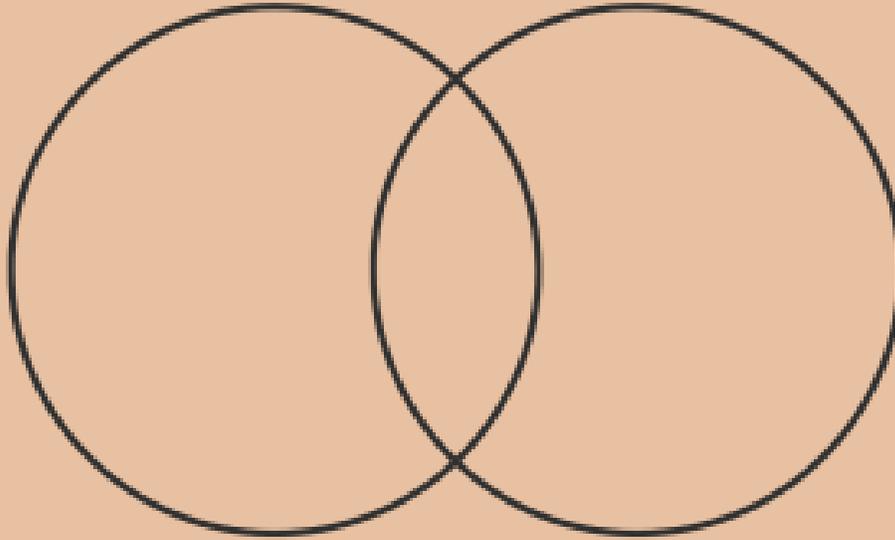


Figure 10.6. Venn Diagram / Photo Credit: Ardene Niemer, CC BY 4.0

Attributions

1. Figure 10.4: [kindergarten_abb3](#) by [Illustrator LdreiT](#) is released under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#)
2. Figure 10.5: Author-created Venn Diagram Showing Social and Emotional Development by Ardene Niemer, for WA Open ProfTech, © [SBCTC](#), [CC BY 4.0](#)
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10.4 BEHAVIOR AND INTENTIONAL TEACHING

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.

How can educators teach social and emotional skills intentionally to support positive behaviors? Remember that all behavioral intervention is an opportunity to teach. When we teach intentionally, we have a plan and a purpose, and our **outcome** (result) will be observable. We are approaching this from a teaching perspective (Hoque, 2016), as that matches with the **strengths-based** focus and moves away from a negative or punishing approach.



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Cultural diversity is very evident in the multitude of effective and appropriate ways we care for and guide children. Social settings also require teachers and families to consider how they want to advise their children to act based on their lived experiences and knowledge of what is required to stay safe in specific situations.

Following are some strategies for teaching intentionally and building social and emotional skills in young children (Epstein, 2014; Ho & Funk, 2018).

Coaching in real time: When a teacher steps into the role of coach, the goal is to help children to see what they are doing, to begin to understand how their actions affect others, and how to choose positive alternatives for the unwanted behavior. Here is an example of this strategy: Two children are struggling for the same toy in the block area. One child grabs the toy from another, who in turn cries. As teacher/coach, you get down to the child's level to engage fully and establish eye contact. The next step is to calmly and warmly say to the children that, "Michael is using the truck now. When you tried to take it away from him, he got upset. What do you think that you might do to make him feel better?" Now, model an appropriate response by saying, "I am sorry that Julie took your

truck, Michael,” but we don’t force children to say they are sorry. You might also say, “Next time if you want to play with the toy Michael is using, you can ask him if he will share.” The teacher’s role is now to observe and provide positive feedback on the interaction and demonstration of the desired behavior.

Giving **effective** praise: Meaningful feedback is directly related to the behavior in the moment and is provided in the form of effective praise. This is a powerful strategy for developing children’s social and emotional development (Kostelnik et al., 2015). Effective praise requires teachers to describe specifically what they see—without generalizing, evaluating, or making comparisons. What we want to teach is internal motivation, and not teach the child to always seek validation from others. This can be accomplished by describing what we observe that the child has done:

- You worked really hard on this drawing. I see many different colors!
- I see how you stayed in the lines and colored very carefully!
- You found a great spot for all of the blocks when I asked for you to clean up.
- Wow! You did it! You put all of the pieces in that puzzle.
- Thank you for helping Hannah with her building. You showed her how to be a helpful friend.
- You didn’t give up! You found all of those pieces for the Lego building

Modeling appropriate behavior: Children learn by observing other people and use this information to get ideas about appropriate/acceptable behavior. They use the ideas to influence their actions. The strategy of modeling, also referred to as demonstrating appropriate behaviors, gives teachers the opportunity to build and scaffold children’s healthy and positive social and emotional skills. Modeling in a classroom can look like this:

- Move closer to children as needed, to provide a visual cue to the behaviors.
- Model appropriate caring and respectful behavior with children and colleagues throughout the day.
- Use nonverbal gestures and contact, for example, nodding, giving a thumbs up, gently touching a shoulder, gently tugging on your own ear, or pointing to your own eye to send messages.
- Clearly state expectations for behavior (use walking feet, use gentle hands, chairs are for sitting, blocks are for building).
- Recognize kind acts of children towards others in the moment.
- Offer effective praise for a group effort.
- Gently touching a child’s hand to redirect attention and behavior.

When children see teachers and other adults model these strategies that are non-threatening and do not invade their space, the child's response is typically a smile. In turn, the child will use their gentle hands, say please and thank you, give hugs and high fives, and use appropriate words to label their feelings (Katz & McClellan, 1997).



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As adults, we are not simply role models for children, but we also use the child's appropriate behaviors to model social and emotional skills for them. You might choose to use puppets during circle time to demonstrate children's appropriate behaviors to help them use those skills in a meaningful way. You might also use a strategy called social stories to teach important social and emotional skills. Social stories are a tool created to help children learn routines, expectations, and appropriate behaviors, and they are presented in a story format. These stories help children learn in another way while at the same time reinforcing the behaviors that we as adults want to see (Katz & McClellan, 1997).

The Appreciative I-Message conveys positive feelings of appreciation, gratitude, relief or happiness to others (Adams, 2022). Unlike praise, which uses labels and judgments, Appreciative **I-Messages** focus on the person's behavior and can include the positive effects on you. A word about You-Messages and praise—people often resent positive You-Messages because they feel they are being judged or talked down to.

Appreciative I-Messages are a way of acknowledging others' contributions (colleagues, families, and children).

- "I appreciate that you helped clean up the art area. I felt that you listened and were a great helper."
- "I got a lot out of the newsletter article you wrote this month. It really made me think."
- "I was impressed by how brave you were with that spider. Let's scoop it into a cup together and take it outside."

Appreciative I-Messages should not be used to manipulate or "shape" behavior. Such

ulterior motives invariably come through to the team member and make your sincerity suspect. The Appreciative I-Message should be a “no-strings attached” expression of acceptance and acknowledgement.

Classroom Climate



Figure 10.7. Preschool Class Rules / Photo Credit: Allison Shelley for EDUimages, CC BY-NC 4.0

Behavior can be influenced by the classroom environment, beyond the physical layout of the space. Every classroom environment in every program has a climate. This classroom climate includes all aspects of the physical learning space and is influenced by attitudes, teacher tone, interactions between teacher(s) and students as well as students with each other. Classroom climate is also influenced by moods and messages that are shared openly or implied, as well as intentional or unintentional actions.

The relationships built in positive classroom climates support children to feel safe, supported, and valued. The result of this is that the children will participate more freely in taking risks and engaging in deeper learning opportunities through exploration and experimentation. Behaviors in a positive classroom climate tend to be more positive in nature as well.

You can recognize a positive classroom because you will see responsive teachers who manage behavior and attention challenges as well as the social and emotional needs of individual children (Riley et al., 2007).

You can build a positive classroom climate by practicing some of the strategies shared below (Katz & McClellan, 1997).

- Use behavior-approving language in the form of verbal comments or facial expression
 - “I see you are doing a great job sitting on your mat!” Or “Nice work concentrating on your counting.”
 - Smiling, nodding, or giving a thumbs-up
- Give specific praise. (“Seth, you are really keeping your hands to yourself during circle time. Way to go!”)
- Maintain a positive attitude with the children and with colleagues.
- Maintain a positive and pleasant tone and affect (what others see and hear from you).
- Provide frequent opportunities to develop self-regulation skills.
- Model making appropriate choices.
- Reinforce children’s appropriate choice-making.
- Guide children in developing strategies for themselves.

A negative classroom climate has the opposite effect, in that it may feel hostile, uncomfortable, and stressful. The classroom may appear chaotic and out of control. In addition to being an environment that insufficiently supports active learning, a negative classroom climate can also influence unwanted behaviors. In a negative classroom

climate, you may also see open examples of inequality, inequitable access to learning opportunities or materials, and obvious stereotypes and biases.

As you work to eliminate a negative classroom environment, it is important to do the following (IRIS Center, n.d.):

- Eliminate damaging forms of behavior management (sarcasm, shaming, threats).
- Eliminate or strictly limit behavior disapproving language
 - Using a child’s name multiple times, such as in “Use walking feet, Johnny!” or “That was not a good choice, Sam.”
 - Using facial expressions such as grimacing, frowning, gesturing, or shaking your head side-to-side.



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When children have opportunities to learn in positive classroom climates, with more positive peer interactions, teachers who express a more positive emotional tone, and teachers who positively reinforce behavior, they demonstrate significantly greater social competence and fewer unwanted behaviors (Katz & McClellan, 1997).

Reflection

List five phrases you can use to positively reinforce behavior.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

- 4.
- 5.



Figure 10.8. *Untitled / Photo Credit: cherylholt, Pixabay License*

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10.5 TEACHING AND SUPPORTING SOCIAL BEHAVIORS

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.

Children are born wanting social interaction. They watch how family and others connect with them. They watch and listen closely to facial expressions and tone of voice. Through these interactions and observations babies develop the foundation for appropriate behavior based on what they see (Committee on the Science of Children et al., 2015).

Social rules help to guide us in our interactions with others. Many children have a hard time recognizing these rules. It takes time and practice to learn.

Thomas McIntyre (2006) wrote these suggestions in his article “Teaching Social Skills to Kids Who Don’t Yet Have Them”:

1. Teach “belly breathing” as a calming technique. Take a deep breath in and count slowly blowing air out. The first photo in this chapter shows a child blowing bubbles, a strategy that is also highly effective here, as a child must take a deep breath to blow bubbles. You might also use the strategy of “smell the flower and blow out the candle” for a visual image. Use a silk flower and unlit birthday candle for props.
2. Include a calm corner (not the book area/library) in your classroom. Include soft toys, pillows and emotion posters and materials.
3. Teach social skills (making friends and getting along with others), and incorporate social stories regularly in your ongoing curriculum. Social stories help teach children routines, expectations, and behavioral standards in an alternative way. Search online for “social stories” for more information.
4. Teach children how to identify their emotions and label feelings with them. Use photos and prompts and keep materials about emotions available in the classroom.
5. Ensure you integrate plenty of movement activities throughout the day.
6. Include many opportunities for sensory play, including sand and water.
7. Model the social behaviors you want to see from the children.



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10.6 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRAUMA AND BEHAVIOR

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.



Figure 10.9. Preschool Girl Plays Alone With Train / Photo Credit: Allison Shelley for EDUimages, CC BY-NC 4.0

Many of our children have experienced trauma, and we may or may not be aware. For them, keeping themselves safe becomes the primary motivator of behavior. Children may appear manipulative or controlling when they may be attempting to just keep themselves safe. Safety is the most important goal of a child experiencing trauma (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, n.d.).

Like the tree and root system we learned earlier in this chapter, we only see the small portion above the surface. Look below the surface of the behavior, and you will see the feelings and emotions driving the behavior. The unwanted or “misbehavior” we experience is often a child’s attempt to solve another problem of which we are unaware.

Even minor stressors can act as triggers that fill children with emotion and can result in misbehavior. When teachers and caregivers do not understand why a child is acting out, they are more likely to focus on “managing” the behavior rather than meeting the child’s needs. This is not an effective response to misbehavior, and may actually lead to the child being more unpredictable or even explosive, making the process of calming down even more difficult.

According to the Mayo Clinic, Stress is an automatic physical, mental and emotional response to challenging events. It’s a normal part of everyone’s life, including the lives of children (LaCore, 2022). To understand unwanted or “misbehavior,” it is important to understand the body’s stress response. Children who have experienced repeated trauma often have overactive alarms. They are powerfully attentive to danger and may label non-threatening things as dangerous. False alarms can happen when children hear, see, smell, or feel something that reminds them of frightening things from the past. These reminders are called triggers.

Some common triggers of unwanted behavior include (Kahn, 2023):

- Changes in the schedule, routine or environment that are unexpected
- The sense a child feels of helplessness or fear
 - Experiencing a situation that causes a child to feel threatened or attacked
 - Overstimulation from the environment (can be many things including too many children/people in the room, noise, light, or activity).



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What Does a Triggered Child Look Like?

It is important to note that stress from trauma can show up in our children in their health (physiologically), through their emotions (emotionally), through their thinking and processing of information (cognitively), or behaviorally. In Chapter 10 we're focusing on the behavioral aspect.

The National Institutes of Health (Chu et al., 2022) shares that behaviors resulting from a stress response typically fall into one of three categories: flight, fight, or freeze. Let's take a look at what you might see in a classroom with these three categories:

Flight: Children who experience a flight response want to get away, to “flee” the situation or threat. Their body is telling them to run. The goal is to avoid danger.

Shae, age 4, has experienced trauma in an environment of ongoing domestic violence. When Shae hears raised voices (even in play) he tries to elope, or run from the classroom, or at the very least, leave the area and hide in a perceived “safe” place.

Fight: Children who react to trauma in this way will tend to face the threat head-on. There may be no hesitation, and this reaction may seem instantaneous, but the child is simply in a mindset of defense. As teachers, we may see and label this as aggression. From the child's view, it is defense.

Aloria is 6. She lives in a neighborhood surrounded by violence. She often hears gunshots and sirens throughout the day and night. In the classroom, Susie grabbed a marker from Aloria that she was using for her drawing. Immediately, Aloria responded with fists up and ready to take Susie on.

Freeze: This final category of “freeze” is just how it sounds. Children experiencing a freeze response are stuck in place, frozen in the moment. This child is unable to physically move or react to the threat (real or perceived.)

Chris was visiting extended family when a tornado alert appeared on the tv screen. Everyone in the home proceeded to the home's basement for safety, as the storm neared and strengthened. When they emerged from the basement after the storm, the roof and many walls of the home had vanished. Chris's response now in the classroom is to freeze when loud noises are present.

An important takeaway from this information about trauma is that there is not one

single way that a child will react or behave. We cannot assume anything about a child's behavior without considering trauma—significant traumatic events, or an accumulation of smaller traumatic experiences.

Watch for these types of behaviors (Spokane Regional Health District, n.d.), and ask yourself, “What is the child communicating?”

- nervousness or jumpiness
- showing confusion about what is dangerous or who to go to for safety
- having broad mood swings between quiet or withdrawn and aggressive
- high need for attention, or trouble paying attention
- loss of appetite
- reverting to earlier (younger) behaviors such as bedwetting, wanting to be fed
- reenacting experiences in play
- avoiding friends or activities previously enjoyed
- getting involved in fights, or provoking fights



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What Can You Do?

The [Pyramid Equity Project](#) shares some insight on the most effective strategies for addressing challenging behavior. Focused on prevention of challenging and unwanted behavior and promotion of appropriate social behaviors, these strategies include environmental changes, providing positive attention and feedback to children, and a focus on teaching social skills and emotional competencies. It is important to remember that even when intervention and teaching practices are in place, some young children may still engage in challenging or unwanted behavior. When responding to these behaviors, always combine intentional teaching and prevention practices with the strategies for specific behaviors. The use of these response strategies is intended to reduce the likelihood of challenging behavior, but will not be effective without careful and intentional attention to teaching social skills and emotional competencies (Strain et al., 2017).

- The teacher, or other adult, must stay calm, regardless of the behaviors demonstrated. An upset adult interacting with a triggered child can worsen the behavior.
- Remember the tree and root system. Try to identify the need below the surface that is influencing the child's behavior. Shift your focus on meeting the child's needs rather than on correcting the behavior.
- Try the strategy of belly breathing or blowing bubbles to help the child breathe and become calm.
- Wait until the child is no longer triggered to talk about what happened. While triggered, a child is not able to use the rational part of the brain, making reasoning ineffective.
- When the child is calm, talk about how to recognize triggers and what can be done to increase awareness of emotions to prevent being triggered. Or, talk about what can be done to calm down and manage (or regulate) emotions.
- As difficult as it can be, try to remember that these behaviors are not a personal attack, and likely have little to do with you.



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Trauma, as it is fully defined and as it applies to behavior, has historically been absent from teacher training curricula. This left a gap in understanding possible root causes and motivation for behavior. Therefore, teachers had to rely on less effective means of teaching behavioral expectations and coaching children towards wanted behaviors. The absence of teacher training curricula also left teachers less than fully prepared to plan strengths-based, positive strategies and interventions that would support children to learn desired behaviors.

We tend to think of trauma as the result of a frightening and upsetting event. But many children experience trauma through ongoing exposure throughout their early development. This can be ongoing abuse, neglect, homelessness, food insecurity, precarious immigration status, changes in family situations (such as divorce), domestic violence, or violence in their communities. And it's clear that chronic trauma can cause

serious problems with learning and behavior. Trauma is particularly challenging for educators to address because kids often don't express the distress they're feeling in a way that's easily recognizable — and they may mask their pain with behavior that's aggressive or off-putting. (Miller, 2024, paras. 1-2)

The challenge now is for educators is to always think about effective practices, where the bigger picture includes information on trauma-informed care. Early childhood educators need to learn the signs and symptoms of trauma in children to understand these confusing behaviors. Identification of symptoms of trauma can also help avoid misdiagnosis, as these symptoms can mimic other learning challenges, including [ADHD](#) and other behavior disorders (Minahan & Rappaport, 2012).

Some of the barriers to learning that are experienced by children impacted by trauma include trouble forming relationships with teachers and other adults, poor **self-regulation** skills, negative thinking, hypervigilance, and challenges with **executive function** (Center on the Developing Child. n.d.).

Children who have been neglected or abused often have many challenges in forming relationships. This can also impact relationships with teachers (Miller, 2024), which in turn poses a barrier in the first step to a successful classroom experience. Children who live with trauma may also have learned to be wary of adults because their experience includes having been ignored or betrayed by those they have depended on. Often, children in trauma do not have the skills or the experience that would support them in asking for help. Many have had little or no adult modeling for identifying and meeting their needs.

Many children who have experienced trauma have not been able to develop secure attachments to the adults in their lives. Children who have never developed that early attachment for trust, who have not learned that they are lovable, and who have not learned that people will take care of them, need extra support to build those special relationships with their teachers and other staff (Sheldon-Dean, 2024).

One of the biggest challenges in the area of behavior and **guidance** in classrooms and programs is that when kids act out, the response is built on disciplinary systems that involve withdrawing attention and support, rather than addressing their needs and challenges. That type of guidance is teaching children they may be punished for acting out! Educators need to do the opposite and show extra patience for kids who provoke and push away adults who try to help them. Instead of punishing, this is an opportunity to teach a child what to do! Teachers need to work with these children on [changing their behavior](#). When a child is acting up in class, teachers need to recognize the powerful feelings they are expressing, even though they are expressed inappropriately.

Take the opportunity to be strengths-based in your approach. Begin by acknowledging the child's emotion and try to identify it. This is also where modeling plays a big role. Start

by saying, “I can see that you are really angry that Anja took the marker you wanted!” If that statement is not correctly connected to the feelings the child is experiencing, that child is highly likely to correct you. This will provide a positive pathway to teaching desired behavior, rather than jumping to reprimands, a behavior plan, deducting points, or withdrawing privileges or suspending the child (Miller, 2024).

Materials and Classroom Strategies

Visuals and other materials can be used to teach children to label feelings and emotions should be an ongoing part of the curriculum (Head Start ECLKC, 2021b) and be present in a quiet corner area and in accessible parts of the classroom environment. Acknowledging and naming an emotion helps children be more able to express themselves in a more appropriate way. Think about creating a chart using photos of the children in your classroom to depict common feelings, or use the link in the additional websites to explore at the end of this chapter. Think about feelings such as:

- boredom
- cheerfulness
- curiosity
- disappointment
- excitedness
- embarrassment
- fearfulness
- frustration
- happiness
- jealousy
- loneliness
- feeling mad
- nervousness
- sadness
- feeling scared
- feeling overwhelmed

Effective communication is the cornerstone of a child’s ability to express themselves in a way that doesn’t push others away. The first step towards achieving this is to show children that you understand them. What better way to do that than by using pictures to help them identify and describe different emotions? Also, consider using these pictures to check in with the child throughout the day and encourage them to use feeling faces to communicate their emotions. By gradually introducing new feeling vocabulary words,

starting with a few basic emotions and then moving onto more complex ones, educators can help children develop a deeper understanding of their feelings. Remember to teach a balance of both positive and negative emotions. By doing so, you can help the child achieve emotional maturity and better communicate their needs.



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It is critical that we remember and respect that children who have experienced trauma (or are experiencing ongoing trauma) often have a difficult time managing their strong emotions. Typically, as very young children, we learn to calm and soothe ourselves by being calmed and soothed by the adults in their lives. If a child has not had the opportunity to learn to self-soothe because of neglect, the lack of a secure attachment system contributes to persistent **dysregulation**. Emotional dysregulation happens when a child is not able to control or regulate their emotional responses to challenging input (Rouse, 2024). Dysregulation then impacts a child's ability to learn, to engage with others appropriately, and to be successful in the classroom.

In the classroom, teachers need to engage in strategies to support and coach children in ways to calm themselves and manage their emotions. This allows the adults to act as models and to be partners in helping children to learn skills for managing their behavior. Remember that co-regulation (warm and responsive interactions that a child needs to understand, express, and modulate their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors) comes before self-regulation. Early childhood educators can help children learn how to get the control they need to change the output when they are upset. This also includes providing coaching and practice at de-escalating when they feel overwhelmed (Strickland-Cohen et al., 2022).

Another challenge for children living with trauma is the belief that they develop that they are "bad," and that they are at fault for the trauma that has occurred. This can lead to a pattern of self-doubt and distrust of others.

Children with trauma may also tend to develop the idea that everyone is out to get them. They might hear directions and requests as exaggerated and angry and unfair. This leads the child to act out with a response quickly and in an irritable manner. A mistake that might seem trivial to us becomes exaggerated if their experience has been that

minor mistakes result in adult anger or punishment. For these children, it is important to build on small steps towards success in the classroom, and to help them see that in the classroom making a mistake is a necessary part of learning.

As teachers, or ECE professionals, in any role responding to behavior, we must be cautious and always base our observations on facts. It is important to look at the big picture of the situation and not to jump to conclusions (Miller, 2024). This chapter highlighted that trauma symptoms comprise a list of possibilities and can vary between children. If we make assumptions and stray from fact, unintended consequences may occur. Also, for example, it is possible that we as educators could miss a connection between trauma and hyperactivity which could lead to a possible misdiagnosis of ADHD.

One consideration that we cannot skip is the need for the adult (teacher, director, assistant, etc.) to calm themselves first, and then engage in strategies to support children to calm themselves. We cannot be effective if we are not calm and thinking clearly. This is when we model the behavior we want to see in the child and connect to their big feelings. The strategy of belly breathing is one way to begin. As child psychiatrist Dr. Rappaport states, “If you can connect with what they’re trying to tell you, they may settle. It can work even if you just make a guess — you don’t have to be right, they can correct you” (as cited in Miller, 2024, para. 23).

Do you believe that rewards are an effective way to motivate people? While tangible rewards and points-based systems may seem like a good idea, they can have several drawbacks that are often overlooked (Horner & Goodman, 2009). Let’s take a moment and think more deeply about this strategy of tangible rewards. Tangible rewards are stars, stickers, treats, charts, etc. used to track behavior. This system may be used with some specific children, and even included on an IEP (Individualized Education Plan, for children in Special Education ages 3-21 years) or IFSP (Individualized Family Services Plan for Early Intervention, birth-3 years). Think about this type of technique, and ask yourself, “What is the child learning by doing this?”

In a New York Times article in 1993, Alfie Kohn shared some thoughts in an article entitled, “For Best Results, Forget the Bonus”. Those suggestions and thoughts are summarized here:

First, rewards can be seen as a form of punishment. Rather than promoting a genuine interest in a task, rewards can be perceived as manipulative and may not inspire individuals to do their best work (Kohn, 1993).

Second, rewards can damage teamwork and cooperation. To achieve excellence, people need to work together, and rewards can create a competitive environment that can undermine cooperation.

Third, rewards can discourage risk taking and exploration. When people are focused on

achieving a reward, they may be less likely to take risks or try new things, which can stifle creativity and innovation.

Fourth, rewards can undermine interest and intrinsic motivation. When people are focused on achieving a reward, they may feel that their work is not freely chosen or directed by them. This can reduce their enjoyment of the task and their desire to pursue it more.

Finally, it is important to encourage children to find intrinsic motivation and rewards in their work, rather than relying on external rewards. By doing so, they will be more likely to develop a genuine interest in learning and will be more likely motivated by their goals and interests, instead of for a reward.

“Do rewards motivate people? Absolutely. They motivate people to get rewards.”

~[Alfie Kohn \(1993, p. 11\)](#)

Reflection

1. List strategies to implement in your curriculum to support positive behavior, social, and emotional skills growth.
2. Record the changes you can make to your environment to support social and emotional skill development related to behavior.

Attributions

1. Figure 10.9: [Preschool girl plays alone with train](#) by Allison Shelley for EDUimages is released under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#)

10.7 COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES: WHAT, WHEN, AND HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH FAMILIES ABOUT BEHAVIOR

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.



Figure 10.10. Parent Talking With Teacher / Photo Credit: SHVETS production, Pexels License

At this point in the chapter, we have a shared definition of behavior, taken a deeper look at behavior and motivation, and established an understanding that all behavior is a form of **communication**. We also have reviewed how relationships (especially positive relationships) relate to behavior and are needed to support positively guiding the behavior of children. This foundation was built to support a mutual understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma (Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, 2021). This critical information is necessary to understand the whole child and not simply react to the behavior(s) that are seen.

In this section, we examine how to have conversations with families about behaviors (challenging and/or unwanted). This communication requires an ability for you to be objective, positive, and culturally aware in the information you share and the method by which you communicate.

Successful work in the field of early learning depends on your ability to build positive, trusting, and respectful relationships with families. No child comes to us alone or isolated, they come to us within the context of a family. Building and maintaining trusting relationships with those families allows educators to engage in more opportunities for open communication and dialogue about children.

Having a conversation about a child's **challenging behavior** can be stressful for them and for ourselves. Did you know that you can reduce your stress and gain more positive results when you "invest" in relationships with families? It requires being objective and sticking to facts, while at the same time maintaining a focus on solutions. It is important that we understand that in child development, there are cultural differences relating to beliefs about developmental milestones (Maryville University, 2021). When communicating with families be conscious of your own beliefs related to culture and your personal biases as you make choices about what and how to communicate with families.

It might feel intimidating to have conversations with families about a child's behavior (Griffin, n.d.). A key strategy in having difficult conversations is to begin with the positive. Start with strengths, including describing what the child can do, and what he/she does well. Include positives about behavior and times when you have noticed positive behaviors or interactions. Remember to always avoid the impulse to blame the family for the child's challenging behavior. This is an important interaction to have with the family and cannot be avoided out of our fear of potential (real or imagined) conflict. When we look at these extremes of blame and avoidance, realize that neither approach is helpful for the child, and both only add to your own stress. This added stress could even possibly increase the intensity of the behavioral situation of concern.

Did you know that our biases can significantly impact how we respond to children's behavior in the classroom (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2019)? It's crucial to understand that what we expect from children's behavior in their early education may differ from what they learn at home. How we react to their behavior is what counts. To eliminate these biases and guide children's behavior effectively, educators need to communicate expectations clearly and consistently within the classroom. Remember to make a conscious effort to recognize and overcome biases to create a positive and nurturing learning environment for all children.

When the time comes to talk with a child’s family about challenging behavior, Webster-Stratton (2012) shares some strategies to help create a productive interaction. Remember above where “invest” in relationships was mentioned? Webster-Stratton talks about this process of relationship building as a metaphor for a piggy bank. Webster-Stratton believes that we need to make deposits regularly to this piggy bank to have the ability to make withdrawals that support our difficult conversations.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://openwa.pressbooks.pub/earlychildeddu1/?p=668#h5p-149>

Try these three strategies in your relationship work with families:

1. Make sure you have plenty of investments in the “relationship bank” with the family,
2. Stick to data from your observations
3. Offer possible solutions and support.



Figure 10.11. Bank / Photo Credit: 401(K) 2012, CC BY-SA 2.0

Stratton (2012) also discusses how to fill your relationship bank. Each of us (both children and adults) has an emotional piggy bank. It is built with positive relationships. Just like your real-life piggy bank, you must have money in the bank to successfully make withdrawals without a negative **outcome**. Also take a moment to go back and review the other suggestions for positive reinforcement offered in this chapter.

Research (Webster-Stratton, 2012) has found that children need five positives. For example:

- Great walking feet!
- High-5!
- You are working SO hard!
- You did it!
- I see that you know how to put that puzzle together!

To move forward in your positive relationship, those five positives are needed for “balance” in your “emotional bank”. Essentially, they will outweigh one negative and help to move forward in your positive relationship. Keep in mind that these “negatives” are sometimes important for boundary setting, and child might learn to use these words effectively in necessary situations. To maintain the positive relationship, it is important to also include the balance of positives for relationships. Here are some negatives:

- No!
- Stop!
- Please do not do that!

Now, add your own positives to the list!



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://openwa.pressbooks.pub/earlychildedu1/?p=668#h5p-150>

Reflection

Take a break and think about that for a minute to let this ratio sink in; you need to say to a child five positives for every negative:

- five positives
- provide balance for one negative
- resulting in a more positive relationship and allowing the child opportunities for success

Stop and practice this formula related to a specific behavior you have observed or can imagine. Write your thoughts in the following table. Duplicate the table for more practice.

5 Positives	Balance 1 negative
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Table 10.2 Five Positives One Negative

Let's do some math! Think about that child whose name you say multiple times a day (Danny, don't do that! Danny, keep your hands to yourself! Danny, Mae is using that now. Danny! Clean up, Danny....) Imagine you say that child's name 30 times a week. Now, multiply that 30×5 . Did you calculate that answer to be 150 positives? The child will need over 150 positive comments just to break even emotionally! This deposit strategy is not only for the child, but also the same for families. That very first time you approach a family to discuss a child's challenging or "unwanted" behavior you are withdrawing a significant amount from the "emotional bank".

Refer to the numbered list above with these Webster-Stratton strategies: investing in the relationship bank with family, sticking with data from observations, and offering possible solutions and support.

Do you have enough positive interactions and a strong relationship already in place to

avoid a negative balance? With sufficient balance in the piggy bank, you are ready to have challenging conversations and, as Webster-Stratton (2012) found, families will still have emotional money in the bank to work with you on developing possible solutions.

Next, stick to the facts. This is called being objective. Put aside the emotional aspect of challenging behavior when communicating with the family. Taking this emotion-free, positive approach you could share with a family, "Today Michael had a very difficult time with sharing." This is a much more useful statement that opens the possibility for a conversation about problem-solving. The opposite can be said for using statements such as, "Michael was hitting *all* day." This statement is not helpful and it is also most likely not accurate. The positive approach will lead to the strategy to support Michael learning a new skill, which he is. This also provides scaffolding to ask about behavior in the home, "Tell me about how Michael shares at home with his siblings. What methods have you tried that I might try here at school?"

Remember that emotional piggy bank that was shared earlier? Our goal here is to build a positive relationship and partnership with the family. We want to work together to make positive connections between home and school. Approaching challenging behavior in a fact-based manner will help to remove emotion and blame from the conversation and will be much more likely to open doors rather than create walls (Webster-Stratton, 2012).

The third and last strategy shared by Webster-Stratton (2012) is about problem solving. For every conversation, we as the ECE professionals need to be ready to share some solutions. At the same time, it is of benefit to the partnership to engage in give and take by asking for and offering ongoing partnership with the family. Always get ideas and input from the family. You will have an opportunity to share other strategies with the family after they communicate what they are currently doing at home to support their child. This partner-based communication will work to build a bridge between home and school that will support the child's learning. You will also need to talk about going forward, and how you will continue to communicate about the child's skill building. This should include any information you will be collecting from your ongoing classroom observations. Remember the importance of sharing successes in all written and verbal conversations with the family to keep adding to the family's and child's emotional piggy bank.

Here are some guiding thoughts for conversations with the family:

1. Begin with strengths: "Let's talk about what Sarah is doing really well!" This will begin your conversation with the positive and will focus on what the child can do so that you can build (scaffold) from there.
2. Share concerns using facts: "I am concerned about Sarah and how she's doing with her frustration. Are you seeing similar challenges at home?" Remember that you are

working to build that positive relationship with the family, and you should always bring up concerns with collaboration in mind.

3. Together, define a clear and measurable goal. "I really want to work with you to help Sarah develop her social skills to support positive behavior."
4. Create a plan together. "What do you think we should include in the plan for Sarah, so that each of us has strategies to follow that develop new skills for success?" Always focus on skill development, not on behavior.
5. Finally, discuss next steps for moving forward. "The more we all work together, the more successful Sarah will be." Remember that consistency between home and school will support the child to be more successful, and faster.



Figure 10.12. Author-created Image of the 5 Steps to Creating a Cooperative Plan / Photo Credit: Ardene Niemer, CC BY 4.0



Figure 10.13. *Two Children Standing Near Cliff Watching Ocean / Photo Credit: Torsten Dederichs, Unsplash License*

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10.8 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.

Summary

This chapter focused on child behavior with the goal of building a foundation for positive and intentional guidance within a developmentally appropriate framework. The chapter presented a strengths-based approach to building a child's skills where the educator builds on what a child knows and can do.

In defining behavior, early childhood educators look from two perspectives: behavior that is seen and observed, and behavior that is below the surface and unseen. Educators need to know every child with whom they work to discover the below-the-surface experiences, skills, and motivations that influence behavior. Along with the development and teaching of social and emotional skills, remember that all behavior is communication. Next time you are challenged, stop and ask yourself what a child is telling you through behavior. When challenged by a child's behavior, remember to look at the well-being of the whole child and the possible presence of trauma in their life.

At the core of the work around behavior is relationship building with the child's family. Strong, respectful relationships that are founded in partnership will support your work with the children and model social skills for life.

As young children develop socially and emotionally, they learn self-control. Challenging behavior is common and can be expected. It is important to identify the meaning behind challenging behavior and work together with families to set age-appropriate expectations for the child.

Teachers and parents want to help children develop socially and emotionally. There are many ways to do this, and a range of techniques and strategies are at our disposal. Remember, we all come from diverse cultural backgrounds and have unique teaching and parenting styles, which means there is no one-size-fits-all approach to effective child guidance.

By drawing on our experiences and knowledge, we help children navigate social situations in a way

that is safe and appropriate. Let's work together to promote positive social-emotional development in our children!

Take a moment to reflect on the following brief scenarios from the Virtual Lab School (n.d.).

A. Two children are fighting over a piece of purple construction paper in the art area. They begin to yell and rip the paper from one another's hands.

When facing a situation where two children are in a disagreement, take a moment to assess the root of the issue. In this case, two young girls are fighting over a piece of purple construction paper in the art area. To find a resolution, ask yourself these questions:

1. What steps can be taken to resolve the issue?
2. Are there any relevant details about these children and their developmental needs that should be taken into consideration?
3. Seeking assistance from a colleague or supervisor can be helpful in finding a peaceful and fair resolution.
4. Remember, as a responsible adult, it's your duty to ensure the safety and well-being of the children in your care

B. A child is crying and following the teacher around the room.

1. What might the behavior be communicating?
2. He wants or needs the adult's attention.
 - a. He has an injury to his tear duct.
 - b. He doesn't like attending the program.
 - c. He is socially immature.
3. Based on what you learned in this chapter, what should the teacher's response be?

C. Two children are pretending to fight and rough house on the carpet.

List three activities to redirect the behavior of the children.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

D. Recently, a young child approached me with a tearful expression, repeating a message over and over again. Sadly, I couldn't understand the child's language, which made me feel frustrated. Later on, I saw the same child kicking over constructions made by other children in the block area.

How can the teacher support this child? Choose one of these options:

1. Provide visual support (picture schedules, social stories, etc.) or simple sign language/gestures, giving the child a system for communication.
2. Put the child in time out for whining and destroying the structures.
3. Ignore the child and move on to the other children.
4. Assume the child cannot hear and refer for testing.

“Every child deserves a champion—an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection, and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be.”

Rita Pierson (2013, 6:52)

Review Questions

1. What is behavior?
2. Why are professional relationships important in our work in ECE?
3. How are relationships and behavior(s) connected?
4. How will you communicate with families in a way that shares and supports mutual perspectives?
5. What, when, and how will you communicate to families about challenging or unwanted behavior?
6. Define social development.
7. Define emotional development.
8. Why is it important to distinguish the difference between social development and emotional development?
9. Explain why we need to understand childhood trauma and the connections to a child’s behavior(s).
10. Describe the social and emotional connections to behavior, including:
 - social emotional foundations of early learning
 - classroom climate
 - guiding social behaviors

- trauma and behavior: the role of neurodiversity in behavior and the relationship between trauma and behavior.

11. What are the five steps to consider when having a conversation with a family?

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CHAPTER 11: PROFESSIONALISM IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



Preschool Teacher Reads to Class / Photo Credit: Allison Shelley for EDUimages, CC BY-NC 4.0

Overview

In Chapter 1 we introduced the term *teaching practice* and referred to the *field* of early childhood education (ECE). In the last two decades, much attention has been paid to the difference between a *field* and a *profession* of ECE (Goffin & Washington, 2007). While the intensity of the attention around defining ECE as a profession has increased considerably, this attention is far from new. As early as the mid-1960s, Bettye Caldwell wrote about the limited concern for defining the field (1967).

This chapter explores the definition of *profession* and considers whether ECE fits that definition. You will learn about a recent effort by NAEYC and partners to position ECE to be recognized as a profession. We also look at the currently used and various systems of standards and codes that define the professional behavior and conduct of the ECE

practitioner. This chapter explicates the expectations of a professional early childhood educator as you prepare to move into that role.

Objectives

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define professionalism using widely accepted criteria.
- Describe the ways in which early childhood education meets the criteria of a profession.
- Describe the process undertaken in the Power to the Profession initiative and the intended goal of the initiative.
- Describe the main issues the Power to the Profession initiative took on.
- Describe standards currently used to define and regulate the work of early childhood educators, including:
 - The Washington Administrative Code
 - Washington State Core Competencies
 - NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators
 - NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct
- Define advocacy and describe how this activity is part of professionalism in ECE.

Key Terms

- Advocacy
- Early childhood education
- Early childhood educator
- ECE field

- Ethical conduct
- Ethical dilemma
- Ethical finesse
- Ethical ideals
- Ethical principles
- Ethical responsibility
- Field of practice
- Ideals
- NAEYC
- Personal advocacy
- Principles
- Profession
- Professional
- Professional preparation
- Public advocacy
- Scope of practice
- Stackable certificates
- Professional Standards
- Unifying Framework
- Washington Administrative Code (WAC)

Attributions

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11.1 DEFINING TERMS: A VOCABULARY FOR DISCUSSING PROFESSIONALISM

Brenda Boyd Brown, Ph.D.

Understanding the terminology is a helpful way to start an investigation of professionalism in ECE. The terms **profession** and **professional** are used frequently in our everyday conversations. However, our common use of these terms does not ensure that we understand what these terms mean as we apply them to our work as educators.

In our work life, we may use the term professional to refer to the fact that we are committed to doing our jobs well, that we are good employees (i.e., punctual, respectful to colleagues, dress appropriately), that we provide reliable and competent service. Or, it may simply mean that we get paid for what we do (Feeney, 2012). The term *professional* may be used as a compliment, indicating that that person is good at their job.

While we may use the term professional to describe how we behave at our jobs, a body of scholarly literature exists in which academics from various disciplines have discussed the meaning of the term.

In this section, we will define terms that assist in understanding the conversation about ECE becoming a profession.

Field

It is not unusual to refer to the “**field of ECE.**” We used that phrase in [Chapter 1](#). Calling ECE a field allows us to create a boundary around what we mean by ECE; it allows for defining what fits into this category. Similarly, we often hear of those who work in the business and medical “fields.” As Goffin and Washington (2019) suggest, the term *ECE field* describes all of the programs, services, and occupations that currently reside within the boundary of what we call ECE—childcare, either in centers or family childcare homes; preschool; and care for infants and toddlers, for example.

Field of Practice

A **field of practice** refers to a specialization or a defined scope of work undertaken by an identified group of practitioners. It is a term often used to describe medicine

or social work specialties. Stacie Goffin has also applied the term *field of practice* to ECE (Goffin, 2015; Goffin & Washington, 2019). A field of practice, according to Goffin, indicates the roles that directly focus on the learning and development of children. In other words, the ECE field of practice refers to those who educate and facilitate child development. Calling ECE a field of practice allows for defining the focus—the learning and development of young children. Naming it as a field of practice also highlights that the field’s main objective is competent practice and suggests that we understand what it means to educate young children competently. In sum, the ECE field of practice is populated by those who do the work of direct service to children, which also assumes a level of competent practice to be successful.

Profession

The term profession is commonly accepted to mean an “occupation that serves the public welfare and that requires specialized educational training in some branch of learning or science” (Feeney, 2012, p. 6). Thus, a profession requires specialized education not held by others and serves a public good instead of serving one’s self-interest alone (i.e., simply getting a paycheck).

Professionals

If a profession is an occupation that serves a public good and requires education, a professional is the inhabitant of a role in that occupation—the person who does the work of the profession. Applying the definition of profession just shared, a professional is a person who has committed to serving the public good related to that field and has achieved the educational requirement necessary to play that role. In the field of ECE, it is not unusual to hear about efforts to professionalize the field, often referring to incremental efforts to improve the practice of individuals rather than system-wide efforts to meet the full definition of a profession.

A large body of academic literature has identified the defining features of a profession. Although there is disagreement about which features are critical, some are commonly included and are accepted as essential to the definition. Feeney (2012) identifies eight criteria regularly found in the literature to define professions. Table 11.1 describes these criteria.



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Criteria	Details of Criteria
Specialized body of knowledge and expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence-based knowledge (grounded in research and scholarship) • Skillful application of knowledge • Obligation to stay informed about new information
Prolonged training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquisition of evidence-based knowledge through training/education that occurs over time • Includes study and practical experience
Rigorous requirements for entry to training and eligibility to practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admission to training programs is competitive. • An exam may follow graduation from training. • Background screening required for licensure
Standards of practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow standards to ensure competent practice • Make decisions based on standards (practice is not “cookie-cutter”)
Commitment to serve a significant social value	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated to the public interest • Altruistic and service-oriented
Recognition as the only group in society that can perform a function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only those with credentials, training, and licensure can play this role. • Only those who can competently complete the role
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-governed • Internal control over the quality of services provided--the national organization provides

Table 11.1 Criteria for Defining a Professional

Criteria	Details of Criteria
Code of Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obligations to society spelled out • Moral behavior for practice codified • Instills confidence that the public good will be prioritized

Reflection

How do you use the terms profession and professional? Do they mean different things to you? Do you see yourself as a professional in your work with young children? Why is that?

Review the list of criteria in Table 11.1 and consider whether ECE meets enough of these criteria to be labeled a profession. If you are not sure that ECE meets enough of the criteria, think about why that might be the case, and imagine what ECE would look like if it met all or many of these criteria.

11.2 ECE AS A PROFESSION

Brenda Boyd Brown, Ph.D.

Recently, many have questioned whether ECE meets the definition of a profession (Feeney, 2012; Goffin, 2013, 2015). Some have concluded that it currently does not, and a review of the list in Table 11.1 provides evidence that this conclusion is accurate. While ECE has developed some of the characteristics in Table 11.1, not all are currently in place. For example, a *Code of Ethical Conduct*, put forth by the **NAEYC** (2011a), has existed for several years. However, there is no universal requirement that ECE practitioners know or abide by this code.

Similarly, in terms of **standards** of practice, many states have adopted guidelines defining the skills and knowledge necessary to provide quality childcare. However, each state can define these guidelines as they see fit, and various licensing requirements can be found across the U.S. As guidelines, they carry no authority over the continued practice of a practitioner who chooses not to follow them.

Moreover, these competencies are often set by the state legislature and defined by the state agency responsible for child care licensing rather than being defined and agreed to by the profession. This fact points to the absence of autonomy. Having autonomy is another marker of a profession. Licensed child care, a central mode of delivery in ECE, is heavily regulated by the state rather than by the profession, providing notable evidence for the lack of autonomy in ECE, another critical feature in a profession. Further, prolonged training with rigorous entry requirements must be more consistently applied for entry into ECE to allow it to be considered a profession.

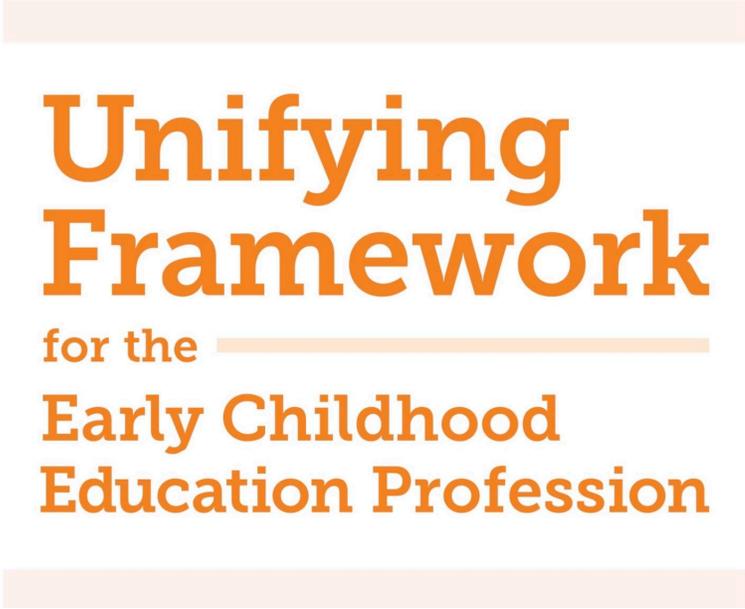
This analysis should clarify that ECE has work to do before it can claim the title of a profession and before those engaged in this work can claim to be professionals. However, identifying this reality has not made it easy for ECE to move toward the status of a profession. While numerous efforts have aimed to solve the problem, large-scale success has yet to be achieved. The significance of the work of **early childhood educators** remains unrecognized, and they remain under-compensated; the field of **early childhood education** remains fragmented and siloed with no clear definition of its boundaries. Little specialized knowledge is required for entry (Committee on the Science of Children et al., 2015).



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NAEYC's Efforts: Power to the Profession and the Unifying Framework



Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession

Figure 11.1. Partial Cover of “Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession” / Photo Credit: © National Association for the Education of Young Children

A hopeful initiative has recently emerged. Beginning in 2017, NAEYC (the National Association for the Education of Young Children), the leading professional association for those engaged in the work of ECE, made a significant investment in achieving this goal. This initiative, titled Power to the Profession, and carried out by a task force representing 15 national ECE-related organizations, created a *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession* (2020). According to Power to the Profession (n.d.), the framework is designed to “set a vision for how to drive the significant and sustained public investment that will allow all children, birth through age 8, to benefit from high-quality early education provided by well-prepared, diverse, supported and compensated professionals” (para. 3). The title of the framework, including the term professional, as well as the focus on

preparation and support of the professionals illustrate the focus of moving ECE to this status, while also recognizing the need for public funding to achieve this long-standing goal.

Power to the Profession was a multi-year process that involved eight “decision cycles” in which decisions on the defining issues of the field were presented to stakeholders for feedback. At each cycle, practitioners in the field responded in writing to the proposal, engaged in focus groups, and other means of providing feedback. After this process, each proposal was revised and ultimately finalized. The results of the eight decision cycles were presented in the *Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession* (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020). A summary of the recommendations in the framework can be found in the [appendix 2](#). In addition to summarizing the recommendations, the table includes how they addressed the eight criteria of a profession identified earlier in this chapter. The recommendations that make up the Framework are notable in their effort to address as many issues facing ECE as possible at one time.



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Naming and Defining the Profession

The first issue addressed by the Task Force was what to call the profession (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020). Settling on what to call itself is a long-existent problem with ECE. Note that the title “early childhood education” is the selected name throughout this chapter. Nevertheless, many do not accept this and use other names, such as early care and education or early learning. The difficulty was not just about agreeing to a single name but determining which practitioners working with young children were part of the profession. A long-held aversion to exclusion has made it difficult to draw a boundary around who is “in” and who is “out” of the profession. However, this decision is necessary to define a field as a profession. After much deliberation, the Task Force chose to call the profession Early Childhood Education, and the professionals are called Early Childhood Educators. Further, the authors drew a boundary between the profession and the larger field of early childhood, delineating the professionals from other allied practitioners who, while still engaged in work that supports children and families, are not early childhood educators and not part of the profession.



Figure 11.2. Early Childhood Education Profession within the ECE Field / Photo Credit: © National Association for the Education of Young Children

Figure 11.2 presents the *Unifying Framework* (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020) illustration that depicts the relationship between the *field* of ECE—everything outside of the *profession*—and the profession designated by the orange section at the top of the circle. The profession, as proposed, includes three roles:

1. Early Childhood Educators who provide direct service to children birth to age eight and on whom the *Unifying Framework* is primarily focused
2. **Professional Preparation** Faculty and Trainers who instruct, observe, and monitor the practice of aspiring ECEs
3. Pedagogical and Instructional Administrators who guide the practice of ECEs

In addition to defining the profession and the professional, the *Unifying Framework* (Power

to the Profession Task Force, 2020) identifies three designations of early childhood educators: Early Childhood Educator I, II, and III, as presented in Table 11.2. Creating these designations addresses a confusing jumble of titles and roles in the current field, creating a uniform approach to defining responsibilities (**scope of practice**) and preparation. The Task Force also recognized that the scope of practice attached to a specific level of professional preparation differs by setting. For example, in Birth to age five settings, a practitioner with an associate degree may be a lead teacher in a classroom. That same level of education is tied to an assistant teacher position in a K to grade 3 setting.

Title	Setting	Scope of Practice (role in development and delivery of educational programming)	Educational Requirement
ECE I	Birth-3rd Grade	Assist	120 clock hours of professional preparation
ECE II	Birth-Age 5 K-3rd Grade	Lead Guide ECE Is Assist Guide ECE Is	ECE Associate Degree
ECE III	Birth-3rd Grade	Lead Guide ECE Is and IIs	ECE Bachelor's Degree OR ECE Master's Degree

Table 11.2 Designations of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) Proposed in Unifying Framework

Note: Source Generated by author based on info in source cited in text discussing this table (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020)

Defining Professional Standards and Professional Preparation Delivery

Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators

Figure 11.3. Partial Cover of “Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators” / Photo Credit: © National Association for the Education of Young Children

The *Unifying Framework* (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020) also addressed the need for a unified system of professional preparation for EC Educators. The *Unifying Framework* recognizes the role of higher education in professions, informing the content of professional preparation and delivering high-quality preparation that successfully graduates competent professionals. The Task Force selected the updated and revised NAEYC *Professional Standards and Competencies* (NAEYC, 2019) as the standards for professional preparation. Given that a profession is defined partially by the existence of standards for practice set and defined by the profession, choosing standards developed by NAEYC rather than a state licensing entity is appropriate. These revised standards were released shortly before the *Unifying Framework* and included a “leveling” of the standards, further illuminating the distinction between the three Early Childhood Educator designations (See Table 11.2). This “leveling” guides professional preparation programs to pitch coursework content appropriately to the different designations and further underscores the differences in the scope of practice.

This approach addresses the reality that many practitioners have worked in the field for some time without college coursework. These individuals may not be willing to undertake a college education but wish to remain employed in the newly named profession. These designations recognize the contribution of all professionals regardless of the scope of practice. The *Unifying Framework* additionally recommends that all early childhood educators complete a general early childhood education program before specializing in, for example, a focus on an age group such as preschool or toddler-aged children.

In addition to adopting professional preparation standards, the *Unifying Framework* calls

on higher education institutions to be accountable through accreditation by a governing body to ensure the delivery of competently prepared early childhood educators. Moreover, the *Unifying Framework* calls on higher education to work to ensure seamless transition across educational systems, access to higher education by an ethnically, racially, and linguistically diverse population, and diversity in faculty that prepares early childhood educators.

Finally, the *Unifying Framework* recommends that once all the requirements just described are in place (i.e., higher education access to all who seek it, effective higher education that produces competent educators, utilizing a uniform set of standards), then early childhood educators should be licensed upon completion of a program of professional preparation.

Professional Compensation

The *Unifying Framework* (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020) also addressed the requirement for increased compensation for current and future ECE professionals. They recommend “public school salary scales as a minimum benchmark for comparable compensation, assuming comparable qualifications, experience, and job responsibilities” (p. 41). The compensation for an early childhood educator should be comparable regardless of setting (i.e., private childcare, state-funded preschool, public school kindergarten). The *Unifying Framework* also calls out the importance of a benefits package for all EC educators regardless of setting. The Task Force stated that the other requirements were only possible by instituting increased compensation. In other words, any increase in education or responsibility resulting from the *Unifying Framework* would necessitate a matched increase in salary. The Task Force also recognized that employers that hire early childhood educators should be accountable for providing comparable compensation (salary and benefits). The Task Force indicates that such accountability is only possible with a financial investment from the federal government, which requires a recognition of ECE as a public good that serves all of society.

The Purpose of the Unifying Framework

As described here, the goal of the *Unifying Framework* (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020) was to address the issues that have kept early childhood education from claiming its status as an actual profession. By formalizing ECE as a profession, those who do this work will be well-prepared and well-compensated, finally receiving the status and

recognition they have long deserved. While this is accurate, it does not explain why doing so is essential.

Those who have argued for defining ECE as a profession have claimed effectively that the well-being of children is what is at stake (Goffin, 2013; Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020). Suppose ECE remains a fragmented, unrecognized, under-compensated occupation. In that case, many children will not have access to the early education that research has consistently shown improves each child's developmental and learning outcomes. NAEYC, the association that initially called the 15 representative entities that made up the Task Force, has a vision. This vision, sometimes called an audacious one, is to unify as a profession to argue for ECE as a public good that our tax dollars should support. These efforts aim to ultimately have ECE recognized as a profession so that those who do that work are well-prepared, well-compensated, and supported—doing so to ensure that the children who receive their efforts will have positive future trajectories.

Reflection

Review the summary of the recommendations made in the *Unifying Framework* (found in the [appendix 2](#)). What seems most beneficial about these recommendations? What will be most challenging to implement, in your opinion, and why? How would the implementation of these recommendations affect your current work in ECE? Is the *Unifying Framework* going to improve the lives of early childhood educators? The children they serve?

Attributions

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excerpt referring to full report: "Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators".

11.3 STANDARDS CURRENTLY DEFINING PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE

Brenda Boyd Brown, Ph.D.

The work of the Power to the Profession Task Force is impressive. Adopting the *Unifying Framework* across the country would dramatically change the face of ECE. This audacious vision would address many, perhaps even all, of the defining issues the field has grappled with, especially in recent years. However, the aspirational nature of the *Unifying Framework* should not lead one to believe that ECE as we know it today has no established standards that could nudge it toward professionalizing. Such standards do exist. This section of the chapter will introduce systems of standards that currently define and regulate the work of early childhood educators in the United States and specifically in Washington State.

Washington Administrative Code

Early childhood education is not made up only of licensed childcare. However, it represents a large portion of early childhood education programs across the country and in Washington State. The term *licensed childcare* should suggest that a state agency regulates these programs (licensed to operate). Each state has its administrative agency that oversees childcare. In Washington State, it is the [Department of Children, Youth, and Families](#) (DCYF). After the legislature passes laws, they become part of the [Revised Code of Washington](#) (RCW), a compilation of all permanent laws now in force. However, in the case of something as complicated as childcare, the laws cannot be specific enough to guide practice. Thus, an administrative agency, in this case DCYF, writes administrative codes or regulations that specify what is allowed in the operation of a licensed childcare program. One chapter of the **Washington Administrative Code (WAC)** addresses the requirements for the [operation of licensed childcare programs](#) (Wash. Admin. Code § 110-300, 2018). Note that these regulations reflect foundational (or base) quality (sometimes called minimal quality) and that licensed programs are called early learning programs, not early childhood education, as NAEYC recommended (Power to the Profession Taskforce, 2020). The chapter in the Washington Administrative Code § 110-300 (2018) comprises several sections:

1. Intent and Authority
2. Child Outcomes
3. Family Engagement and Partnership
4. Professional Development, Training, and Requirements
5. Environment
6. Interactions and Curriculum
7. Program Administration and Oversight

Three of these seven sections of the Washington Administrative Code § 110-300 (2018) have multiple subsections, making more than 100 subsections of regulations, many of which are broken down into additional subsections. This is a complicated document!

All sections guide childcare practice according to the State of Washington and could be considered professional **standards**. We could conversely argue that a **profession** is viewed as an autonomous body that self-governs and provides internal control of quality and thus does not need this level of detailed regulation by an entity external to the profession.

Given the focus of this chapter on professionalism in ECE, the section on Professional Development, Training, and Requirements is of special note. This section of the Washington Administrative Code § 110-300 (2018), revised as recently as 2023, addresses staff qualifications in licensed childcare programs (§ 0100), and the general staff qualifications for lead teachers:

- be at least 18 years of age
- have a high school diploma or the equivalent
- preservice requirements (i.e., negative TB test, orientation training, background check)
- ECE Initial Certificate within five years of hire or promotion (or from the time of this section becoming effective)
- ECE Short Certificate within two years of receiving ECE Initial Certificate
- document the completion of annual professional development

The ECE certificates referenced here are part of the Washington State stackable certificates. These are certificates offered by many community and technical colleges in Washington and provide a cumulative pathway with courses building on one another (Washington State DCYF, 2023). These stackable certificates are meant to provide a manageable set of steps in moving to the goal of a degree. Initially, this is at the associate

level, and if a student continues in their education, at the bachelor’s level. The three stackable certificates are described in Table 11.3.

Initial ECE Certificate 12 quarter credits	Short ECE Certificate of Specialization 8 quarter credits The initial ECE Cert + child development	ECE State Certificate 27-32 quarter credits The Short ECE Cert + the following:	Total Credits 47-52 quarter credits
Three courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intro to ECE • Health, Safety, and Nutrition • Practicum 	And one of the following specializations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECE--General • Infant/toddler care • School-age care • Family childcare • Administration • Home visitor/ family engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 credits of general education (Math and English) • 17-22 quarter credits of ECE 	Builds foundation for Associate Degree

Table 11.3 Washington State Stackable Certificates

Note: Source is author generated based on source cited in text (Washington State DCYF, 2023)



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Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals

Washington State

Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals

Figure 11.4. *Partial cover of Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals/ Photo Credit: © Washington State Department of Early Learning*

In 2009 the former Department of Early Learning at the direction of the Washington State legislature published the [Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals](#) developed out of a multi-year process that engaged a broad consortium of professionals from across the state (Washington State DCYF, 2009). The competencies are meant to provide a framework of knowledge and skills necessary to provide quality care for children. The competencies are viewed as a tool that can be used in a variety of ways:

- Individual practitioners assess their knowledge and skills and plan for professional development (PD).
- Directors develop PD plans or build job descriptions.
- Trainers plan and organize PD.
- Higher education faculty and administration guide course and program development.

The competencies are divided into eight content areas:

Child Growth and Development (Washington State DCYF, 2009) contains statements that present a skill or knowledge. The statements are organized by levels. The levels as shown in Table 11.4 represent a continuum of skill/knowledge from entry level to

advanced preparation. All but the first level is associated with professional development or a college certificate or degree.

Level 1	Basic knowledge and skills expected at entry-level No specialized training or education required
Level 2	Level 1 + knowledge and skills comparable to a CDA (Child Development Associate Credential)
Level 3	Level 1 + Level 2 + knowledge and skills commensurate with an associate degree in ECE/Child Development
Level 4	Level 1 + Level 2 + Level 3 + knowledge and skills commensurate with a bachelor's degree in ECE/Child Development
Level 5	Level 1 + Level 2 + Level 3 + Level 4 + knowledge and skills commensurate with an advanced degree in ECE/Child Development

Table 11.4 Competency Levels

Note: Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals as defined by Washington State's Department of Children, Youth & Families (2009).

Each of the eight content areas has between 2 and 17 skill/knowledge statements representing an individual competency. The total number of competencies identified in this system is more than 650, making for a very complicated system of standards in Washington State (DCFY, 2009).



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NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies

As described in the previous section on the *Unifying Framework*, a new set of professional standards, the *Professional Standards and Competencies for Early Childhood Educators*, has been adopted by NAEYC (2019) and is proposed to be the unifying standards of practice in the profession of childhood education. This newly adopted position statement represents the core body of knowledge, skills, dispositions, and values that early childhood

educators must demonstrate to be effective teachers of young children. The previous professional standards set by NAEYC were written as expectations for higher education programs—what they must teach to prepare early childhood educators successfully (NAEYC, 2012). The revised *Professional Standards and Competencies* (NAEYC, 2019) are written as expectations for the individual professional—what they must know and be able to do as an effective educator.

The standards are organized into six core areas:

- child development and learning in context
- family-teacher partnerships and community connections
- child observation, documentation, and assessment
- developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate teaching practices
- knowledge, application, and integration of academic content in the early childhood curriculum
- professionalism

Each standard (NAEYC, 2019) contains three to five key competencies that clarify the core with a total of 22 key competencies. Each standard has also been leveled to correspond with the three ECE designations (ECE I, II, and III) described in the *Unifying Framework* (Power to the Profession Task Force, 2020). The leveling documentation is presented as a first attempt to identify the differences in the breadth and depth of content in the programs that prepare professionals with differing scopes of practice. Table 11.5 presents a sample of the leveling descriptions for key competency 1a: “Understand the developmental period of early childhood from birth through age eight across physical, cognitive, social/emotional, and linguistic domains including bilingual/multilingual development.”

ECE I	ECE II	ECE III
Identify critical aspects of brain development, including executive function, learning motivation, and life skills.	Describe brain development in young children, including executive function, learning motivation, and life skills	Describe brain development in young children including executive function, learning motivation, and life skills
N/A	Describe ways to learn about children (e.g., through observation, play, etc.)	Evaluate, make decisions about, and communicate effective ways to learn about children (e.g., through observation, play, etc.)

Table 11.5 Levels of Key Competency 1a

Note: Table 11.5 is author generated based on source cited in text (NAEYC, 2019)



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NAEYC Code of Ethics



Figure 11.5. Photo Credit: Nicolas Malara

A common characteristic of professions is that they have a document spelling out the moral responsibilities to society and guiding principles for professional behavior. Because a profession is viewed as a group that can uniquely fulfill an important social need,

and because the service is often provided to a vulnerable population, there must be a clear statement about how ethical behavior is defined. Without that, the power in the professional role can potentially exploit the population being served.



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Although early childhood education is still striving to be viewed as a profession, it has had a code of ethics since 1989 and began developing a code at least 10 years before that (Feeney & Freeman, 2018). Beginning in the mid-1970s, NAEYC leadership was advancing efforts with the code of **ethical conduct** adopted in 1989. NAEYC's [Code of Ethical Conduct](#) was updated in 2005 and most recently reaffirmed and updated in 2011. NAEYC leadership is currently seeking feedback from practitioners to assist in updating the code.

The *Code of Ethical Conduct* (NAEYC, 2011a) exists as one of several position statements that NAEYC has adopted. These position statements are guides to assist early childhood educators in making informed decisions on issues facing the field/profession and promote dialogue on the issues using a common language provided by the statement. All [NAEYC position statements](#), including the *Code of Ethical Conduct*, are available on the association's website.

The *Code of Ethical Conduct* (NAEYC, 2011a) focuses on early childhood educators working directly with children and families. Supplements have also been written to apply the code to the work of [Early Childhood Program Administrators](#) (2011b) and [Adult Educators](#) (2004). Multiple articles in NAEYC's publication *Young Children* [have addressed the use of the code](#), providing professionals with numerous opportunities to practice applying the code to real situations faced in the work of early childhood education.

Many professions that have a code of ethics and also have the power to sanction professionals do not follow the code. For example, a physician that breaches the medical ethics accepted by the profession may face the loss of the right to practice medicine. There is currently no way for the ECE profession to sanction an early childhood educator who breaches the NAEYC *Code of Ethical Conduct* (2011a). The only legal rule applicable to early childhood educators exists in the licensed childcare setting. Educators who work in licensed childcare are designated mandated reporters. This designation indicates that

they are, by law, required to report any instance in which they have cause to believe a child has suffered abuse or neglect (Washington State DCYF, n.d.).

Structure of the *Code of Ethical Conduct*

The NAEYC *Code of Ethical Conduct* (2011a) is organized under two major components: core values and conceptual framework.

Core Values (p. 1)

- Appreciate childhood as a unique and valuable state of the human life cycle.
- Base our work on knowledge of how children develop and learn.
- Appreciate and support the bond between the child and family.
- Recognize that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture, community, and society.
- Respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual (child, family member, and colleague).
- Respect diversity in children, families, and colleagues.
- Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect.

Conceptual Framework (pp. 2-7)

The framework is an organizing structure for the code. It is divided into four sections that address professional relationships: with children, with families, among colleagues, and with the community and society. Each section includes an introduction to the primary responsibilities of the professional in that setting. Each section also lists a set of **ethical ideals** and **ethical principles**.

Ethical ideals are aspirational. They represent what we strive for as we work with children and families; they are our goals. Ethical principles are more concrete—they could be considered the objectives that allow us to achieve our goals or aspirations (ideals). The principles guide conduct and help professionals resolve **ethical dilemmas**. Ethical dilemmas are “moral conflicts that involve determining how to act when an individual faces conflicting professional values and responsibilities” (Feeney & Freeman, 2018, p. 19).



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The four professional relationship areas explored in each section of the conceptual framework (NAEYC, 2011a) are as follows:

1. **Ethical Responsibilities** to Children (pp. 2-3):

This first section focuses on the profession's beliefs about the unique and valuable nature of childhood and the vulnerability of this stage of development. Consequently, early childhood educators are responsible for ensuring children's safety, health, and emotional well-being. Moreover, this section of the code addresses the profession's commitment to respecting individual differences, helping children learn to cooperate with peers, and promoting children's self-awareness, competence, self-worth, and physical well-being.

The first section contains 12 ethical ideals and 11 ethical principles. (Note there is no one-to-one correspondence of ideals to principles). The first principle is identified as taking precedence over all the others in the Code:

"Above all, we shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitive, or intimidating to children" (p. 3).

2. Ethical Responsibilities to Families (pp. 3-4):

The second section addresses the responsibility to the families served by early childhood educators. Given the belief that the family is of primary importance and that the family and the teacher have a common interest in the child's well-being, educators are responsible for communicating, cooperating, and collaborating with the child's family. The second section contains 9 ethical ideals and 15 ethical principles.

3. Ethical Responsibilities to Colleagues (p. 5):

The third section of the code addresses responsibilities to colleagues. This section is divided into two subsections: responsibilities to coworkers and responsibilities to employers. The responsibility to colleagues is to establish and maintain relationships that support productive work and professional needs. The focus here is on trust, confidentiality, collaboration, and respect for the dignity of each human. It also includes holding coworkers and employers accountable for their professional **ethical conduct**. The first subsection contains three ethical ideals and four ethical principles and the second subsection contains two ethical ideals and five ethical principles.

4. Ethical Responsibility to Community and Society (pp. 6-7):

The final section of the code recognizes the responsibility of the educator to provide programs that meet the diverse needs of families, that assist families in getting access to needed services, and that work together with other agencies and professionals, and to help with developing programs that are needed but not available. This section contains 7 ethical ideals and 11 ethical principles.

Using the *Code of Ethical Conduct*

The *Code of Ethical Conduct* (NAEYC, 2011a) provides a tool for various ways to ensure ethical conduct and to resolve ethical dilemmas that arise due to the complexity of early childhood education. While the code of ethics is a guide, it is not a recipe for specific behaviors to be enacted in any particular situation. However, the *Code of Ethical Conduct* (2011a) does identify several specific responsibilities. These ethical responsibilities are either things we should not do or things that we are required to do. Feeney and Freeman (2018) call these “mandates” (p. 17) and explain how these mandated behaviors are spelled out in Principles of the Code. Examples of principles that illustrate what educators must do include the following (pp. 129-133):

Principle 1.1: We shall not harm children. We shall not participate in practices that are emotionally damaging, physically harmful, disrespectful, degrading, dangerous, exploitative or intimidating to children.

Principle 2.13: We shall maintain confidentiality and shall respect the family's right to privacy, refraining from disclosure of confidential information and intrusion into family life.

Principle 3A.1: We shall recognize the contributions of colleagues to our program and not participate in practices that diminish their reputations or impair their effectiveness in working with children and families.

Principle 4.6: We shall be familiar with laws and regulations that serve to protect the children in our programs and be vigilant in ensuring these laws and regulations are followed.

These ethical responsibilities are clear-cut. They communicate what must and must not be done. One way the code serves early childhood educators is to provide clear-cut guidelines for behavior. In addition, the code is meant to help navigate ethical dilemmas. In an ethical dilemma, a clear-cut ethical responsibility is not evident. Instead, the professional is faced with two equally justifiable actions, which often include a conflict between the interests of the two parties. For example, it may require placing the child's needs above that of the parents or a group over an individual. The code can help

determine the best course of action in a situation. Still, the process requires thoughtful consideration of the various interests, needs, and priorities of one person or group over the interests, needs, and priorities of another.

Reflection

Consider this ethical dilemma from Feeney and Freeman (2018, p. 52). How you might resolve this ethical dilemma, considering your professional obligations and the conflicting needs of your clientele?

Kali, the mother of four-year-old Chase, has asked his teacher, Sondra, to keep him from napping in the afternoon. She tells Sondra, "Whenever Chase naps during the day, he stays up past 10:00 at night. I have to get up at 5:00 in the morning to go to work, and I am not getting enough sleep." Along with all the other children, Chase takes a one-hour nap almost daily. Sondra feels he needs it to engage in activities and stay in good spirits through the afternoon.

The authors of the *Code of Ethical Conduct* suggest a process for applying the code to ethical issues and dilemmas (Feeney & Freeman, 2018). As you consider the steps, think about the situation described in the above Reflection. The suggested steps from Feeney and Freeman are described here:

1. Determine if the issue/problem involves ethics. Does it involve concerns about right and wrong, rights and responsibilities, human welfare, or an individual's best interests? If so, it is an ethical issue.
2. Determine if the issue involves legal responsibility. If so, follow the law. Issues involving child abuse are examples involving legal responsibilities.
3. Next, determine if the issue involves an ethical responsibility. Recall that ethical responsibilities are clear-cut expectations about how a professional early childhood educator behaves. There is no question about what must be done (or not done).
4. Determine if the issue is a true ethical dilemma requiring hard choices between conflicting moral obligations. Consider the needs of all involved and the professional obligations to each. Are there conflicting obligations requiring one be prioritized over another? Are core values in conflict? If so, there is an ethical dilemma to resolve.

Following are some steps to decision making about an ethical dilemma.

Identify the conflicting responsibilities. Consider the people involved and determine their needs and your obligations to them. Then turn to the Code for guidance. Review the Core Values and Ideals in the related section of the Code. Gather more information if necessary for the full picture. It may also be helpful to refer to program policies or community laws.

Brainstorm possible resolutions. Now that the issue is fully understood, and the conflicting values, needs, and obligations identified, think about how to solve the problem. Do not yet reject any ideas but generate as many ideas as possible. Then, go back and consider the equity and feasibility of these ideas.

Consider ethical finesse. In some situations, it may be possible to solve the problem without choosing between two options. This approach is called ethical finesse and is characterized by the ability to amicably resolve the situation, delicately maneuvering without anyone feeling like they did not have their needs addressed. For example, in the scenario in the Reflection, is it possible to resolve the dilemma in a way that addresses both the needs of the child and the parent? Could the teacher work with the parent to develop more effective bedtime routines. Or, could they experiment with having the child go down for a nap a little later, sleeping less in the afternoon? Ethical finesse should be used sparingly (Kipnis, 1987). If we rely too often on ethical finesse, we may avoid ethical responsibility and not meet our obligations.

Look for guidance in the NAEYC Code. If ethical finesse does not result in a satisfactory resolution, use the Code to determine the action you can defend morally. Then, prepare to act. Look to the core values for guidance. Then review the **Ideals** and **Principles** to clarify your responsibilities. Make sure you feel you have all the necessary information. Reviewing program policies or discussing the issue with a trusted colleague may also be helpful.

Decide on a justifiable course of action. The next step is to make the choice between the alternatives, basing the decision on the ethics presented in the Code. In the previous naptime example, if the attempts to help the parent with bedtime routines and/or a shorter nap did not solve the problem (i.e., the child became sleepy at naptime and was grumpy in the afternoon without a full nap), then the decision to reinstitute the nap procedure for this child may be necessary. Having the Code and your knowledge of child development on your side of the decision can be reassuring and affirming.

Implement your resolution and reflect. After making the decision and putting it into play, reflect on the process to determine what you learned. Did you learn something about how you communicate with families? Did you learn something about how program policies are set and shared with parents? Or did you mostly learn about your comfort

level with these decisions? Consider the outcomes of your decision. Did your resolution ultimately achieve your ethical obligation, or does your decision need to be revisited?"

The process of applying the NAEYC *Code of Ethical Conduct*(2011a) is not an easy one. Nonetheless, this important marker of a profession is critical in the work of early childhood education. Given the vulnerability of our clients (the children in our care) and the inherent power we wield in that relationship, we must be aware of our ethical obligations and become proficient in using tools to assist with carrying out our ethical responsibility in cooperation with the child's family and community.

[Numerous resources for practicing the use of the Code](#) are available from NAEYC.

Attributions

1. Figure 11.4: © Washington State Department of Early Learning Fair use: screenshot excerpt referring to full report: "Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals".
2. Figure 11.5: by Nicolas Malara, for WA Open ProfTech, © [SBCTC](#), [CC BY 4.0](#)

11.4 ADVOCACY

Brenda Boyd Brown, Ph.D.

The role of an advocate, both for the clientele and professionals, and the profession itself, was not included in the list of commonly accepted criteria of a profession presented at the beginning of this chapter. Nonetheless, **advocacy** is important for many professions, including early childhood education. Note that both the NAEYC *Professional Standards and Competencies* (2019) and the Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals (2009) include professionalism as a core standard area and advocacy as a competency area.

Advocacy is any action supporting or defending a specific cause or issue. Advocacy aims to cause change and various activities can accomplish this goal. Often those of us in the early childhood education field feel uncomfortable with the idea of advocacy. It may feel too political, too aggressive, or require one to be able to speak eloquently about an issue. None of those characterizations need to be true about advocacy. There are many ways for an early childhood educator to engage in advocacy without experiencing any discomfort.

Advocating for Children and Families

Part of the advocacy obligation for early childhood educators is standing up for the rights of those we serve—young children and their families. As members of a profession, we have access to evidence-based information and have acquired firsthand knowledge about what children and their families need to grow and develop successfully. Our professional responsibility is to speak out against initiatives counter to this knowledge and that is not good for children or families.

Advocating for the Profession

Speaking out on behalf of the workforce that does the work of early childhood education is another form of advocacy that early childhood educators are called to. Advocating for recognition, compensation comparable to similar professions, and regulation not in opposition to what we know to be good for children and families are all ways of advocating for the profession. When advocating for the profession, it is important to recognize the

difference between one's personal interest and the best interest of the entire profession and consider requirements that may create short term challenges but long term rewards for the individual professional.

Sometimes what is important for the profession may result in the imposition of requirements that may create hardships for the individual professional. For example, advocating for who should be included in the early childhood education profession may require a certain level of educational preparation. This could mean one must pursue additional education. As a part of the profession, one is called to advocate for what is best for the profession, rather than what one wants to do as an individual. One of the equity issues plaguing the profession, for example, is the fact that most ECE professionals are women, and the lowest paid ones are usually women of color. Many ECE professionals themselves live in poverty and experience family stresses.



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<https://openwa.pressbooks.pub/earlychilddedu1/?p=680#h5p-162>



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Methods of Advocacy

One way to organize the myriad advocacy methods is to divide them into personal and public advocacy (Feeney, 2012), as detailed below.

Personal Advocacy

Personal advocacy happens during your workday and includes speaking up about what you know to be the best practice for young children. When you share information with parents, coworkers, or agencies you cooperate with, you are advocating for children's rights. When you refer your families to reliable agencies within your community or provide

them with written resources, you are advocating. Too often early childhood educators feel reluctant to respond to calls for advocacy. Advocacy does not have to involve a public event; it can occur through the relationships you have built as an educator.



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<https://openwa.pressbooks.pub/earlychildedu1/?p=680#h5p-164>

Public Advocacy

Public advocacy occurs when you speak out to address issues of concern in the larger community. It might surprise you how compelling it can be to hear the story of those working directly in the field. Policymakers need data and statistics, but even more, they need to hear how people are affected by the policies they set. They want to hear from the front-line workers about the reality of the days they spend caring for and educating young children.

However, even public advocacy does not require a public display; it can include voting with early childhood education in mind or writing to your congressional representatives at the state or federal level. However, public advocacy can involve engagement that is more visible to others:

- testifying at a legislative hearing
- attending a public rally for an early childhood issue or during the state legislative session
- participating in a community awareness event, such as Week of the Young Child
- writing a letter to the editor of your local paper on some specific early childhood issue
- visiting your state or federal representative or senator to share your perspective on the importance of early childhood education. Also sharing calls to action



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<https://openwa.pressbooks.pub/earlychildedu1/?p=680#h5p-165>

Early childhood practitioners can feel isolated and consequently limited in influencing policymakers or the public. Luckily, at both the state and national levels, advocacy groups exist to support individuals in their advocacy efforts. Some of these advocacy groups are listed below. Many of these agencies maintain email lists for individual professionals to stay informed of current issues.

- **Children’s Alliance**
 - develops a legislative agenda each session with issues specifically related to early childhood education
 - holds an annual advocacy camp to learn how to effectively engage in advocacy
- **League of Education Voters**
 - convenes informational events, advocacy days, and sponsors fundraising events
- **Washington State Association for Head Start and ECEAP**
 - advocates on behalf of Head Start and ECEAP programs
 - provides information about current issues on its web page
 - supports professionals in advocacy efforts
- **MomsRising**
 - campaigns for early care and education
 - provides information about current issues on its web page
- **Child Care Aware of Washington**
 - advocates on behalf of child care providers
 - presents data to support advocacy efforts
 - presents action plans for individuals
- **National Association for the Education of Young Children**
 - mobilizes members and other early childhood educators and allies to advocate on behalf of professionals and the children they serve
 - presents legislative agendas
 - holds training events to empower educators to advocate on behalf of the profession
 - gathers professionals annually to visit federal representatives and senators
- **Washington Association for the Education of Young Children**

- disseminates advocacy information from the NAEYC to membership and others
- sponsors advocacy training
- collects and disseminates information on state legislative issues and actions

Advocating on behalf of the profession and the children and families it serves is part of the role of the professional early childhood educator. There are numerous ways to become involved in advocacy efforts and opportunities abound for both the new professional and those with more experience . Exploring these opportunities and considering how to begin or expand advocacy engagement is essential.

Reflection

Think about how advocacy is described here. Were you surprised that you have been engaged in advocacy without calling it that? What were those advocacy efforts? Do you feel encouraged to investigate new ways you can engage in advocacy? What might more engagement look like for you?

11.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

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Summary

The current field of early childhood education has a long history of striving for recognition as a profession. Your involvement in that ongoing effort requires you to understand what is necessary to meet the definition of a profession and what that label means for your practice. Recognize that recent efforts involve some of the most assertive and comprehensive steps ever taken to claim the title of profession for the field of ECE. You can be a part of this effort that, when realized, will provide a bright future for the profession of early childhood education. This future offers new and exciting opportunities to change how the world understands the importance of early childhood and those that support the development and learning of all young children. We sincerely hope you want to be a part of that future.

Review Questions

1. Describe what it means for an occupation to be defined as a profession. Use widely accepted criteria to define the term *profession*.
2. Discuss why early childhood education does not entirely fit the definition of a profession, relying on the widely accepted criteria used to define a profession.
3. Describe the initiative called “Power to the Profession.” Who called this group together? What was the goal of the Power to the Profession Task Force?

4. What is the name of the final report presented by the Power to the Profession Task Force? When was it published?
5. What did the Power to the Profession Task Force decide to call the profession of those engaged in early learning?
6. According to the Power to the Profession Task Force, what is the difference between the field of early childhood education and the early childhood education profession? Who is in the field and who is in the profession?
7. Describe the three levels of early childhood educators identified in the *Unifying Framework*. How are they similar and different?
8. What professional standards did the Power to the Profession Task Force choose as standards of practice and to guide early childhood educators' professional preparation?
9. What additional requirements would this *Unifying Framework* put on higher education institutions?
10. How does the *Unifying Framework* address the need to improve the compensation of early childhood educators? How does the framework suggest employers can afford this increased cost?
11. What is the goal of the *Unifying Framework*?
12. What is WAC, and how does it relate to the operation of licensed childcare?
13. Which Washington State agency writes and enforces the WAC related to childcare?
14. How is the WAC different from the NAEYC *Professional Standards and Competencies*?
15. What are the Washington State Stackable Certificates? How do they relate to the WAC?
16. What are the Washington State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education Professionals? How are they different from the WAC related to childcare?
17. What are the NAEYC *Professional Standards and Competencies*? How are they different from the WAC related to childcare?
18. What is the NAEYC *Code of Ethical Conduct*? How is it meant to be used by ECE professionals?
19. What are ethical ideals and principles in the *Code of Ethical Conduct*?
20. To whom does an early childhood educator have ethical responsibility?
21. Define ethical responsibility.
22. What is an ethical dilemma?
23. What is advocacy? For whom is an early childhood educator likely to advocate?
24. How are public and personal advocacy different?
25. What are some ways that an early childhood educator can engage in advocacy?

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CHECK YOUR KNOWLEDGE: CHAPTER REVIEW QUESTIONS

Quiz yourself using the following chapter review questions to check how well you can recall the material. These are designed to be especially useful in print, as they contain the questions embedded as H5P interactives throughout the chapters.

CHAPTER 1 KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Chapter 1

Quiz yourself using the following chapter review questions to check how well you can recall the material.

Review Questions

1. Which program incorporates home visits?
 1. Family Childcare Centers
 2. After-School programs
 3. HeadStart
 4. Childcare centers
2. Which of the following is one of the seven core values from the Code of Ethics?
 1. Appreciate and support the bond between the child and family.
 2. Respect diversity in children, families, and colleagues.
 3. Appreciate childhood as a unique and valuable stage of the human life cycle.
 4. All of the above
3. Which president included the Aid to Dependent Children program as part of the “New Deal” in 1935?
 1. President Ford
 2. President Roosevelt
 3. President Coolidge
 4. President Truman
4. In what year did the Family and Medical Leave Act provide childcare relief dollars for families?
 1. 1993
 2. 1999
 3. 1900
 4. 1991
5. In what year did the Washington Department of Children, Youth, and Families study how early learning systems can provide strategies to help all children and families thrive while eliminating inequalities in childhood outcomes?

1. 2001
2. 1996
3. 2019
4. 2000
6. The Unifying Framework for the Early Childhood Education Profession came from what task force?
7. In 1546, _____ was the philosopher who thought boys and girls should learn to read.
8. In 1704, _____ was the philosopher who believed that a child's mind is born a blank slate.
9. ____ was the year the first federal investment was made in childcare in response to the Great Depression.
10. There are ___ individual traits related to adult learning shown in a continuum model. These temperaments relate to how we respond to the environments where we live, work, and children play.
11. True or False: The NAEYC code of ethics is a professional document that offers guidance when you work with children and families.
12. True or False: A bias is a tendency, inclination, or prejudice toward or against something or someone.
13. True or False: In 1927, Johann Heinrich believed all children had a right to education.
14. True or False: In 1893, the National Federation of Day Nurseries was the first nationwide organization devoted to childcare.
15. True or False: One way the United States has moved toward improving consistency in childcare is through a Quality Rating Improvement System, known as QRIS.

Answer Key

1. Headstart. They incorporate a portion of their programming devoted to home visits
2. All of the above.
3. President Roosevelt
4. In 1993, funding through welfare reform initiatives was signed.
5. In 2019, DCYF conducted this study.
6. Power to the Profession. Power to the Profession was the task force in 2020.
7. Martin Luther
8. John Locke
9. 1933
10. Nine is the correct answer as shown in Figure 1.3.

11. True. The NAEYC Code of Ethics provides guidance, especially in situations that cause you to reflect on your values and morals.
12. True. Some biases are positive and helpful. However, bias is often based on stereotypes, rather than actual knowledge of an individual or circumstance, and this can often lead to prejudgment or discriminatory practice.
13. False. In 1827, Johann Heinrich believed that education was a duty of society.
14. True. In New York in 1893 the National Federation of Day Nurseries was the first nationwide organization devoted to childcare.

CHAPTER 2 KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Chapter 2

Quiz yourself using the following chapter review questions to check how well you can recall the material.

Review Questions

1. True or False: High-quality ECE programs turn to child development theory to create effective learning environments for children.
2. Accordion:
 1. The three stages of social development related to ECE through which children (Birth-8 years) progress: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations.
 1. The sensorimotor stage spans between the ages of birth and two years, a child is in the. In this stage, children explore objects using their hands and mouth and coordinate sensory experiences through physical movement.
 2. Preoperational stage.
 1. During this second stage, a child engages in symbolic reasoning which leads to pretend play.
 3. Concrete operations stage
 1. The 3rd stage takes place between the ages of seven to twelve years. During this stage, children begin to use logical reasoning
3. Constructivism dictates that:
 1. new knowledge builds upon previous knowledge
 2. behaviors can be shaped
 3. children learn through social interactions
 4. child development moves through stages
4. According to behaviorism theory, children's behaviors can be shaped through external cues known as _____ .
5. True or False: Scaffolding is the assistance given to support or give specific help to complete a skill.
6. When a child does not seek proximity to the caregiver or does not seem distressed

at the caregiver's absence, the attachment pattern would be labeled:

1. Secure
 2. Insecure Avoidant
 3. Insecure Resistant
 4. Insecure Disorganized
7. True or False: In our diverse contemporary society, it is important to consider how specific parts of a theory can be applied in a culturally responsive way.
 8. Which of the following is a meaningful way for educators to inform their professional practice?
 1. Engage with current scientific research.
 2. Learn from internet searches about professional development.
 3. Use information from the first study you identify.
 4. Disregard cultural knowledge. Engage in the practices we've "always" used in ECE.
 9. High-quality programs know that grounding program practices in sound theory leads to better _____ for children.
 10. The goal of the Perry Preschool Project was to:
 1. Promote school readiness by providing families extra support
 2. Developing the child in all areas
 3. Reform the way children learn in group settings
 4. Enroll low-income children in high-quality preschool experiences
 11. True or False: Maria Montessori's work helped to elevate and professionalize teaching as a career path for women.
 12. In the Montessori approach, older children can _____ behavior for younger children, which can facilitate learning better than direct instruction.
 13. Reggio Emilia programs encourage which of the following:
 1. Art and music
 2. Plan-do-review and family involvement
 3. Observation and completion
 4. Holistic process and opportunities
 14. True or False: The concept of forest schools is that children spend their whole day outdoors, in all weather, where all activities take place outside, except sleeping.
 15. There are _____ major theories of child development.

Answer Key

1. True

2. N/A
3. New knowledge builds upon previous knowledge. This scaffolding happens as children start to organize information into categories.
4. Reinforcers. Reinforcers are actions taken by adults to encourage or discourage behaviors.
5. True. Scaffolding is an important way to support learning.
6. Insecure Avoidant. Insecure avoidant is not sensitive to a child's needs and appears distant.
7. True. Our contemporary society is diverse, and it is important to reflect this diversity in our approaches to teaching and learning.
8. Engage with current scientific research. This research should be about child development and early childhood education.
9. Outcomes. Use of child development theories to inform practice grounds the practices leading to better outcomes for children.
10. Enroll low-income children in high-quality preschool experiences. High Scope and the Perry Preschool Project sought to improve life outcomes for children enrolled.
11. False. Lucy Sprague Mitchell was the education reformer who developed innovative for educating children and helped to professionalize teaching for women.
12. Model. The mixed age groupings of Montessori classrooms means a great deal of peer learning is happening.
13. Art and Music. The Reggio Emilia approach promotes that the child explores the world and is free to express themselves.
14. True: Forest Schools typically are either half-day programs, or enroll only children old enough to not require napping.
15. Seven/7. Each theory is a bit different from others, and each is useful in understanding children's needs at a given age. Cognitive developmental, behaviorism, social learning theory, sociocultural development, psychosocial theory, attachment theory, and ecological systems theory.

CHAPTER 3 KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Chapter 3

Quiz yourself using the following chapter review questions to check how well you can recall the material.

Review Questions

1. Accordion:
 1. As an organ
 1. The brain is the only organ to study itself!
 2. The impact
 1. The brain impacts everything we do in our lives
 3. Brain Development
 1. The brain develops quickly in the early childhood years
2. True or False: We are more impacted by nurture, or environment, than we are impacted by nature, or individual biology.
3. _____ are released into the synaptic gap, acting as chemical messengers that transmit signals to the receiving neuron.
4. True or False: Without neurotransmitters, the brain cannot process information or send out instructions to the rest of the body.
5. Which of the following statements is not true?
 1. Brain development is impacted by the mother's nutrition, stress, and environment
 2. Most neural pathways are created after birth
 3. Experience sculpts the brain
 4. Connections grow from a single/isolated experience
6. The brain's pathways _____ as they are used.
7. What is the optimal window of opportunity for language development?
 1. Toddler
 2. First year
 3. Preschool
 4. School Age

8. True or False: It is acceptable to challenge the child and push them to do things they are not ready for?
9. Myelin acts in two ways: it provides _____ for the brain and _____ the cells.
10. Accordion:
 1. The brainstem and midbrain are the first to develop.
 1. These are mostly concerned with survival.
 2. Autonomic nervous system.
 1. This is where neurons are fully myelinated at birth and control heartbeat, breathing, and sucking.
 3. Least plastic layer of the brain.
 1. This is the area most resistant to change. Functions of the brainstem include defense mechanisms, reflexes, rote responses and more.
11. The cortex is the most plastic layer of the brain; it loves _____.
12. Accordion:
 1. Overuse of digital media can place a child at developmental risk.
 1. Not enough sleep can be caused by overstimulation by screens.
 2. Delays in learning and social skills and behavior challenges
 1. There is less interaction with parents, families, and others when the focus is on screen and screen time. Children who are scared or confused by what they see on the screen may act out.
 3. Childhood obesity
 1. Screen time is linked to less activity and physical play, also to weight gain from exposure to food advertising and snacking.
13. True or False. You can help the child regulate their body by helping them to calm the thalamus. You can do this through movement and breathing, along with other sensory experiences like playing with play-dough.
14. Most brains that have experienced high ACEs will not function as optimally as the brains of children who have had adults help them develop a strong _____ system.
15. There are several elements that are an essential part of helping children overcome trauma and develop resilience. These elements are:
 1. A safe and inviting environment that includes structure, a variety of materials and opportunities for thoughtful choices for children's activities.
 2. Excessive media time through computers, videos, and other screen time.
 3. Unorganized classrooms with overstimulating materials.
 4. Unresponsive adults who do not work to develop healthy relationships.

Answer Key

1. N/A
2. False: We are impacted by a combination of both nature and nurture.
3. Neurotransmitters. This is a tiny space between neurons where the neurons don't actually touch.
4. True. This affects the formation, maintenance, activity and longevity of the synapses and neurons.
5. Connections grow from a single/isolated experience. It is important to remember that each experience results in making connections between new input and what is already known and in place.
6. Strengthen. Neurons not used are subject to pruning, making existing connections stronger.
7. First Year. The chart shows the peak of the window of opportunity around 7-8 months, mid first-year.
8. False. The best approach is to follow the child's lead and focus on their unique timetables of development
9. Substance \ insulates. This fatty layer that coats axons for protection and speeds up nerve impulses.
10. N/A
11. Change. This is where higher-level thinking happens.
12. N/A
13. False. The thalamus plays a role in sleep and alertness, while the vagus nerve when deregulated causes the child to react to threat.
14. Stress Response. This stress response system is resilience, and requires supportive relationships and opportunities for skill building.
15. A safe and inviting environment that includes structure, a variety of materials and opportunities for thoughtful choices for children's activities. These elements can all be supported by being intentional and implementing training in mindfulness.

CHAPTER 4 KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Chapter 4

Quiz yourself using the following chapter review questions to check how well you can recall the material.

Review Questions

1. There are four main _____ in child development.
2. True or False: Toxic stress can lead to childhood trauma and be detrimental to the early childhood stages of development.
3. Brain development is an important part of which developmental domain:
 1. Cognitive
 2. Social
 3. Physical
 4. Emotional
4. Accordion:
 1. Motor skills refer to:
 1. a child's ability to move and coordinate motion using their bodies.
 2. Gross motor skills
 1. Involve "big muscles", such as those needed for running, jumping, and climbing.
 3. Fine motor skills
 1. Involve "small muscles", like those needed for writing, holding a spoon, and doing a puzzle.
5. True or False: Using their hands in varied, age-appropriate activities helps children strengthen fine motor skills and also promotes independence and emotional development.
6. One key area of cognitive development is called _____.
7. When children encounter a challenge, they learn to practice:
 1. Social Skills
 2. Problem Solving
 3. Executive Functioning

4. Self-Reflection

8. True or False. Self-reflection is helpful in problem-solving and social development.
9. Accordion:
 1. Children learn to understand language in infancy through the following activities:
 1. Responsive interactions with adults
 2. Example #1: Adults should speak with and listen to infants starting at birth
 1. Taking turns talking with infants as they babble.
 3. Example #2: Make eye contact and use a gentle tone
 1. Engaging in eye contact and using gentle tones of voice supports the infant in feeling safe and encouraging engagement.
10. True or False: Social and emotional development are interconnected aspects of a single domain called social-emotional development.
11. When a child's growth aligns with expected milestones and age-based averages, it is referred to as _____.
12. True or False. Developmental assessments are carried out by the teacher through observing the child at play or by playing small games and activities with the child, and then recording the child's developmental milestones.
13. Planning curriculum means understanding what is appropriate at a given age or stage of development.
 1. Environments
 2. Assessment
 3. Curriculum
 4. Interactions
14. Accordion:
 1. There are six (6) guidelines for DAP included in the NAEYC Position Statement on DAP
 1. These begin with creating a caring community of learners and engaging in two-way partnerships with families.
 2. Observation, documentation, and assessment
 1. To support children's development and learning, and our teaching practices.
 3. Planning and implementation
 1. Preparing an engaging curriculum, and demonstrating professionalism will support and enhance a child's learning and development.
15. True or False. Understanding child development is a vital skill for all early childhood teachers.

Answer Key

1. Developmental domains. These are the four (4) specific areas in which growth occurs. The areas include: thinking, emotions, movement, and social interactions.
2. True. It can also impact social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as lead to long-term health-related issues.
3. Physical. Development in the physical domain begins in utero (before birth) and includes all things related to the body, including basic survival and movement.
4. N/A
5. True. Fine motor skills begin with a child's ability to grasp an object and develop throughout the early years.
6. Executive Function (commonly referred to as EF) encompasses attention, working memory, and inhibition.
7. Problem solving includes the ability to create step-by-step plans to do cognitive tasks.
8. False. Emotional development supports self reflection and is important to thinking about what you're thinking, and answering the "why" of what we are doing.
9. N/A
10. False. They are separate domains, each with unique functions.
11. Typical Development. Typical development agrees with the norms articulated for a specific age, such as on a developmental milestones tracker.
12. True. Observation of a child during play lets us see a child's skills in real life, in the environment that is familiar.
13. Curriculum. Curriculum, offered at an appropriate developmental level, provides content and activities for learning.
14. N/A
15. True. All teachers should know and use this information and specifics related to the 4 developmental domains to plan an effective and meaningful curriculum to support learning and development.

CHAPTER 5 KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Chapter 5

Quiz yourself using the following chapter review questions to check how well you can recall the material.

Review Questions

1. Which of the following is an example of an anti-bias approach in early childhood education?
 1. Avoiding discussions about identity and diversity can reinforce biases rather than prevent discomfort.
 2. Encourages children to explore, appreciate, and celebrate diversity while addressing stereotypes and injustices
 3. Differences matter and should be acknowledged in a way that promotes respect and inclusion.
 4. Educators should not proactively engage children in discussions about diversity rather than waiting for them to ask.
2. What is a key reason educators must move beyond an anti-bias approach and also be anti-racist in their teaching?
 1. Because all children naturally view everyone equally, regardless of what they are taught.
 2. Because BIPOC children are disproportionately impacted by education systems and internalize messages from their environments.
 3. Because textbooks and stories should only reflect one cultural perspective to maintain consistency.
 4. Because racism no longer exists in educational settings.
3. According to Zaretta Hammond (2014), which of the following is NOT a culturally responsive teaching strategy?
 1. Encouraging interactive games that focus on social and verbal interactions.
 2. Allowing children to engage in conversations during lessons and storytime.
 3. Providing only pre-selected books from the dominant culture for classroom reading.

4. Inviting families and elders to share or record stories for children to hear.
4. According to theories and brain research, what is happening during the first eight years of a child's life?
 1. Children primarily focus on meeting developmental milestones and do not yet engage in social learning.
 2. Children experience exponential cognitive growth and are actively learning about themselves and others.
 3. Children only learn from their families, and classroom experiences have little influence on their development.
 4. Children learn at a slow and steady pace, gradually picking up cultural and social norms over time.
5. What is an important step educators should take when a child notices and asks about differences in others?
 1. Ignore the comment to avoid making the child or others uncomfortable.
 2. Respond with a positive acknowledgment and affirm the difference.
 3. Quickly change the topic to prevent further discussion
 4. Tell the child it's not polite to talk about differences.
6. According to Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, and Nimmo (2023), culturally _____ care goes beyond cultural responsiveness by actively integrating and honoring the cultural strengths, knowledge, and practices within educational and caregiving settings
7. To create culturally responsive and equitable learning opportunities, educators must understand the lived _____ of the family and the child outside of the classroom.
8. According to Dr. Shullman, President of the American Psychological Association, we are living in a _____ pandemic, which leads to psychological and physical issues, as well as historical trauma.
9. _____ goes beyond "fairness" and provides us with a framework to understand the impact of our biases and oppression on children and families and how we can address them.
10. The concept of _____ was developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how social identities overlap, leading to unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.
11. True or False. Culture plays a significant role in shaping how we understand, learn, and interact with the world around us.
12. True or False. The opportunity gap exists because some children inherently lack the ability and capacity to learn.
13. True or False. Throughout the history of public and early childhood education, all children have had equal access to education regardless of race.

14. True or False. In the United States, the dominant social groups set the standards for appropriate and acceptable behavior, while marginalized groups often experience systemic disadvantages.
15. True or False. Biases are learned through cultural upbringing and socialization, and while explicit biases are conscious, implicit biases influence our actions unconsciously.

Answer Key

1. Encourages children to explore, appreciate, and celebrate diversity while addressing stereotypes and injustices. The Anti Bias approach requires teachers to explore with children and teach about diversity and learn about stereotypes and injustices based on one's identities
2. Because BIPOC children are disproportionately impacted by education systems and internalize messages from their environments. The Anti-racist approach requires teachers to critically examine the materials they use, the perspectives they teach from, and the implicit messages being conveyed, and being anti-racist can create learning environments that affirm all children's identities and experiences.
3. Providing only pre-selected books from the dominant culture for classroom reading. Culturally responsive teaching encourages diverse storytelling and perspectives rather than limiting children to books from the dominant culture. Including family stories and different cultural narratives helps children connect with their learning in meaningful ways.
4. Children experience exponential cognitive growth and are actively learning about themselves and others. The first eight years are a time of rapid brain development. During this stage, children are not only reaching developmental milestones but also actively learning about their identities, cultural norms, and social expectations from their families, teachers, and communities.
5. Respond with a positive acknowledgment and affirm the difference. When children notice and ask about differences, it's important to acknowledge them in a positive way. This helps affirm diversity and ensures that children understand differences are valued and welcomed in the classroom.
6. Sustaining. Cultural sustaining care is not just about being responsive or inclusive—it actively sustains and perpetuates cultural strengths, knowledge, and practices, ensuring that historically marginalized cultures continue to thrive.

7. Experiences. Understanding lived experiences helps educators recognize the unique challenges and strengths of each family, allowing them to create more equitable and culturally responsive learning environments.
8. Racism. Dr. Shullman describes racism as a pandemic to highlight its widespread and harmful impact on individuals' mental and physical well-being, as well as the historical trauma it perpetuates.
9. Equity is more than just fairness—it requires actively addressing systemic barriers and ensuring that all children and families receive the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.
10. Intersectionality helps us understand that people experience discrimination and privilege in complex ways based on the combination of their social identities.
11. True. Culture is a powerful force in shaping our perspectives, values, and ways of learning. It influences how we interpret information, communicate, and interact with others. Recognizing this helps educators create more inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments.
12. False. The opportunity gap is not about children's inherent abilities but rather about the structural inequities that prevent all children, especially BIPOC children, from having the same access to learning opportunities. Teachers play a crucial role in creating equitable opportunities for all children.
13. False. Historically, children of enslaved people were denied access to education, and Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to boarding schools. These systemic inequities continue to impact education today. Understanding this history helps us work toward a more equitable system.
14. True. Dominant social groups in the U.S. shape societal norms and expectations, while marginalized groups often face systemic barriers and inequities. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for fostering equity and inclusion in education and beyond.
15. True. Biases develop through cultural and social influences. Explicit biases are those we are aware of, while implicit biases operate unconsciously, shaping our decisions and interactions without us realizing it. Recognizing both types of bias is essential for fostering equity and inclusivity.

CHAPTER 6 KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Chapter 6

Quiz yourself using the following chapter review questions to check how well you can recall the material.

Review Questions

1. Early childhood education has a long history of relying on _____ to understand children's needs and abilities.
2. True or False. NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) statement has always recognized the importance of systematic observation of child development in early childhood education.
3. Beginning in the 1980's increasing pressure for _____ led to more testing of young children.
4. The term assessment means
 1. Systematically collecting data about a child's development
 2. Synthesizing data into an idea or theory about a child's development
 3. Using systematically collected data and synthesized ideas about a child to make educational decisions
 4. All of the above
5. True or False. Observation is the only way that assessment can be carried out with young children.
6. Formative assessment...
 1. Happens only at the end of a learning period
 2. Helps the teacher see how the child is grasping information
 3. Often uses informal and authentic assessment methods
 4. Both B and C are accurate
7. True or False. Formative assessment can be more flexible and individualized than summative assessment.
8. The term observation is defined as
 1. Watching and listening to children to learn about them
 2. Giving children a standardized test to assess their learning.

3. A haphazard and unintentional process.
4. A process that makes children feel self-conscious.
9. To avoid bias in observation and documentation, it is important to be as _____ as possible.
10. After observing the child by watching and listening, the next step is to _____ what was seen. This process ensures that observational data can be revisited to assist in understanding the child's development.
11. The third part of the observational process is to _____ the observational data.
12. The most common method of recording observations of development in early childhood education is
 1. Running record
 2. Checklist
 3. Rating Scale
 4. Anecdotal record
13. A work sample is...
 1. An artifact illustrating a child's ability or developmental achievement
 2. A standardized test
 3. A portfolio of a child's work
 4. Inauthentic assessment
14. True or False. Interpretation of documented observations requires expertise that comes with being a prepared educator.
15. Which of the following is the most important reason to carry out observation and assessment in an education setting?
 1. Accountability to funders
 2. To inform responsive teaching
 3. To advocate for the importance of early education
 4. To justify one's teaching job

Answer Key

1. Observation has historically been used as a critical component of early childhood education by providing information about a child's development and instructional needs.
2. True. NAEYC has always (and continues to) advocate for the use of systematic observation in quality early childhood education.
3. Accountability and standards. As education reform put more emphasis on "proving" the effectiveness of pedagogy through the use of accountability and standards,

testing increased, even in classrooms serving young learners.

4. All of the above. These are all components of what assessment is.
5. False. While observation is a critical and highly appropriate method, we shouldn't think that it is the only way to collect assessment data.
6. Both B and C are accurate. Formative assessment can rely on informal/authentic assessment methods AND provides the educator with information about the child's learning.
7. True. Because formative assessment is not being used to make high stakes educational decisions (like whether to promote a grade, or a need for intervention), formative assessment can be individualized to the child's own needs and learning style. It is designed to inform the educator about the child's learning and what needs to happen next.
8. Watching and listening to children to learn about them. As simple as it sounds, this is what observation is about. In fact, it is a complex process when done well.
9. Objective. The best tool for avoiding bias in observation and documentation is to objectively describe what is observed and recorded.
10. Document/record. It is important to document what you've observed so you can return to that data to interpret it.
11. Interpret. Once you have observed and documented, it is important to interpret, or make sense of the observation using your expertise as a prepared educator, and by comparing and combining it with previously collected observations.
12. Anecdotal record. The anecdotal record is the most commonly used method because it is fairly short, but captures important evidence of development
13. An artifact illustrating a child's ability or developmental achievement. A work sample is what it sounds like. A piece of work completed by a child in the course of the school day.
14. True. While we can all interpret observations, and we all get better at it with practice and experience with children, it is important to note that without a strong background in child development, interpretation can be less than valid.
15. To inform responsive teaching. This is the most important reason to go to all the work of high quality observation and documentation. Doing so increases the degree to which instruction supports the individual child's development, improving outcomes for that child.

CHAPTER 7 KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Chapter 7

Quiz yourself using the following chapter review questions to check how well you can recall the material.

Review Questions

1. True or False. It is 10:00 am. Teacher Tanya told the children it was time for table toys. The children are sitting at the tables using magna-tiles. This is considered play.
2. Which list is correct for the domains (areas) of development that are used when children play?
 1. Learning, activity
 2. Cognitive, physical, social and emotional
 3. Listening, following directions
 4. Happy, excited
3. Tanisha is looking at lego pieces, hits them together without connecting them, puts pieces down and picks them up, turns pieces around, continues banging them together and suddenly they stick together. Tanisha is engaging in _____ play.
4. Zachary is building a castle with legos. Zachary is engaging in _____ play.
5. Tad built a castle with blocks. Tad is pacing in front of the castle wearing a hat and carrying a stick. Tad announces: "I am the guard of the castle." Tad is engaged in _____ play.
6. Greg, Jin, and Karl are playing outdoors. They are pretending the play structure is a castle. Karl and Greg are knights; Jin is the king. Greg, Jin, and Karl are engaging in _____ .
7. Susie is watching three children play family in the dramatic play area. Which engagement strategy is Susie using?
 1. Cooperative
 2. Parallel
 3. Onlooker
 4. Solitary
8. Tanya is building with duplos and is sitting next to Sonja, who is doing a puzzle.

Tanya and Sonja are engaging in...

1. Cooperative
 2. Parallel
 3. Onlooker
 4. Solitary
9. True or False. Children of all ages, including infants, use the cooperative play engagement strategy.
 10. True or False. Reading or looking at a book is physical play.
 11. Which description below fits with children's risky play?
 1. Children always get hurt when engaging in risky play.
 2. Children take on risks when engaging in risky play.
 3. Children are defiant.
 4. Children observe others but do not do anything.
 12. True or False. The Butterflies preschool classroom daily schedule has 20 minutes of free play. This is okay because there is free play and the teacher could not make it any longer because there are academic activities such as language/literacy and math on the schedule.
 13. True or False. Getting ready to go outdoors and putting on coats, hats, etc. presents an opportunity for children to develop self-help and fine motor skills.
 14. Which child is experiencing difficulty using materials?
 1. Brendon builds a car out of legos.
 2. Stacy puts together a puzzle.
 3. Jossue cut out pictures from a magazine and glued them onto a paper with some hanging off the edges.
 4. Alan tapped two legos together, put them down, picked up two more and tapped them, then put them down. He did this four times and then sat looking at the legos.
 15. True or False. Rejection in play is not serious, and teachers do not need to address it because classrooms are busy and they need to focus on academic learning.

Answer Key

1. False. In play, children make choices, including about what materials they will use. In this example, Teacher Tanya made the choice and told the children they would use magna-tiles.
2. Cognitive, physical, social and emotional are domains of development.
3. Exploratory. Tanisha is exploring the legos and learning what can be done with this

material.

4. Constructive. Zachary is using the materials purposefully.
5. Dramatic. Tad is acting out the role of castle guard and playing by himself.
6. Socio-dramatic. When children pretend and act out roles with others, they are engaging in socio-dramatic play.
7. Onlooker. Onlooker engagement strategy is when a child watches (observes) other children playing.
8. Parallel. Parallel play engagement strategy is when two or more children sit next to each other and play, but are not playing together.
9. False. The play engagement strategies are based on development and younger children (infants/young toddlers) are not at a developmental level to engage in cooperative play.
10. False. Physical play is active with large motor movement.
11. Children take on risks when engaging in risky play.
12. False. Children learn from play and need a minimum of 45 minutes to get involved and fully engage in play.
13. True. Putting on coats, hats, etc. allows children to practice self-help with getting dressed as well as fine motor skills.
14. Alan tapped two legos together, put them down, picked up two more and tapped them, then put them down. He did this four times and then sat looking at the legos. Alan tapped the legos but did not connect them together, therefore did not figure out how legos work by connecting the pieces.
15. False. Rejection in play is very serious and impacts children's social/emotional development.

CHAPTER 8 KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Chapter 8

Quiz yourself using the following chapter review questions to check how well you can recall the material.

Review Questions

1. In an early childhood classroom, children learn from interacting with teachers and peers as well as from the _____.
2. True or false. The area where children store their belongings (coats, etc.) does not have opportunities for learning.
3. True or false. Infant, Toddler, and Preschool classrooms have the same types of furniture and materials.
4. True or false. Classroom design impacts children's behavior.
5. Which is an accurate statement regarding the early childhood classroom arrangement?
 1. There are rows of desks.
 2. There are tables with chairs throughout the whole room.
 3. The room is set up in interest areas with low shelves and relevant materials in each area.
 4. There are bookshelves around the walls and a big rug in the middle.
6. Which statement accurately describes the art interest area in an indoor learning environment?
 1. There are kits for crafts to make pre-determined things.
 2. There should be no art area because it would take up space from academic areas.
 3. There are a variety of items including open-ended materials for children can use explore ideas and create.
 4. Each day the teacher posts an example of what children should make in the art area.
7. Which statement accurately describes the materials in the math interest area in an indoor learning environment?

1. Math manipulatives, blocks, puzzles
 2. Flashcards, worksheets
 3. Dress up clothing and play food.
 4. Paint, paint brushes, glue
8. True or false. It is advised to keep broken items and things with missing pieces because materials are expensive.
9. True or false. A well-designed classroom that is organized and tidy promotes learning as well as reduces stress.
10. The outdoor learning environment (OLE) is...
1. Not important because children are on recess (break from learning) when outdoors.
 2. An extension of and different from the indoor environment
 3. Is only for physical play activity
 4. Nothing for teachers to consider or think about because they take their breaks when children are outdoors.
11. Items that are open-ended and moveable are often referred to as _____
12. Which statement is correct regarding supervision of children in the outdoor learning environment (OLE)?
1. Supervision in the OLE is not needed.
 2. Setting boundaries is a strategy for effective supervision in the OLE.
 3. Teachers need time to talk with one another and supervision is secondary to talking with co-workers.
 4. Older children provide supervision outdoors.
13. True or false. Setting an effective daily schedule includes consideration of the children's ages and developmental levels.
14. What is the recommended length of time for preschool large groups?
1. 20 minutes
 2. 10-15 minutes
 3. 30 minutes
 4. 45 minutes
15. Because most young children are not reading yet, it is recommended that teachers provide a _____.

Answer Key

1. Environment. The environment is a key aspect of the teaching and learning process in early childhood.

2. False. Children can learn self-help and social skills as well as language/literacy if their names are on cubbies and other spaces where they store their belongings.
3. False. The developmental level of each age group determines the type of furniture and materials.
4. True. The design and layout of the classroom influences behavior and allows them to move around and socialize freely and purposefully without disrupting others.
5. The early childhood classroom is set up in interest areas that are intentionally arranged to allow children to play and engage and so teachers can supervise and interact.. The early childhood classroom is set up in interest areas that are intentionally arranged to allow children to play and engage and so teachers can supervise and interact.
6. There are a variety of items including open-ended materials for children can use explore ideas and create. The art area is a space in which children work with variety of materials and can explore and create based on their own ideas.
7. Math manipulatives, blocks, puzzles. Correct! The math area includes math manipulatives, blocks, puzzles as well as other items in which children can explore number concepts, shapes, and measurement.
8. False. Broken items and things with missing pieces do not allow children to learn from the materials in the way it was intended as well as can cause frustration and/or may be unsafe.
9. True. Overcrowding, clutter, and disorganization inhibits learning and can cause stress for both teachers and children.
10. An extension of and different from the indoor environment. The OLE is a space that can extend what children do indoors as well as offers different opportunities for learning.
11. Loose parts is the term that is often used for items that are open-end and moveable.
12. Setting boundaries is a strategy for effective supervision in the OLE. It is a teacher's responsibility to ensure children are supervised outdoors and setting boundaries is an effective strategy.
13. True. The children's ages and developmental levels are key factor in setting up the daily schedule. Examples: Infants are on their own wake, sleep, eat schedules. Toddlers should not be required to function in large groups.
14. 10 – 15 minutes. Preschool group times should be no more than 15 minutes in length.
15. A picture schedule allows children to see the daily schedule and it can be calming as well as reduce inappropriate behaviors.

CHAPTER 9 KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Chapter 9

Quiz yourself using the following chapter review questions to check how well you can recall the material.

Review Questions

1. True or false. We need to learn about the diversity in the cultures and structures of the families we serve.
2. The daily experiences of racism for people of color have a _____ and can erode resources for the parent.
3. Parent involvement generally does not include:
 1. Volunteering in the classroom
 2. Communicating with the school
 3. Reading the school newsletter
 4. Participating in school activities
4. True or false. The benefits of the teacher having a positive, healthy connection with families include increased skills for both the child and the parent.
5. True or false. Approaching our work from a position of strength will help to scaffold learning by identifying opportunities and possibilities for growth.
6. True or false. We are obligated professionally and ethically to develop relationships with all families and communities we serve.
7. Reciprocal partnerships and community connections
 1. Personal relationships with families
 2. Reciprocal partnerships and community connections
 3. Focus on the dominant culture in your program
 4. Knowing that the teacher knows best
8. True or false. We need to engage in inclusive communication strategies in order to fully support children and families.
9. The concept of being family _____ implies positive and respectful attitudes towards families.
10. Most commonly, conflicts between teachers and families are the result of a lack of

understanding of:

1. Background, culture, language, and/or beliefs
 2. Family stability and status
 3. Racism and equality
 4. Lack of parent engagement
11. True or false. Barriers to family engagement are often viewed as solely the family's responsibility.
 12. _____ can be mediated through building an invested interest on both sides, including clear and intentional communication, relationships, and an attitude of partnership.
 13. _____ can be defined as children with and without disabilities learning alongside each other in integrated classrooms.
 14. True or false. Creating a visual model of a family's existing support helps highlight areas where additional support is needed.
 15. A positive relationship with families, along with a program that is committed to family engagement, is vital to a child's success in school and life. Key elements include:
 1. Focus on social skills and communication
 2. Parents, teachers, the school, and the community
 3. Is uniquely important across the school-age years
 4. Only the school staff to support the child's learning

Answer Key

1. True. These perspectives are important considerations for success for the child and family and provide critical information about how to design and deliver program content.
2. Cumulative effects. The cumulative effects can lead to increased exhaustion and depression.
3. Reading the school newsletter. Simply reading the newsletter is a passive action and is not seen as parent involvement.
4. True. There are many benefits to teachers, including increased positive behaviors of the children.
5. True. Focusing on what a child is able to do helps teachers identify strengths and areas for growth.
6. True. It is essential to build respectful relationships with the children, families, and community.

7. Reciprocal partnerships and community connections. NAEYC supports building positive and respectful relationships with families, and connecting with your community.
8. True. To truly and fully engage with families we must use the strategy of inclusive communication, which is respectful to all of the families.
9. Sensitive. It is essential that we engage in positive and respectful attitudes towards families.
10. Background, culture, language, and/or beliefs. When we build respectful relationships with families, we seek to understand their culture, life experiences, values, and beliefs
11. False. This is a partnership, and both sides are responsible for identifying and working to reduce barriers.
12. Barriers. Our clear and intentional communication with families will support engagement to mediate barriers.
13. Inclusion. There are many benefits of inclusion, including support for children and teachers.
14. True. Positive support systems and their interactions can support optimal development.
15. Parents, teachers, the school, and the community. This positive relationship embraces the entire “village” to support the child’s learning at home and at school.

CHAPTER 10 KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Chapter 10

Quiz yourself using the following chapter review questions to check how well you can recall the material.

Review Questions

1. The most important function of behavior is _____.
2. True or false. All behaviors can be seen or observed.
3. Positive relationships and positive behaviors all add to healthy *brain* development, and depend upon the relationships with individuals in the child's close community and family.
4. Accordion
 1. Analyze
 1. shift compliance to choice when possible
 2. Consider
 1. ignore challenging behaviors by making wise and limited choices of when to intervene
 3. Self- monitor
 1. self-monitor your own behaviors using counters, visuals, and tokens to count "relationship deposits"
5. Which of the following is not true about social and emotional development?
 1. Social and emotional development include developing skills related to social interaction, emotional awareness, and self-regulation.
 2. Social interactions include those with both adults and peers.
 3. Emotional awareness is focused only on feelings.
 4. Self-regulation includes expressing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in socially acceptable ways.
6. All behavioral intervention is an opportunity to _____.
7. Accordion
 1. Coaching in real time
 1. As a coach it is our goal to help children to see what they are doing, to begin

to understand how their actions affect others, and how to choose positive alternatives for the unwanted behavior.

2. Giving effective praise
 1. Effective praise requires teachers to describe specifically what they see—without generalizing, evaluating, or making comparisons. We want to teach internal motivation, not teach the child to seek validation from others.
3. Modeling appropriate behavior
 1. The strategy of modeling, also referred to as demonstrating appropriate behaviors, gives teachers the opportunity to build and scaffold children’s healthy and positive social and emotional skills.
8. True or false. To build a positive classroom climate, you should often use behavior-approving language, eliminate damaging forms of redirection, give specific praise, and maintain a pleasant affect.
9. Social rules help to guide us in our _____ with others, and many children have a hard time recognizing these rules.
10. Accordion
 1. Common triggers
 1. Unexpected changes in the schedule, routine, or environment
 2. A sense of fear or helplessness
 1. Situation causes the child to feel threatened or attacked
 3. Overstimulation
 1. Environment: too many children/people in the room, noise, light, activity.
11. True or false. Children who are “triggered” have behaviors resulting from a stress response, which typically are flight, fight, or freeze.
12. The adult must remain calm when facing unwanted behaviors. This includes the following, except:
 1. Shift the focus to meeting the child’s needs
 2. Wait until the child is no longer triggered to talk about what happened
 3. Unwanted behaviors are a personal attack
 4. Talk about how to recognize triggers with the child
13. Visuals and other materials designed to help children label feelings and emotions should be an ongoing part of the curriculum, readily available in a _____, and accessible throughout the classroom environment.
14. Accordion
 1. Use the “relationship bank”
 1. Make sure you have plenty of investments to draw from
 2. Use data

1. Use the data gathered from observations. Be objective!
3. Solutions/support
 1. Offer possible solutions or support. Share in a conversation and include realistic options
15. True or false. There should always be 10 positive comments to balance every 1 negative comment.

Answer Key

1. Communication. It is important to remember that communication through behavior happens every moment of every day.
2. False. We may not see the root cause of behavior, but it is an important consideration.
3. Brains. Relationships with friends are critical to creating and nurturing relationships.
4. N/A
5. Emotional awareness is focused only on feelings. Emotional awareness includes the ability to recognize and understand both feelings and emotions.
6. True. When we teach intentionally, we have a plan and purpose, resulting in observable outcomes.
7. N/A
8. True. To build a positive classroom climate, you should often use behavior-approving language, eliminate damaging forms of redirection, give specific praise, and maintain a pleasant affect.
9. Interactions. We learn these rules through time and practice in a classroom and with others.
10. N/A
11. True. These three terms categorize the behaviors observed in a triggered child.
12. Unwanted behaviors are a personal attack. These behaviors, actually, have little to do with you, and are the response to trauma.
13. Quiet corner. These materials and visuals help children better express themselves appropriately.
14. N/A
15. False. Research suggests that a 5:1 ratio of positive to negative interactions helps maintain healthy, supportive relationships with children. Negative comments carry more weight, so balancing them with multiple positives is key to reinforcing connection and trust.

CHAPTER 11 KNOWLEDGE CHECK

Chapter 11

Quiz yourself using the following chapter review questions to check how well you can recall the material.

Review Questions

1. A professional can be defined as...
 1. A good employee that does their job well.
 2. An individual that works in an occupation serving the public good.
 3. An individual that has completed specialized education required for the role.
 4. Both B and C are necessary to fully define the term professional
2. True or false. Early Childhood Education is well-established as a profession.
3. In 2017, NAEYC began an initiative called _____ that aimed to move ECE to the status of a Profession.
4. The Power to the Profession initiative includes:
 1. Was a multi-year process
 2. Involved 8 decision cycles
 3. Provided opportunity for practitioners to have input
 4. Included all of the above characteristics
5. The Power to the Profession Task force presented the results of their work in a document titled the _____ for the Early
6. True or false. Currently, no established standards exist for the regulation of early childhood education, which is why the Unifying Framework is so important.
7. In Washington state, regulations regarding the operation of licensed child care facilities are spelled out in the _____.
8. True or false. The WA State Core Competencies for Early Care and Education professionals sets the professional development requirements for educators in licensed child care facilities.
9. The NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies
 1. Are meant to provide a unified position on what is required to practice in the profession of early childhood education

2. Are “leveled” to provide clarity about expectations for professionals with differing scopes of practice
 3. Are aspirational—they have not yet been adopted universally in the US
 4. All of the above describe the NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies
10. Because professionals often provide service to a vulnerable population, it is important that a _____ be in place to protect against exploitation.
 11. True or false. Ethical principles are components of the NAEYC Code of Ethics that are aspirational—they are goals we strive for.
 12. True or false. While it is appropriate to advocate for children and families, it is inappropriate for early childhood educators to advocate for the profession of ECE.
 13. True or false. It is inappropriate for early childhood educators to advocate for compensation for members of the profession.
 14. When an early childhood educator speaks up to support best practices for young children, they are engaged in:
 1. Personal advocacy
 2. Public advocacy
 3. Political Action
 4. Inappropriate outspokenness
 15. When early childhood educators participate in a community awareness event, like Week of the Young Child, they are engaged in _____.

Answer Key

1. Both B and C are necessary to fully define the term professional. A professional is commonly defined as one who has completed specialized education allowing that person to be in an occupation that serves the public good.
2. False. While unfortunate, the field of ECE does not meet enough of the characteristics of a profession to allow it to be called that.
3. Power to the Profession. Power to the Profession is what the work of a 15 entity task force was called.
4. Included all of the above characteristics. All of the listed characteristics describe the Power to the Profession work.
5. Unifying Framework. This is the title of the document that captured the recommendations of the Power to the Profession Task Force.
6. False. This statement is false, because although the Unifying Framework strives to provide a single set of standards, it is not because none exist, but because so many, differing standards exist.

7. Washington Administrative Code/WAC
8. False. While the Core Competencies offer guidelines for the content of professional preparation, it is the WAC that actually sets the rules for professional preparation.
9. All of the above describe the NAEYC Professional Standards and Competencies.
10. Code of ethics. A power differential often exists between professionals and those they serve. Thus, a code of ethics is important to spell out how to avoid exploiting clients.
11. False. Ethical principles are not aspirational. They are concrete mandates describing what to do or not do in professional practice.
12. False. Early childhood educators are expected to advocate for both the clientele they serve, as well as the profession itself.
13. False. It is not inappropriate to advocate on behalf of the profession, including advocating for compensation that is comparable to other similar professions.
14. Personal advocacy. Personal advocacy happens through the course of one's work day, whenever a professional speaks up for best practice.
15. Public advocacy. Public advocacy is speaking out publicly about best practice.

APPENDIX 1: LEGAL REFERENCES

Chapter 1

Economic Opportunity Amendments of 1965, Pub. L. No. 89-253, 79 Stat. 973 (1965).

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/89th-congress/house-bill/8283/text>

Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, Pub. L. No. 103-3, 107 Stat. 6 (1993).

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/103rd-congress/house-bill/1/text>

Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, Pub. L. No. 93-383, 88 Stat. 633 (1974).

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/93rd-congress/senate-bill/3066/text>

Human Services Amendments of 1994, Pub. L. No. 103-252, 108 Stat. 623 (1994).

<https://www.congress.gov/103/statute/STATUTE-108/STATUTE-108-Pg623.pdf>

Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1981, Pub. L. No: 97-35, 95 Stat. 357 (1981).

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/97th-congress/house-bill/3982>

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, Pub. L. No. 104-193, 110 Stat. 2105 (1996).

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/104th-congress/house-bill/3734/text>

Chapter 6

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002).

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/1/text>

Chapter 9

Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Pub. L. No. 94-142, 87 Stat. 773 (1975).

<https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/STATUTE-89/STATUTE-89-Pg773>

Improving Child Care Access, Affordability, and Stability in the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), 89 F.R. 15366 (2024).

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/03/01/2024-04139/improving-child-care-access-affordability-and-stability-in-the-child-care-and-development-fund-ccdf>

Wash. Rev. Code § 26.44.030 (1965). <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?Cite=26.44.030>

Chapter 11

Wash. Admin. Code § 110-300 (2018). <https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=110-300>

APPENDIX 2: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEFINING THE PROFESSION: POWER TO THE PROFESSION UNIFYING FRAMEWORK (2020)

Issue Addressed	Recommendations	How ECE is Moved to a Profession
<p>Lack of agreement about a name (early care and education, early learning, etc.)</p> <p>Difficulty defining who was “in” the field and who was not</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinguish between the Early Childhood Education Profession and the Early Child Education Field • Profession is Early Childhood Education • Professionals are Early Childhood Educators • Those in the Profession include early childhood educators (ECEs), pedagogical and instructional administrators (P&IAs), and professional preparation faculty and trainers (PPF&T) • ECEs include those who provide direct service to children B-8 and who meet the guidelines for the profession • P&IAs include those who guide the practice of ECEs and who meet the guidelines for the profession • PPF&T are a subset of higher ed faculty and professional development staff that instruct, observe, and monitor the practice of aspiring ECEs and who have met the guidelines • Those in the ECE Field are not in the profession but are allies of and support the profession (i.e., home visitors, policy or advocacy specialists, children’s librarians, and those who do not meet the professional qualifications) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created a bounded field of practice that was not all-inclusive • Increased clarity
<p>Too many titles for, and little clear delineation of positions and required preparation</p>	<p>Establish three designations of ECEs, each with a distinct scope of practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECE 1 Helps develop and sustain high-quality child development and learning environment Requires 120 clock hours of professional preparation Pay commensurate with level preparation level of preparation and responsibility • ECE 2 Assist or be responsible for developing and sustaining high-quality child development and learning programs (depending on program types) Requires ECE Associate degree Pay commensurate with level of preparation and responsibility • ECE 3 Responsible for independently developing and sustaining high-quality development and learning environment Requires ECE Bachelor’s degree Pay commensurate with level pararation and responsibility; comparable to pay for public school teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defined the necessary preparation by position in the profession • Clarified compensation as commensurate with level of education and responsibility

Issue Addressed	Recommendations	How ECE is Moved to a Profession
<p>Program standards and accountability lies with the regulatory body-not the profession</p> <p>ECE is not viewed as a public good requiring public investment</p>	<p>Unified standards put in place and enforced by the profession</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECEs will hold necessary credential to practice, meet standards and guidelines and work only within their scope of practice • Professional preparation programs will maintain accreditation by recognition body, provide preparation programs aligned to standards and competencies set by the profession • Employers/owners will hire and retain ECEs by providing compensation and working conditions that support well-being, ensure that workplace and employee’s practice is aligned with standards and competencies set by the profession • Federal government and agencies will focus legislation, regulations, and funding on implementing the Framework recommendations, protect and invest in ECE as a public good, engage with and be responsive to members of the profession and the public served by ECE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places authority for professional standards with the profession: autonomy achieved • Recognizes ECE as a public good served by a profession
<p>Professional standards and competencies</p> <p>No agreed upon set of standards that come with authority to remove ECEs who do not practice within standards</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Professional Standards and Competencies for ECE will serve as the core standards for the profession (revision of previous NAEYC standards for professional development) • Standards will be “leveled” for the three levels of ECE positions (establish the depth and breadth of the competencies required at these different designations) • ECEs will be licensed (following completion of approved preparation program, passing the national assessment, and gaining licensure) 	<p>Universal standards for practice set for the entire profession (regardless of age or setting)</p>
<p>Professional compensation</p> <p>Practitioners in the ECE field are underpaid, not recognized as doing work that requires preparation and commensurate compensation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensation for ECEs will be at least comparable to public school salaries and comparable across all settings • Compensation will include an adequate benefits package • Increases compensation commensurate with increased preparation and competency 	<p>Compensation recognizes professional status, required preparation, and competency</p>

APPENDIX 3: WEBSITES TO EXPLORE FOR MORE INFORMATION

Chapter 1

[Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education Position Statement](#), National Association for the Education of Young Children

[Child Care Aware of America](#)

[A Global History of Early Childhood Education and Care](#), UNESCO Digital Library

[National Association for the Education of Young Children](#)

[Power to the Profession, Unifying the Framework Executive Summary](#)

[Uncovering the Role of Early Childhood in Black Women’s Clubs Work Towards Racial and Gender Justice](#)

[Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families](#)

Chapter 3

[Beyond Screen Time: Help Your Kids Build Healthy Media Use Habits](#), HealthyChildren.org

[Center on the Developing Child](#), Harvard University

[Common Sense Education, Digital Citizenship Curriculum](#)

[Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences](#), University of Washington

[MyPlate](#), U.S. Department of Agriculture

[Sleep Foundation](#)

[Washington Department of Child Youth and Families](#)

[Zero to Three](#)

Chapter 9

[The 8 P’s of Parent Engagement](#), National Education Association (NEA)

[Developmentally Appropriate Practices \(DAP\)](#), NAEYC

[Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center](#) (ECLKC)

[How to Report Child Abuse or Neglect](#), Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF)

[National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (NAEYC)
[Parent Engagement in Schools, Adolescent and School Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC)
[Parent to Parent USA](#) (P2P)
[Principles of Effective Family Engagement](#), NAEYC
[Power to the Profession](#), NAEYC
[Racial Stress and Self-care: Parent Tip Tool](#), APA
[Raising the Bar for Parent Partnership and Engagement](#), U.S. Department of Education

Chapter 10

[CDC's Developmental Milestones Tool](#), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
[Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning](#), Vanderbilt University
[Classroom Implementation: Practical Strategies](#) (Example of feelings visual aids), National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations (NCPMI)
[Considerations for Trauma-Informed Child Care and Early Education Systems](#), Administration for Children & Families
[Creating Trauma-Sensitive Classrooms](#), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
[Developmental Milestone Expectations in Early Head Start](#), Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center
[Family Engagement](#), NCPMI
[Fostering Healthy Social and Emotional Development in Young Children: Tips for Early Childhood Teachers and Providers](#), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
[Interactive Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five](#), Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center
[Message in a Backpack](#), NAEYC
[National Scientific Council on the Developing Child](#), Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University
[Promoting Young Children's Social and Emotional Health](#), NAEYC
[Strategies for De-escalating Student Behavior in the Classroom](#), Center on Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports (PBIS)
[Supporting Child and Student Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Mental Health Needs](#), U.S. Department of Education

[Trauma-Informed Supports for Early Childhood Professionals](#), Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF)

APPENDIX 4: ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Holly Lanoue, M.ED

Hello, my 25-year career in Early Childhood Education started back in 1999 when I decided to go back to school and earn my AA degree at Olympic College. Once I finished my degree, I was hired at the campus childcare center as an assistant teacher in the toddler classroom (which turned out to be my favorite age group to work with). I worked for a year and was promoted to a lead teacher at the campus Early Head Start. I worked for 5 years and decided to go back to school and earn my undergraduate degree from Chapman University. I continued on and earned my Master's degree in Curriculum Instruction from Lesley University. While I was earning my degree, I was hired as an adjunct faculty and ran the Early Achievers Grant for Olympic College. I am now a full-time tenured faculty teaching Early Childhood Education classes and love every minute of it. For the past 14-years I have loved helping new teachers navigate through their educational journey. Working on this OER project has been an honor and I feel fortunate to have worked with such inspirational educators here in Washington State. This is an amazing Intro book for any early childhood educator, hope you enjoy reading it as much as we did writing it for you all.

Christine Moon, M.S.

I am in my 26th year as a tenured full time professor at South Puget Sound Community College in the Early Learning and Education Program. I also serve as the Program Lead, overseeing both Early Childhood and Parenting Education Programs. I am an active member of both the Washington state groups Organization for Parenting Education Programs and Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Program, serving as president for both groups at various times. I began my career in child care as an after school teacher. Later I worked as a center supervisor, teacher, home visitor and mental health consultant for Oregon State funded PreK and Head Start in WA. I also spent time as a preschool teacher for children with exceptional needs. One of my favorite jobs was as a therapist for children and families where I met my husband who is now an elementary school principal. I enjoy researching how to help children and families thrive and passing on this information in my classes to adults who are interested in working with kids and families

in some capacity. I am especially interested in brain development and diversity, equity, belonging and inclusion. I would envision a world where all children feel valued, seen and cared for by loving adults and communities. I am excited to be part of the group bringing OER to our field and the teachers who will use this information to care for our most vulnerable citizens.

Angela Blums, PhD

My career working with children began 25 years ago, while working with toddlers in a child care center. Since then, I have been fascinated with all things related to child development and early childhood education. I have taught in a variety of zero to five settings, including traditional child care, Montessori, and Waldorf programs in Minnesota, California, and Germany. Working with children has been one of the greatest joys of my life. Outside of the classroom, I worked in child development research, focusing on cognitive development in young children. I completed my B.A. in Child Psychology at the University of Minnesota and my PhD in Child Development from the University of California – Davis. I have been an Early Childhood Education professor at Pierce College since 2015. In my free time, I enjoy spending time outdoors with my husband and children.

Brenda Boyd Brown, Ph.D.

I am a retired associate professor of Human Development at Washington State University. I taught in the early childhood education area for more than 30 years. I have directed laboratory preschools at three major universities in the US and Canada, two of which included full-day child care serving infants through school-aged children. I have conducted research evaluating efforts to improve the professionalism of the early childhood education field and educated numerous teachers of young children. I have held several positions on the governing board of the Washington Association for the Education of Young Children, including president and vice president. My hope for this book is that it will excite readers about the potential for the future of the early childhood education field. I am happy to have had the opportunity to share what I've learned over the years spent working with children, families, and colleagues. I hope it is a useful resource.

Ardene Niemer, M.Ed.

Working with children and families has been the focus of my entire career in Early Childhood Education. I have served as an adjunct professor of ECE at Olympic College since 2017 building on my over 40 years of experience in the field of early learning, family support, early literacy, and special education. My degrees and experience have built a holistic foundation for working with children and families and teaching adult learners. Before joining the OC team, I served as faculty at other colleges, and as a disability and education consultant to Head Start and ECEAP programs. In a leadership capacity, I served as president and co-president of the Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Council, also working with a team to create the Common Courses for Early Learning in Washington, and other state-wide special projects. I was the author of 2 chapters of Version 1.1 of this OER text and am excited to be a part of the team to present this second, updated version of the OER. I hope that this OER will play a part in creating a strong foundation for students newly entering the field so that they can have a positive and informed impact on the lives of children and families. As I also teach the course using the OER, I am eager to see students apply what they have learned to their professional practices and continue to “master their craft” of teaching young children in partnership with families.

Gayle Julian

I have been in the field of Education all 38 years of my career having taught people ages 4 to 82! I earned my undergraduate degree from the University of Wyoming in Home Economics Education with an emphasis in Child Development and my Masters from San Francisco State University in Curriculum and Instruction. For the past 23 years I have been the Early Childhood Program Director and Faculty at Olympic College in Bremerton, Washington and during that time have been lucky enough to work on the ECE State Stackable Certificates Project, the writing of the STARS 30 hour Child Care Basics Course and Version 1 of this text. I have also served as President of the Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Council. Personally, my husband John and I have a blended family of five adult children ranging in ages 23 to 29 and I cannot wait to be a grandmother and support them in raising happy and healthy young children. I love the field of early learning and am proud to be a writer of this textbook—I believe that quality open educational resources benefit students who are our future for the healthy growth and care of young children. I hope you enjoy this collaborative writing project brought to you by some of the best early childhood professionals in the State of Washington!

Ninderjit Kaur Gill

I am an able-bodied, non-neurodiverse, heteronormative, cisgender woman of color. I use she/her pronouns. My preferred language to speak and read is English and I am an American and Canadian citizen whose ancestors come from Punjab, India. I am the daughter of an immigrant Punjabi- Sikh mother who still holds their Indian nationality and does not speak English. I am a single mother of two adult sons who are still navigating the impact of a public school system that assimilated and acculturated them into dominant culture values and beliefs.

I am in my 6th year as a full time tenured faculty at North Seattle College. I teach in the Associate and Bachelors of Early Childhood Teacher Education preparation programs. I was a teacher of young children for 3 years and then a director of an early learning program for 7 years. Through my own personal and professional experiences with discrimination, I was motivated to return to school to complete my Masters in Education focusing on multicultural education in early childhood education. I continue my studies as an education doctoral candidate with a focus on anti-bias and anti-racist curriculum in teacher preparation programs.

I do my best to use the power and privilege I hold as an educator wisely and carefully. I believe in sharing power with and being innovative in our educational work to ensure we disrupt racism, sexism, classism and ableism in our education systems. I am also an advocate for language justice and ensuring that in-service students/providers/teachers are able to learn in their preferred or home language. I hope chapter 5 will provide you with a start to understanding the necessary and important role the concept and ideals of diversity, equity and inclusion play in our work as teachers and educators. We teach what we know and who we are. Therefore it is vital that we build our skills, knowledge and efficacy in this work so we can begin to see, hear and engage with all the ways our children, families and we show up in our work.

Jennifer Karshna, Ph.D.

I have been working with young children and their teachers for over 30 years. I received my undergraduate and Master of Arts degrees from Antioch University and PhD from Walden University. My graduate degree studies were focused on teacher education in early childhood. I have taught young children in several types of settings (full day childcare, Head Start, part-day preschool), have done on-site training and coaching at ECE programs, provided in-service training for ECE teachers, and taught college courses. My current role is ECE Program Chair and full-time faculty at Tacoma Community College.

In addition to teaching, I have served on the Board of Directors for the following organizations: Puget Sound Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington State Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Council, and the Pike Place Market ChildCare Center. My hobbies include gardening, reading, and enjoying the company of my wonderful family members and friends.

APPENDIX 5: GLOSSARY

Activity

Action and being active

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

These include neglect, physical, sexual or emotional abuse, household violence or caregiver mental health.

Advocacy

Action that argues for an issue or course of action; support or defense of a group or an idea.

Affect

What we can observe as a visual demonstration of the child's own feelings and empathy for others.

Amygdala

The structure that activates fight-flight-freeze responses.

Anecdotal note or record

A short, narrative record of a single incident illustrating significant developmental or learning evidence.

Assessment

In education settings, the systematic collection, synthesis and use of data to make educational decisions about a child or group of children.

Attachment Pattern

Description of the relationship between mother (or primary caregiver) and child based on the behavior of the child.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

A diagnosable condition in which an individual has difficulty concentrating and inhibiting behaviors.

Atypical development

When a child does not develop in the way that is congruent with averages for a given age, causing a disturbance to everyday activities.

Authentic Assessment

An assessment approach that involves a teacher observing and documenting a child's skills, knowledge, and behavior during their everyday activities and routines.

Autism

A diagnosable condition in which children have difficulty with social interactions and communication - sometimes with rigid behaviors.

Axon

The part of the neuron that sends information to other cells.

Barriers

Obstacles or obstructions to learning, including physical, technological, systemic, financial, or related to mental health and attitude.

Bias

The attitudes that favor one group over another.

Boundaries

How quickly a brain can develop myelin.

Brain Stem and Midbrain

The lower part of the brain concerned with survival.

Burnout

Overwhelming occupational stress or workload

Cell Body

The genetic and energy producing part of cell.

Cerebellum

The part of the brain concerned with coordination.

Challenging behavior

Inappropriate behavior that children use and rely on to get their needs met.

Checklist

A list of skills or developmental milestones for documenting achievements.

Child development

The pattern of change that begins at conception and continues through adolescence.

Chronosystem

Part of the Ecological Systems Theory; includes broad, national, or global aspects of society that influence a child's development.

Code of Ethics

A set of guidelines for responsible behavior within the field. Sets forth a common basis for resolving the principal ethical dilemmas encountered in the field of early childhood education.

Communication

A core skill in a child's development based on the ability to understand and to be understood.

Community

A group of people living in a common geographical area or space. Community can also be a feeling or set of relationships between people based on common needs.

Compassion Fatigue

Burn out from stress of taking on the emotional stress and trauma of others.

Compliance

The child's ability or willingness to conform to the direction of others and follow rules.

Conditioning

The idea that children are motivated by external cues which drive behavior.

Connecting/ connection

The ability of the teacher and school to communicate with and provide support to children and their families.

Constructive Play

Creating and building with open-ended materials

Constructivism

The idea that children create (or construct) their own knowledge through experiences with the world.

Cortex

The outer part of the brain concerned with higher level thinking.

Cortical Modulation

The ratio of function between the higher and lower brain areas.

Cortisol

The hormone released during stress.

Culturally relevant pedagogy

The practice of including ideas and artifacts that refer to a child's individual culture.

Culturally responsive

The ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people of your own culture as well as those from other cultures.

DCYF

Department of Children, Youth and Families. A cabinet level agency focused on the well-being of children in Washington State.

Dendrite

The part of the neuron that receives information from other cells.

Developmental domains

Specific areas in which growth occurs – Physical, Cognitive, Emotional, and Social.

Developmentally appropriate practice

Methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning.

Differentiation

The thoughtful practice of tailoring activities to meet children's individual needs.

Distress

Negative stress

Diversity

"A variation among individuals, as well as within and across groups of individuals, in terms of their backgrounds and lived experiences. These experiences are related to social identities, including race, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, social and economic status, religion, ability status, and country of origin" (NAEYC, 2019, 17)

Documentation

Written account of observed action

Dramatic Play

Pretend and imaginative play; often involves creating a storyline

Early Childhood Education

The title of the profession chosen by the Power to the Profession Task Force. Includes those that care for, teach and support the development of children from birth to age 8.

Early Childhood Educator

The title of the professionals chosen by the Power to the Profession Task Force: those who provide direct service to children, birth to age 8.

Early childhood period

Ages birth through age eight

ECE Field

All programs, services and occupations that currently reside within the boundary of what we call ECE.

Effect

A change or result that is produced by a particular action, event, or circumstance. It is the outcome or consequence of something that has happened or been done.

Emotion regulation

A child's ability to control or modify one's own emotions.

Emotional development

The child's development of and identification of emotions and feelings, and includes the child's experience, expression, and management of their emotions.

Emotional Intelligence

5 specific skills related to understanding feelings of self and others and using them to make positive life decisions.

Enriched Environment

A stimulating, challenging, supportive and loving environment.

Equality

An approach and/or practice of providing opportunities, resources and status to all that are equal.

Equitable

Finding the “right fit” to offer what individual children and families need for successful relationships.

Equity

“The state that would be achieved if individuals fared the same way in society regardless of race, gender, class, language, disability, or any other social or cultural characteristic” (NAEYC, 2019, p.17).

Ethical conduct

Behavior following moral and right principles.

Ethical Dilemma

Moral conflict that requires choosing between two conflicting values and responsibilities.

Ethical Finesse

Finding a way to resolve an ethical dilemma that is acceptable to everyone involved.

Ethical Ideals

Aspirational statements guiding behavior.

Ethical Principles

Rules for practice, distinguishing between two conflicting values and responsibilities.

Ethical Responsibility

A clear cut rule regarding moral decisions.

Eustress

Positive stress

Evidence-based strategies

Approaches that have been developed through repeated scientific research and testing to make sure that they are effective.

Executive function

Collection of processes that encompass attention, working memory, and inhibition.

Exosystem

Part of the Ecological Systems Theory; includes parts of a child's indirect environment that influence the child's development.

Experience

Personal connection and engagement

Exploratory Play

Exploration of materials and toys

Expressive Language

Talking and using language so that others understand what is being said.

Extrinsic

External to a person and observable

Family

A main element of our society. A family is made up of people who care about each other.

Family engagement

A process used to develop and sustain positive, goal-focused connections with families.

Family involvement

Simply when a family accepts an invitation from the school or teacher to join in an activity usually at the school.

Field of Practice

Specialization or a defined scope of work undertaken by an identified group of practitioners.

Fine motor skills

Movement related to small muscle groups in the body.

Formal Assessment

Assessment that utilizes standardized tools designed to assess a specific skill or ability, often with a narrow focus.

Formative Assessment

Ongoing assessment, often informal, that provides real time feedback on children's understanding, skills and development.

Frontal lobe

Part of the cortex that processes mainly sensory and motor information

Glial Cell

Support cell in the brain that does not send electrical messages

Gross motor skills

Movement related to the large muscle groups in the body

Guidance

To teach and to help children learn social skills that will support them to get along with other people.

Humanism

Any system or mode of thought or action in which human interests, values, and dignity predominate.

Hundred Languages of Children

The belief that children can express themselves through various types of artistic expression.

Inclusion

The act or practice of including all students in the classroom community.

Influences

Families and family relationships are shaped by a variety of internal and external factors such as culture, language, identity, education, experiences, and more.

Informal Assessment

Methods of assessment that are individualized and flexible, as opposed to standard and rigid.

Intentional

A deliberate action taken by someone with a specific goal or objective in mind.

Interactions

The ways in which two or more individuals or groups communicate and engage with one another.

Interest Area

Spaces arranged for the purpose of specific materials and play, such as block area or library area.

Internal Working Model

A conceptual understanding of how the relationship between an individual and a loved one should be.

Intrinsic

Within and inside a person

Intrinsic Motivation

A desire to do things based on one's own wishes and goals.

Iterative

Repetition of a procedure applied to the result of a previous application

Joint attention

The action of a child and a caregiver focusing on the same object or concept at the same time.

Life Crisis

A psychological conflict in which two conflicting aspects of development must be navigated by an individual.

Limbic system

Mid part of the brain concerned with emotions and memory

Loose Parts

Moveable items; a term that is commonly used in ECE for moveable items

Macrosystem

Part of the Ecological Systems Theory; includes broad aspects of culture that influence a child's development.

Manufactured Items

Things that are made, including items made of wood.

Mesosystem

Part of the Ecological Systems Theory; includes the connections between parts of a child's immediate environment that influence the child's development.

Metacognition

Self-reflection; an ability to think about one's own thoughts.

Microsystem

Part of the Ecological Systems Theory; includes the parts of a child's immediate environment that influence the child's development.

Mindfulness

Being aware of your body and surroundings in the current moment.

Models

The individuals in a child's environment after which behavior is emulated.

Morality

People's views of what is good, right, or proper: their beliefs about their obligation and ideas about how they should behave.

More Knowledgeable Others

Individuals in a child's environment who have more skills and knowledge about a particular area than the child.

Moveable Items

Things that can be moved, such as small rocks, sticks, buckets, bicycles.

Mutual

In ECE mutual refers to respect and relationships that are between two parties (programs, staff, families, community).

Myelin

Protective fatty coating on the mature neuron

NAEYC

(National Association for the Education of Young Children) Prominent professional organization for early childhood educators.

Natural Items

Things found in nature, such as sticks and rocks

Naturalistic Observation

Observation of children in real-world settings engaged in activities of their choosing.

Neurodivergent

A characteristic in which an individual's brain and behavior differ from the majority of individuals.

Neuron

Brain nerve cell

Neurotransmitters

Chemical messengers that transmit information between neurons.

Norm-referenced

A type of standardized test in which children's performance is compared to a "norm group".

Object Permanence

The ability for a child to understand that if an object is hidden from view, it continues to exist.

Objective

Based in what is directly observed, as opposed to what is inferred.

Observation

As an educator, watching and listening to children in an objective manner to learn about them.

Occipital lobe

The part of the cortex that processes mainly vision.

Open-ended questions

Questions that do not have a yes or no answer; used to facilitate thinking.

Oppression

The systematic and prolonged mistreatment of a group of people that results from systemic bias based on their social identity groups.

Outcome

The specific steps to a goal, stated in measurable, objective terms.

Outdoor Learning Environment (OLE)

Space outside where children learn and play.

Outdoor/Nature Play

Playing outside; playing in natural area and/or with natural objects.

Parietal lobe

The part of the cortex that processes mainly sensory information.

Partnership

A partnership is a reciprocal, respectful, and ongoing relationship between a program and families or community.

Personal Advocacy

Efforts to advocate for what is best for young children in the context of one's workday; advocating for an individual or a practice.

Physical Environment

Physical space including furniture and materials in a learning environment.

Physical Play

Movement and being active; engaging gross motor skills.

Plan-Do-Review

A learning process that helps children organize their activities through planning, action, and reflection.

Planned ignoring

Deliberate and intentional inattention to an identified attention-seeking or other strategic behavior.

Plasticity

How easily the brain can change itself; It is more plastic in the youngest years.

Portfolio

A compilation of work samples and other documentation of development and learning collected over time.

Power to the Profession

A national collaboration led by NAEYC that defines the early childhood education profession.

Prefrontal lobe

The part of the cortex that processes mainly critical thinking, problem solving, executive function and self-regulation.

Privilege

The unearned advantages that result from being a member of a dominant social identity group.

Problem Solving

A system by which children use step-by-step strategies and logic to complete cognitive tasks.

Profession

An occupation that serves the public welfare and that requires specialized educational training in some branch of learning or science.

Professional

The inhabitant of a role in that occupation--the person who does the work of the profession.

Professional Preparation

A combination of courses or practical experience designed to prepare and qualify individuals to be effective within the teaching profession; Can be pre-service or in-service.

Professional Standards

Practices, skills, ethics, and/or qualifications set forth by a professional body representing the respective profession; Guide the behaviors of the individuals as well as the collective profession.

Program approaches

Practices and philosophies that a program uses to guide their teaching and learning.

Pruning

Reducing the number of connections and neurons in the brain.

Public Advocacy

Speaking out to address an issue of concern for the community as a whole.

Rating scale

A method of documenting a child's skill, knowledge or development on a continuum of how frequently, or successfully the behavior is displayed.

Receptive Language

Understanding what is being said

Reciprocal

Shared, felt, or shown by both sides, in a balance of give-and-take

Reciprocal Interactions

Back and forth communication between a child and caregiver - can be verbal or nonverbal.

Reflect

To think deeply and carefully about something, to consider it thoroughly, or to examine it closely to gain a better understanding or insight.

Reinforcers

Actions taken by adults to encourage or discourage certain behaviors.

Relationship

The connections and interactions between family members, including parents, siblings, grandparents, and other extended family members.

Resilience

The ability to overcome early hardship.

Responsive

Something or someone that reacts quickly and positively to different situations or needs.

Risky Play

Taking risks when playing; can be social/emotional, cognitive, or physical risks; mostly commonly refers to physical risks.

Running record

A detailed, objective, sequential recording of a child's behavior written while the event is happening.

Scaffolding

The assistance given by the more knowledgeable other that changes in response to the child's ability.

Schemas

Categories of information about a concept or thing

Scope of Practice

The responsibilities and authority granted to a professional.

Self-regulation

A child's ability to understand and manage their behavior.

Sensorimotor Play

Physical movement and input from the senses

Separation anxiety

A fear of being separated from their primary caregiver.

Social development

The process where a child learns to interact with others around them.

Social Environment

The atmosphere and people in a learning environment.

Stackable Certificates

Three credentials granted by community and technical colleges in Washington - they build on one another and set the foundation for acquiring an associate degree.

Standardized

A method of formal assessment that uses standard (the same) methods of administration and scoring.

Stationary Items

Things that cannot be moved, such as trees or climbing structures.

Strange Situation

A lab test that mimics an everyday scenario and assesses a child's attachment to their caregiver.

Strengths-based

Begins with focus on a child's (and family's) positive attributes and seeing possibilities to build upon.

Stress

Physical, chemical or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension.

Stressors

Events or conditions in an individual's life that cause stress- these can be internal or external factors.

Subjective

Based on, or influenced one's own personal tastes and opinions; inferred rather than directly observed.

Summative assessment

Assessment completed at the end of a learning period; evaluates the cumulative learning during that period.

Synaptic Gap

The tiny space between neurons.

Temperament

A set of inborn traits that organize the way we approach the world.

Temporal Environment

Pertains to time in a learning environment, including the daily schedule.

Temporal lobe

The part of the cortex that processes mainly hearing, speech and language.

Thalamus

The structure that acts like a gate for sensory information coming into the brain.

Theory

A set of ideas that are supported by a substantial amount of evidence and are based on repeated testing of the same concepts.

Theory of mind

Ability for a child to infer the thoughts and feelings of others.

Toxic Stress

Stress that is beyond the child's ability to process without adult help.

Typical development

When a child develops in a way that is congruent with averages for a given age.

Unifying Framework

The final product of the Power to the Profession Task Force; Reports on recommendations made by the Task Force to define the profession and create infrastructure to support implementation of the recommendations.

Unintended consequence

The result or consequence of a purposeful behavior or action that is not intended, planned, or expected.

Values

Principles or standards that a person believes to be important, desirable, or worthwhile.

WAC

Washington Administrative Code; Sets regulations for licensed child care.

Washington State Core Competencies

A framework that guides decisions and practices carried out by professionals in all early care and education settings.

Window of Opportunity

Times the brain is primed to learn certain tasks.

Work sample

A product or example of the child's work in the classroom (i.e., drawing, building, writing).

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The difference between what a child can do alone and what a child can do with help from a more knowledgeable other.